

# ***SAFARA***

**REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE  
LANGUES, LITTÉRATURES ET CULTURES**

**N°1 Janvier 2002**

**Section d'Anglais, UFR de Lettres & Sciences Humaines,  
Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis, BP 234, Sénégal**

## TABLE DES MATIÈRES

<b>Editorial .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's <i>Paradise</i>. ....</b>	<b>3</b>
Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA	
<b>Engendering nature in Zora Neale Hurston's <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>.....</b>	<b>19</b>
Badara SALL	
<b>African ethos and western chaos in Toni Morrison's <i>Tar Baby</i> .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Amara D. DIARRA	
<b>Armah's mythopoetic vision in <i>Two Thousand Seasons</i> .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Mustapha MUHAMMAD	
<b>The theme of the failure of human communication in Thomas Stearns Eliot's work .....</b>	<b>59</b>
Hilaire BOUKA	
<b>Oscar Wilde et Samuel Beckett : deux lecteurs de la Bible .....</b>	<b>71</b>
Yves MBAMA-NGANKOUA	
<b>La satire de l'injustice dans <i>La Cruche cassée</i>, <i>Le Tremblement de terre au Chili</i> et <i>Michael Kohlhaas</i> de Heinrich Von Kleist ... ..</b>	<b>97</b>
Magatte NDIAYE	
<b>L'autre, l'ailleurs, l'étrange : la rhétorique de l'exclusion dans le roman historique .....</b>	<b>113</b>
Kalidou SY	
<b>Les constructions corrélatives dans <i>Les Tambours de la mémoire</i> de Boubacar Boris Diop .....</b>	<b>123</b>
Modou NDIAYE	
<b>Phonological process of vowel insertion of English loanwords into Hausa.....</b>	<b>143</b>
Lawan SHUAIB	
<b>Le shirk ou la survivance du paganisme dans les pratiques islamiques : l'exemple des Balant .....</b>	<b>149</b>
Sékou SAGNA	
<b>Le concept hégélien de la fin de l'art à l'épreuve de la déglobalisation esthétique .....</b>	<b>163</b>
Makhtar GAYE	
<b>Identités culturelles et cinéma :quelle image de l'Afrique à l'heure de la mondialisation ? .....</b>	<b>187</b>
Saliou NDOUR	

*Safara*, English Department, Gaston Berger  
University, Saint-Louis, Sénégal, n°1, January 2002

## **GENDERIZING THE MYTH OF UTOPIA IN MORRISON'S *PARADISE*.**

Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA\*

An examination of the creative exploration of the myth of utopia in *Paradise*, the present essay argues that Toni Morrison inverts in the novel the patriarchal, hierarchized Jewish order that makes woman the curse of man and the cause of his Fall and of the loss of paradise. Woman is represented in the novel as an embodiment of the love principle and as the key to paradise. On the contrary, man is portrayed as the sinner, the aggressor who violates the law of love, robs the world of its bliss, and ends tragically its joyous play. Paradise is defined, not in metaphysical or religious terms as a perfect place or God's heavenly abode, but in human terms as a happy and "real earthly home" that guarantees bliss, freedom, and peaceful co-existence.<sup>1</sup>

The novel is read as an oblique critique of the Great American Dream and the haunting myth of utopia upon which the United States was founded. A celebration of women's sexuality, it explodes the myths of racial purity and moral superiority that delude nine black men of Ruby into attacking a women's Convent and killing five of its members and a baby. The history of the black community of Ruby which is narrated in the novel, from its difficult beginnings in 1890 through its multifarious transformations and schisms to a July dawn in 1976 when the harmless women were attacked in a nearby convent, is analogous to the relentless and vain struggle to keep America white. White symbolizes purity and "American means white".<sup>2</sup>

Focusing her magnifying lens critically inward on her black folk, Morrison takes on three devils of American capitalism, namely racism, sexism, and violence. An affirmation of sisterhood, the novel is an interrogation of the misrepresentation of women by men. It abolishes negative verbal and visual images of women and replaces

---

\* Department of English, Obafemi Awolow University, Ile Ife, Nigeria .

<sup>1</sup> Toni Morrison, *Paradise*. London : Chatto and Windus, 1998, p. 213.  
Further references to the novel are incorporated into the text.

<sup>2</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark : Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.  
New York : Vintage Books, 1993, p. 47.

### Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA

them with positive ones. The Convent women's audacity, irreverence, and radicalism for which they are stigmatized are forms of rebellion against orthodoxy and male oppression. Whereas the women seek to restore charm, zest and the play element to life, they are falsely accused of "revolting sex, deceit and the sly torture of children" (8). They are perceived as awful women, members of a secret cult. To calm his troubled conscience over his illicit love affair with Consolata, Deacon Morgan (Deek) gives the orders that the Convent women be killed, and thus reinforces the image of women as "detritus: throwaway people" (4). "Not infrequently", observes Pam Morris, "the female figure is first enjoyed as an object of erotic titillation and then punished for precisely that exercise of dangerous seductive charm".<sup>3</sup> After stalking Gigi (Grace) for years Kentucky Derby (K.D.) scandalizes her name.

A tale of hate, love, migration and violence, *Paradise* could be read as a critique of Christianity, especially the secondary status the religion assigns women. Denominational differences notwithstanding, all Christians in Ruby are united on the expediency of getting rid of the Convent women. Morrison seems to be more comfortable with natural religion because it promotes the Mother cult. Christianity elevates the spiritual and downgrades the carnal. It teaches humans to crucify the flesh.

The transformation of the Convent by Consolata into a coven has as its goal the restoration of unity of body and spirit. "Never break them in two", she tells the women. "Never put one over the other" (263). The gender revolution started by her is a calculated attempt to drive out the "cold that is in this place" (the Convent) (3). She insists on the inseparability of sexual and spiritual love. To her, love is divine. She teaches the women what they are hungry for: love, the pleasure of which is derivable from exploring and manipulating their own bodies without guilt or shame. Consolata and the Convent women remind us of Marie Jenny Howe and her Heterodoxy group, free-willed women who just want to be themselves and "assert individual choice in livelihood, personal relationships, and habit of dress and living".<sup>4</sup>

Consolata tells her girls of a female singer named Piedade who expands the imagination with her songs that centre around the subject of paradise and love that would build it. On hearing of Piedade, the women begin to live a life of the imagination by translating their dreams into drawings that tell the sad stories of their

---

<sup>3</sup> Pam Morris. *Literature and Feminism*. Oxford and Cambridge : Blackwell, 1993, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy F. Scott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminisms*. New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1987, p. 39.

### Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's *Paradise*

sordid past. For example, anytime Seneca feels the hunger to slice her inner thigh or arm, a habit begun in childhood in reaction to her sexual violation by her foster brother (Harry) in the foster home of Mama Greer who refuses to believe that such a thing happens in her home, she simply marks her open figure drawn on the cellar floor. Consolata employs art to help the women discover their authentic selves and overcome their sense of frustration.

Piedade's song is magic and *Paradise* strives to appropriate it through its lyricism, rhetorical extravagance, erotic evocation of the female body, and alluring tropes. "In women's speech, as in their writing", Hélène Cixous theorises in "The Laugh of the Medusa", "that element which never stops resonating, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it retains the power of moving us - that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman. Why this privileged relationship with the voice? ... a woman is never far from 'mother' ... there is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk".<sup>5</sup>

However, Consolata's vision of oneness of body and spirit is highly circumscribed, for it is limited to women only and therefore falls short of the need for balance and unity in gender relations. But Consolata exudes love. She, like Piedade's song, is magic. Even in death the Convent women express their will to love. The youngest of the nine murderers looks back at one of their victims: "The shot woman, lying uncomfortably on marble, waves her fingers at him" (4). Clear and unequivocal, the message sent by the dying woman to the young man is that only love can make Ruby an earthly paradise.

The image of woman as a baby factory is projected by one of the murderers: "Peering out he sees an old hen, her puffed and bloody hind parts cherished, he supposes, for delivering freaks - double, triple yolks in outsize and misshapen shells. Soft stuttering comes from the coup beyond..." (5). Lesbians oppose the brood-sow image of women and their movement is getting bigger and stronger in the West. But in Africa, where human biological reproduction is still highly valued, homosexuality is an aberration that is frowned upon by men and women. As noted by Gwendolyn Mikell, "the slowly emerging African feminism is distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal, and concerned with many 'bread, butter, culture, and power' issues".<sup>6</sup> "Western feminists", she observes, "are often troubled that African women take their reproductive tasks seriously...and refuse to subordinate their biological roles to other roles within society".<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Cited by Morris, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> Gwendolyn Mikell, ed. *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

**Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA**

Having been rid of their desires for men by Consolata, the Convent women are set at liberty to exercise control over the use of their own bodies. Mavis begins to perceive marriage, as lesbians do, as a male-inspired institution that robs women of their freedom and individuality and perpetuates gender inequality. But the Convent women love children.

All the offences for which the women are murdered are simply the men's imaginings. The allegation that they worship graven idols is false. Generally, men mythicize women and project upon them their anxieties, desires, doubts, dreams and fears. Women are collectively perceived as evil. All evil occurrences are traced by Ruby people to the Convent women, "...everything that worries them must come from women" (217). Frederick Jameson paraphrased Frederick Nietzsche's thought on the subject of evil and scapegoating. It is worth quoting at length:

*Evil thus, as Nietzsche taught us, continues to characterize whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my own existence. So from the earlier times, the stranger from another tribe, the 'barbarian' who speaks an incomprehensible language and follows 'outlandish' customs, but also the woman, whose biological difference stimulates fantasies of castration and devoration, or in our time, the avenger of accumulated resentments from some oppressed class or race, or else that alien being, Jew or Communist, behind whose apparently human features a malignant and preternatural intelligence is thought to lurk: these are some of the archetypal figures of the Other, about whom the essential point to be made is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil because he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar (his emphasis).<sup>8</sup>*

Unfortunately, the strategy of alterity adopted by Morrison inverts the gender order and holds men up as the culprits, the cause of all the problems that plague society. What saves the monodimensional vision is the appropriate emphasis placed on the unifying function of love. "The construction of gender identity on oppositional terms", Pam Morris warns, "is too limiting. It dangerously and damagingly regimented and restricts the full range of potential human experience.

---

<sup>8</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious : Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, New York : Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 115.

### Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's *Paradise*

Human sexuality is too amorphous and complex to be contained within simplistically oppositional categories".<sup>9</sup>

Morrison negates the myth that women are the weaker sex. It is the Convent that produces the black pepper used to make the cake relished by men for its "burning power". Though "many customers tried planting the seeds, the pepper grew nowhere outside the Convent's garden" (11). It is therefore not surprising that the Convent women are perceived as witches. Mary Magna (Mother) warns Consolata to beware of Lone DuPres who, in her opinion, practises witchcraft. When Consolata faints it is the hot drink procured by Lone that revives her. Ironically, Consolata uses the God-given gift of witchcraft taught her by Lone which she calls "in sight" to delay Magna's death (247). Lone's name is symbolic. She is the lone voice raised in support of the Convent women. Her witchcraft or "in sight" definitely aids her understanding of the sorority. She tries vainly to prevent the murder.

The idea that women are the weaker sex is imagistically annulled in the following passage: "The bathtub rests on the backs of four mermaids - their tails split wide for the tub's security, their breasts arched for stability" (9). It is on women, the homekeepers, that the stability of society squarely rests. When the family, the basic sociopolitical unit, is destroyed the whole society is ruined. It is not impossible that crime, drug addiction and homelessness are direct products of the destruction of the marriage institution in the United States.

In *Paradise*, Morrison puts before African-Americans a difficult proposition: separation from or integration with white America? Whereas separation is motivated by hatred, integration could easily lead to the dispossession of the blacks and the loss of their identity. To rebuild the American society and rid it of racial and sexual discrimination and all the multifarious problems issuing therefrom, all the parties concerned must learn to forgive and tolerate one another. The divinity of love is premised on forgiveness, a god-like quality. Sadly, neither the founders of Haven and Ruby nor their descendants could tolerate anybody but themselves. They do not forgive.

The bitter historical experience of the blacks congeals their resentment of privileged races and makes it difficult to forgive. The fifty-eight freedmen were refused accommodation on their journey from Mississippi to Oklahoma in white and even mulatto towns. Actually the nine male murderers are simply following the infallible admonition of their great ancestor Big Papa that "if they stayed together, worked, prayed and defended together, they would never be like Downs, Lexington, Sapulpa, Grans where Colored were run out

---

<sup>9</sup> Morris, pp. 5-6.

### Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA

of town. Nor would they be among the dead and maimed of Tulsa, Norma, Oklahoma City, not to mention victims of spontaneous whippings, murders and depopulation by arson" (112). It is undeniable that there is strength in black unity. The logic ought to be stretched to imbricate other races, which is precisely what Reverend Richard Misner does when he helps the lost white woman whose child is ill on the way to Lubbock and for which Steward detests him. The American society is haunted by its slave past which makes the eradication of racism and all forms of discrimination extremely difficult. That Morrison resolves the gargantuan problem of racial hatred in the United States on the altar of integration and love is a measure of maturity of her vision and a clear indication of her own willingness to forgive.

Mary Magna, Consolata's benefactress, practises Christian love. She tells Consolata who says that "God don't laugh and he don't play": "Next time you see Him, tell Him to let the girls in" (48). Perhaps the most critical statement in *Paradise*, it casts in doubt the existence of God and makes a piquant plea for acceptance of female. The insinuation is that even God is a male chauvinist who denies females their rights. Division of labour that reversed the female fortune and caused their loss of politico-economic power was part of the punishment for the Original Sin. A matriarch figure, Magna brings in the girls who are alienated under patriarchy, and cares for them.

All drifting women who come to the Convent under the aegis of Consolata find it a paradise. Its simple form of existence, coupled with the atmosphere of abundant freedom, gives them a satisfaction they have never known.

Confronted with the problems of loneliness, the breakdown of communication with her husband, the terrible loss of her twin babies Merle and Pearl who die of asphyxiation in the Cadillac car while she goes into a store for some wieners, and the irrational fear of being killed by her other children at their father's instigation, Mavis flees in her husband's car and ends up at the Convent. Frank, her husband, prevents her from having friends. The female hitchhikers picked by her on the road to California represent the American society as "sad, scary, all wrong. High schools were dumps, parents stupid, Johnson a creep, cops pigs, men rats, boys assholes" (33). They are rebelling against an asphyxiating capitalist society that denies them true liberty, in opposition to which Morrison creates, in fidelity to the principle of alterity, the Convent, "the most peaceful place on earth", as Mavis tells Pallas, a negation of all that the United States represents (182).

After six years of tending babies that do not cry, Sweetie loses her mind and goes out into the cold, crying. The unnamed girl with a broken heart follows her to the Convent. The girl's heart is broken when Jean, her sister, walks away, leaving a letter written in lipstick. The broken-hearted girl in a gracious gesture of true sisterhood drapes a scraper over Sweetie's shoulders to keep her warm. Sweetie is taken



### **Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's *Paradise***

in at the Convent and cared for. She drifts into a "staticky, troubled sleep" and is woken by a baby's cry. "Somewhere in the house the child continued to cry, filling Sweetie with rapture - she had never heard the sound from her own" (129). The baby's cry that throws Sweetie into raptures will ironically be later mistaken by Ruby men as an indisputable evidence of the Convent women's cruelty to children.

Billie Delia feels that her life has been ruined by K.D. who proposes to her first and goes on to impregnate and much later marry Arnette. After a serious row with her mother who fights her "like a man", Billie Delia runs off to take refuge in the Convent. "What she saw and learned there", we are told, "changed her forever" (152). It would probably include the senselessness of the beating her mother gave her for removing her drawers in childhood and mounting Hard Goods, the winning horse that K.D. rode in a competition to mark the founding of Ruby. Parents sometimes hamper their children's sexuality all in the name of proper moral upbringing. The horse-riding metaphorizes K.D.'s sexual exploitation of women. K.D. lets Arnette suffer for four years and consents to a wedding only after he has been kicked out of another woman's bed.

As represented by Morrison, the gender war is multi-dimensional and eternal. Adam and Eve, the primal couple in Christian mythology, are represented in the novel by Mikey and Gigi. Both the mythical and fictive couples are inscribed in the desert rock formation of Wish, Arizona: "A man and a woman fucking forever...Sometimes tender. Other times rough. But they never stop..." (63). As deployed in the passage quoted above, "fucking" signifies more than sexual intercourse. It connotes the dialogue between man and woman in all its multidimensionality on biological, class, economic, educational, marital, political, sociological and psychological topoi. Morrison's is not a naïve conception of gender conflicts. She recognizes that they cannot be finitely resolved but can and should be increasingly minimized. Her exploration of the theme in one novel after another is an attempt to realize the transformation of the reader's consciousness, for men often misapprehend women, while some women internalize and reproduce the male psychology that confines them. The men of Ruby misread the Convent women who are assimilated to child murderers, prostitutes, viragoes, whores and witches.

Embarrassed by and scandalized at the randy rock formation, a committee of concerned Methodists organizes to blow up or disguise the coupling rocks with cement. The antiperversion Methodists who want to destroy the rocks are hypocrites, for they get titillated by the sexual image.

Gigi is enamoured of the coupling rocks because they are full of kinetic energy. Life is flux. She never gives up the search for the "eternal desert coupling", a metaphor for true love and sexual fulfillment (64). With Gigi's steadfastness the novelist questions the

### **Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA**

popular notion that women are inconstant in love. Gigi goes to Ruby to find out if the “two trees” that “grew in each other’s arms” mentioned by Dice on the train to Frisco are there and, if they are, to squeeze herself in between them and feel a superhuman ecstasy and remain an irresistible lover. The trees are believed to have an aphrodisiac quality (66). She is disappointed but meets Roger Best who exploits her sexually and jettisons her. As depicted in the novel, it is men who are capricious and fickle in love. Gigi demonstrates the meaning of love when Dice, a dwarf, stands on tiptoe to collect his luggage from the overhead rack on the MKT train. Gigi helps him. The portrayal negates the sexist idea that men are physically stronger than women. Morrison asserts simply that women are different. Soane considers the negative views that the so-called respectable men and women of Ruby have of the Convent women as all wrong. “They’re different is all”, she insists (288).

Although women epitomize love and seek sexual fulfillment, they should not be reduced to sex objects, as the embezzler-owner of the mansion is wont to do. Upholding the stereotype that women’s role is to meet men’s emotional and physical needs, he entertains himself and his guests with “mostly food, sex and toys” (71). He throws one voluptuous party before his arrest. The four teaching sisters who moved into his house when it was offered for sale at a pittance and converted it into a convent school for Indian girls “concealed the obvious echoes of his delight but could do nothing to hide his terror” (71). “Shaped like a live cartridge, it curved to a deadly point at the north end where, originally, the living and dining rooms lay” (71).

Allied with the survival instinct, fear is the most dominant instinct in the contemporary capitalist world. It is fear of being run out of town that drives the nine black men of Ruby to kill the harmless Convent women. The whites cling on to the myth of racial superiority for fear of losing economic and political privileges. So do men perpetuate the idea of male superiority for fear of losing ground to women. The old Ruby generation are afraid of the change that the youth are bent on introducing. When Anna Flood is four she sees a scorpion and runs into her father’s store out of fear. Steward explains to her that “the scorpion’s tail was up because it was just as scared of her as she was of it” (116). The scorpion’s tail images the phallus and hints at men’s fear of castration and women’s dread and envy of the penis, a symbol of male power. Generations of men and women carry on a gender war fuelled by fear. Lone provides an explanation for men’s mortal fear of midwives: “Men scared of us, always will be. To them we’re death’s handmaiden standing as between them and the children their wives carry” (272).

The embezzler’s mansion represents the United States. “Except from the bedrooms no one in the house could see the sun rise, and there was no vantage point to see it set. The light, therefore, was

### Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's *Paradise*

always misleading” (71). The light of American civilization is judged misleading. The novelist casts her gaze on the seamy side of her country. Spatial dimensions and architectural images - the bathroom, the bedroom, the kitchen, and the living room - acquire a symbolic significance in the novel. The spaces are traditionally women’s special turf where they perform their important domestic tasks and play their life-affirming and life-sustaining roles. Not until the revolution wrought by women in the Convent is extended to the “marketplace”, the politico-economic field, will the world know happiness and peace. “Utopian literature may figure a new ethical order projected on ‘feminine qualities’”.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the dream of utopia is after all a tall one that will never be realized, for women are not by any means error-proof. They have imperfections that are either glossed over or not mentioned at all by the novelist, for example, the opportunistic tendency to want to use men to satisfy their lust for material wealth, instead of working to achieve economic freedom. Consolata engages in home economic production: gardening, and teaches the women to be likewise productive.

The erotic images sculpted in marble in the Convent which give the nine male assailants the sought-for proof of their charges of unbridled licentiousness and perverseness, ironically, are the creations of the male capitalist embezzler. The Convent women are killed for the sins committed by the man. They are martyrs, not of Christian proselytizing, but of the struggle for female emancipation.

In their quest for wish fulfillment, the desire to build God’s own country on the planet earth, even the Pilgrim Fathers left no room for grace and thus were contaminated by genocide and slavery. The name Grace given Gigi by her mother is symbolic. It points indirectly to the absence of love in the society. “In that holy hollow between sighting and following through,” the narrator asks, “could grace slip through at all?” (73). A sexual image, the “holy hollow” satirizes Puritanism and Christian hypocrisy. It metaphorizes the gender war zone. The paradox inherent in the gender war is precisely that men desire the thing - beauty, innocence, purity, virginity or virtue - which is most prized in woman and women guard jealously the very same thing that they must lose in order to feel fulfilled. The means voids the end in either case. It is important to state that desire for wish fulfillment whittles down the sex war to play and renders everybody stupid. Gigi is irritated by the idea that women serve themselves up as food for men, but her own desire for wish fulfillment prevents her from turning down K.D.’s offer of “a little ride”, a cliched metaphor for lovemaking (74).

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 7.

### Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA

A child of nature, Gigi sits naked in the Convent garden's red chair sunbathing. Asked by angry Mavis who she is, she yawns and scratches her pubic hair. Her figural gesture defines her as a girl who seeks and desires love. Clothing, she seems to say, is one of the masks of deception put on by people.

Morrison is out to expose and deconstruct in *Paradise*, as in her previous novels, hidden and secret parts of the love game which traditional ethic does not allow people to freely and openly discuss. She explores the fertility-cum-vegetation myth in order to restore woman to her rightful place as Mother and Love. Shortly after Mother's death and Gigi, a newcomer to the Convent, asks who dies, Connie replies: "A love" (73).

Men who neither honour Mother nor respect Love are punished in diverse ways in the novel. Steward Morgan, one of the capitalist moguls in the Morgan family, loses not just his youth and taste buds but the natural beauty and trees of his ranch to love of money. His greatest undoing, however, is loss of his children, a painful punishment for his sterile vision that sacrifices compassion for filthy lucre. Fertility is associated with romance and sterility with lack of compassion. The Morgans have embraced the capitalist ideology and have no place in their hearts for blacks who are poor. Money is their ruling passion. Big Daddy Morgan even owns a bank!

Class-cum-material determinism has a disruptive impact on black racial identity and unity. The Morgans go to Arnold Fleetwood's house to discuss K.D.'s maltreatment of Arnette and seize the opportunity to exhibit their economic power and snobbery. "When they knocked on the door each man...began to breathe through his mouth as a way of narrowing the house odor of illness" (57). Considering the fact that Arnold Fleetwood owes Steward and Deek money, their expressive action amounts to a rub. Deek remarks that "Women always the key. God bless 'em" (61). It is ironic that women who are supposed to be the key are kept in the background while the Morgan and Fleetwood men carry on with the negotiation. Thus Deek's statement is not only patently disingenuous but sarcastic as well.

However, women do not just fold their arms and watch men maltreat them. Disappointed by their husbands, some wives turn their affection to their children. For example, Mable and Sweetie, married to father and son respectively, spend "all their energy, time and affection on the four [Fleetwood] children still alive" and stop worrying about their husbands who, consequently, turn their "shame sideways" (58). Children often steal the love their mothers used to have for their fathers, and hence some married couples choose not to procreate at all.

Having lost her husband's (Steward) love to the lust for money, Dovey ponders: "aside from giving up his wealth can a rich man be a good one?" (93) Owing to lack of marital fulfillment, she

### Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's *Paradise*

finds herself another man, who is at least twenty years younger than her, and cuts out on her husband.

Loneliness drives some wives into adultery. It is the case with Dee Dee whose husband, Milton Truelove, calls her a slut. His prolonged absence from home on business during the summer holiday leaves room for her to fall in love with Carlos, her visiting daughter's boyfriend, with whom she shares the same professional interest as artist. Mrs Norma Keene Fox desires the company of a paid woman to dispel her loneliness anytime Leon, her husband, is away from home. Seneca finds the work extremely humiliating and later finds comfort and solace in the Convent.

As industrial capitalism advances, certain undreamt-of changes occur. "In every Ruby household appliances pumped, whispered and flowed..." (89). The price for these time-saving "electric servants" which ease women's labour and make life more comfortable is a plethora of psycho-social problems: moral corruption, desecration of all the traditional values that Ruby represents, disappearance of the beauty of the natural environment, drunkenness, extreme individualism, fear of insecurity, rebellion of youth and women, and sass.

Perhaps the most audacious change desired by the youth, which encapsulates all other transformations, is the alteration of the inscription on the Oven from BEWARE THE FURROW OF HIS BROW to WE ARE THE FURROW OF HIS BROW, a change from complaisance and pacifism to civil disobedience and protest (298). The Oven is a symbol of the sanctity of black womanhood, black cultural heritage, personal integrity, freedom and unity in Ruby. It is a community kitchen. Anna problematizes the change the youth want effected in the Oven motto by genderizing it: "Be the Furrow of *Her* Brow" (159).

Modelled on the figure of late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., a victim of white aggression and a martyr of the black struggle, Reverend Richard Misner is an advocate of change and justice and for the former he is disliked by Ruby men. Like King, he adopts nonviolence or peaceful protest as a method of struggle. He makes insinuations about the pride, the chief of sins, and the immoral attitude of the Morgans in matters having to do with money. Most people in Ruby think of immorality only in connection with sex-related matters. The town is wreathed in a thick smoke of hypocrisy. Reverend Cary provides a long list of the sacrifices made by the people to live in Ruby: television, disco, policemen, picture shows, filthy music, wickedness in the streets, theft in the night, murder in the morning, liquor for lunch and dope for dinner (274). All the absences, in his opinion, cannot return Ruby to Eden if there is no love there. In the town, an outsider is an enemy.

Women's beauty is intoxicating and disturbing. It has been the destruction of many successful men. Looking at the joyous,

### Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA

beautifully dressed verberna-reeking summertime ladies who have a group photograph taken, Deek and his twin brother Steward fall off a railing. It is a case of waking infantile sexuality that makes the women smile and fetches the boys Big Daddy's beating. Through the discreet manipulation of what in Nigerian slang is called "bottom power", women, the so-called weaker sex, have tamed the wildest and most powerful men in the world. Alexander Pope wrote on the perplexing paradox in *The Rape of the Lock*: "And mighty hearts are held in slender chains"<sup>11</sup>. Aristophanes dramatizes in *Lysistrata*<sup>12</sup> the power of female sexuality. A superior weapon, it forces destructive, warring men to lay down their arms and embrace peace. The idea that women are weaker vessels is pooh-poohed.

Everybody but the Convent women is stiff and overtly polite at Arnette's wedding reception. Asked to leave the reception on account of their outrageous mode of dressing, the Convent women leave the Morgans' yard and go to the Oven to have their fun. "They grin and yip but look at no one. Just their own rocking bodies" (157). In Anna's opinion, the norm-defying women "have saved the day" (159). However, their looking at no one but their own rocking bodies is suggestive of a sterile lesbianism that negates all that wedding stands for in the propagation of humankind.

The Convent women have a very low opinion of men generally and are determined to tame the predators. Hence, they resort to lesbianism, a strategy of women's self-protection against male sexual assault. Mavis sees every man as "an unlit explosion" (162). Her husband tries to have an incestuous relationship with his daughter. Two brothers, Brood and Apollo, fight with guns over Billie Delia. Harper worries Catherine his wife into nervous digestion. He is, like Shakespeare's Othello, the jealous type. Consolata loses her virginity at nine. Arnette calls K.D. who refuses to claim responsibility for her pregnancy "nigger", a term which, according to Morrison, "occupies a territory between man and animal".<sup>13</sup> She receives a slap for the abuse. K.D. argues that it was Arnette who seduced him. The image of woman as seductress is as old as time. Perhaps it explains why for the sin of fornication "it was the unmarried mother-to-be (not the father-to-be) who would have to ask her church's forgiveness" (152). Reverend Misner takes sides with Arnette because he hates injustice and despises "males who hit

---

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Pope, «The Rape of the Lock» in M.H. Abrams, ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. I, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York and London : W.W. Norton and Company, 1993. 2239.

<sup>12</sup> Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*. New York: Dover Publications, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, p. 71.

### **Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's *Paradise***

women" (62). Woman-beating is a common male pastime that cuts across racial boundaries.

Consolata likes her room in the cellar "for its darkness. Sunlight was not a menace to her there" (172). Sunlight is associated with manliness, torture, and violence because of its oppressive heat, while moonlight is associated with women for its softness and tenderness. Carlos' face is "moon-drenched" in the house of Dee Dee Truelove (Pallas' mother) who snatches her daughter's boyfriend (169). The betrayal drives Pallas from her mother's house. But it is not as nightmarish as the rape attempt that makes her run to hide in a lake.

Consolata pours affection on Pallas and heals her of her hurts. Pallas feels that the whole Convent house is "permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain, free of hunters, but exciting too" (177). Consolata's gender revolution is a negation of patriarchal power and the hegemony enjoyed by men over the sexual relationship. It is a necessary precondition for the creation of an independent female identity. The only problem is its ultimate sterility. Healing the gender-mutilated world requires not the banishment or elimination of male but reordering of gender relations and roles. To be fully realized, the desire for the Other cannot and must not preclude men. To do otherwise is to replace one form of tyranny with another.

Radical feminists just have to accept the bitter fact that the pleasure that inheres in a man-woman relationship is riddled with pain. This in essence is the indissoluble paradox of love. What is orgasm but neural pain that comes in form of pleasure! Far from being an absolute category, love involves sacrifice which in turn entails suffering, viz, Christ's passion and death. A creator and a destroyer, God who personifies Love is ambivalent.

Researching into the genealogies of the families that founded Ruby, Patricia finds that the men of Ruby hated her father not so much because he prepared his wife for burial but essentially because "he broke the blood rule first" (199). His wife, Delia, "looked like a cracker" (196). The women of Ruby cried and did their best to help Delia who had trouble giving birth, but their hate-filled men withheld their help, gave excuses and allowed mother and child to die. Women who experience the pain of childbirth have compassion but men who do not harden their hearts. Ruby women believed in love and, unlike their male counterpart, were not opposed to Roger Best's marrying Delia. "But they were just women, and what they said was easily ignored by good brave men on their way to Paradise" (201-202). Unmistakable, the persona's sardonic tone expresses a caustic condemnation of the marginalization of women in discourse as well as in the political arena.

Reverend Richard Misner asks his congregation for donation to pay the lawyers who are defending the four demonstrating black teenagers arrested in Norman. Only women give, not so much because they believe in the boys' political struggle but mainly because

**Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA**

they empathize and feel vicariously the pain that the boys' arrest and illegal detention for twenty months without trial must have brought their mothers.

Still on the heartlessness of men, Zechariah Morgan and Drum Blackhorse forbid the women from taking the food, blankets and money donated by the fair-skinned coloured men who refuse to accommodate them in their town. But Celeste Blackhorse sneaks back and collects only the food to distribute to the hungry children. She is certainly motivated by pity. Women are portrayed as nurturant and pacifistic while men are depicted as belligerent and self-centred. The former sex represents the principle of life and growth and the latter the principle of death and decimation.

Although *Paradise* explores profoundly the problems of racism and sexism, it foregrounds more forcefully those of sexism. Morrison seems to subscribe to Caroline Spencer's view that the overthrow of male tyranny over female is "the greatest revolution conceivable"<sup>14</sup> and to Doris Steven's declaration that sex antagonism is primary and towers "above the petty quarrels of religious creeds, above the rivalries of classes, above the slaughterings of nations, [and] above the sinister enmity of races".<sup>15</sup> The novelist's political sympathies no doubt lie with Indians and African-Americans, the most repressed victims of capitalist greed and racism in the United States, but they are more liberally lavished on the victims of male oppression the world over: women.

Nathan DuPres perceives Ruby, a symbolic representation of the United States, as a land flowing with milk and honey. He has a dream in which an Indian comes to him and deconstructs his deodorized image of the land. The Indian makes Nathan DuPres, the oldest male in Ruby, recognize the loss of the paradise built by Indians when the white people took over. Morrison seems to share Modin's view expressed in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* that "America may have been a paradise when the Indians ran it, but it's a shambles now".<sup>16</sup>

Judging by its technological feats, one may be tempted to see the United States as a paradise indeed. But the Indian's proverbial statement that "the tallest cotton don't yield the best crop" is a proper guide in determining the criteria for a genuine paradise (205). A true paradise must have among several other characteristics peace, prosperity and unity. The United States has only one of the great attributes, material abundance, which is not even equitably

---

<sup>14</sup> Cited by Scott, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?* London : Heinemann, 1974. p. 100.



### Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's *Paradise*

distributed. The play on colour in the dream is significant. The foundation of the United States was laid with violence: the enslavement of the Blacks and genocide against autochthonous Indians. Since then the land has been breeding the petals of blood seen in the dream, the red colour of which signifies the horror of violence.

Started by Consolata, the dance in the rain by the Convent women with shaven heads is a cleansing pagan rite. The symbolic rain purifies them by washing away their male-stained past. They no longer wear hair on their heads because they are not out to honour any man. They are born again (liberated). The rain substitutes the male sperm and sends them into raptures. They become one with nature. Since nature is hermaphroditic, there still remains the problem of gender separation.

Reverend Misner and Anna visit the Convent after the massacre. Anna examines the women's drawings and does not see the pornography reported by K.D. "She saw instead the turbulence of females trying to bridle, without being trampled, the monsters that slavered them" (303). In his sermon on the death of Save-Marie, Reverend Misner lambasts the nine murderers and considers Ruby (the US in disguise) "an unnecessary failure" (306). Mourning her dead friends, Billie Delia says Ruby is a "prison calling itself a town...A backward noplac ruled by men whose power to control was out of control..." (308).

Morrison questions in *Paradise* the legitimacy of men's power to control women. Symbolized by women, love is represented in the matriarchal text as the key to paradise. Unlike in *Beloved*,<sup>17</sup> Morrison does not grapple in the novel with the paradox of love, a thematic that would make nonsense of the notion of paradise itself. Wherever there is perfect peace and perfect unity there is total subjugation. So was the situation in the beginning, according to Yoruba mythology,<sup>18</sup> when Obatala totally dominated Atunda his slave. The latter rebelled and shattered his master's head with the boulder, a symbol of monolithic order and absolute tyranny, that he was condemned, like Sisyphus, to carry up hill each time it rolled down. By breaking the original godhead Atunda freed himself from bondage and simultaneously introduced into the world the division of labour, polytheism, and the

---

<sup>17</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. New York : Plume, 1988.

<sup>18</sup> Wole Soyinka, *Idanre and Other Poems*. London : Eyre Methuen, 1967, pp. 61-88.

**Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA**

principle of multiteity<sup>19</sup> The revolt of women has brought them liberation and simultaneously exacerbated problems of divorce, marital infidelity and youth delinquency. The key, therefore, is balance.

---

<sup>19</sup> Olusegun Adekoya, « Atunda, Ogun and Utopia ». *Journal of English Studies*. Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria, vol. 5 (September 1989), 65-76.