

**The Identity Challenge in Toni Morrison's *Paradise***

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's novels are always political<sup>1</sup>. Morrison's seventh novel, *Paradise*, published in 1997, is no different. Jami L. Carlacio maintains that Morrison's work has been an ongoing commitment to redefine (African American) personhood with the intention of ultimately producing a new consciousness regarding race (xv). Beyond race consciousness, Morrison's writing is indeed "a catalyst, a vibrant intellectual site, for interrogating some of the most pressing concerns and contradictions of our world today" (Peterson 261-2). In *Playing in the Dark* (1992) Morrison discredits the view that "canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African Americans in the United States" (5). Morrison then makes visible the invisible Africanist<sup>2</sup> presence in literature of the United States. Morrison argues that since the literature she analyzes was not written by or for African Americans "the fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the [white] writerly conscious" (16-17). While *Paradise* addresses specific issues of race, gender, and history, this thesis argues that a close reading of the text reveals Morrison making visible the invisible presence of the other in the formation of the self.

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<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Alice Childress, who quotes the Black Arts Movement assertion that "art equals politics... and [that] art must serve some political and some consciousness-raising end," Morrison responds, "I think all good art has always been political. None of the best writing, the best thoughts have been anything other than that" (3). In "Rootedness" Morrison asserts that unless her work is political it is about nothing (64). Also see Jill Matus (1998) for the shared concerns in *Paradise* and Morrison's earlier novels.

<sup>2</sup> Morrison explains her use of the term "Africanism" as follows: "[Rather] I use it as a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" ("Playing in the Dark" 6-7).

Since her very first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1971), Morrison has dealt with the complexity of African American identity in relation to its historical and social context. As such Morrison's work has been a continual deconstruction of the African American identity as other. However, when, in *Paradise*, African Americans embody the same discriminatory values as the dominant culture, Morrison in effect seems to be deconstructing<sup>3</sup> human identity itself - thus addressing the universal individual. Moreover, Mae G. Henderson points out that the process of constructing identity, rather than discovering identity, is central to Morrison's artistic vision (Davidson 363). *Paradise* will similarly portray the constructed nature of human identity.

*Paradise* nonetheless functions to re-member the historical past for both African Americans and America as a whole (Davidson 355). Comparing *Paradise* to *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Davidson is correct to argue that the latter two depict the role of narrative in the reconstitution process of the *individual* while *Paradise* assesses the role of narrative in the *community* (355-6). Similarly, Patricia Storace is correct to observe that *Paradise* evokes images of the white founding fathers of the United States, making *Paradise* a provocative allegory of nationhood (Davidson 371).

*Paradise* tells the story of the lives and interactions between residents of an all-black town, Ruby, and its neighbors, a group of women who live outside of town in what is known as the "Convent." Patricia Best, the town's self-appointed historian, describes the beautiful, tall, and graceful people of Ruby as eight-rocks (8-R), because of the blue-black color of their skin that resembles "a deep level in the coal mines" (193). While *Paradise* captures the

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<sup>3</sup> The notion of "deconstructing human identity" refers to exposing the paradox of the self not being self-identical and "unrelated" to other people whom it perceives as very unlike itself. Deconstruction usually reveals how that which was considered as other or peripheral is often at the center of the self.

shift from the civil rights movement to the post-civil rights era in which the realities of racial integration and gender equality as “putative paradises” were first being examined (Schur 277), this thesis argues that Morrison simultaneously builds a case for the possibility of a deeper shift that could lead to a redefinition of all human-to-human relations. Thus, despite *Paradise’s* clear historical and communal import, this thesis will focus on the timeless significance inherent in it by which Morrison addresses the universal individual.

This universal individual resonates with Philip Page’s assertion (648) that the open-endedness of *Paradise*, especially the ending, is Morrison’s invitation to the reader to join her in “shouldering the endless work [we] were created to do down here in paradise” (318). The scope of consciousness-raising enabled through *Paradise* reaches beyond race or gender to all human-to-human relations.

The key focus in my analysis will be an exploration of the themes of doubles, twins, and mirrors found in *Paradise*, for these lend themselves to a striking interpretation. Analyzing these themes through the lenses of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, one discerns that in *Paradise* the individual’s identity is in fact split and not the assumed stable self of rationality. *Paradise* argues for more than the necessity of communities to be open to diversity; it presents a case in which the self is the twin of every “other.”

I begin by defending my focus on doubleness, thereafter I discuss relevant aspects of Lacan and Levinas, and then analyze identity construction in detail.

## CHAPTER 2. DEFENDING AND HIGHLIGHTING DOUBLENESS<sup>4</sup>

Earlier Morrison novels abound in pairs of characters placed in parallel destinies (Harding & Martin 40). Harding and Martin mention that the double is portrayed as a mirror reflection in the case of Milkman and Guitar, *Song of Solomon* (1977); as spiritual bonding between Nel and Sula, *Sula* (1974); and as social a substitute, played by Beloved, *Beloved* (1987) (42). To these examples can be added the later novel, *Love* (2003) and the characters of Heed and Christine. In contrast to these examples, *Paradise* does not limit doubleness to one or two primary characters in the novel. In *Paradise* doubleness functions as a guiding metaphor.

The profusion of doubleness is almost uncanny; it seems to want to “resolve” a troublesome matter.<sup>5</sup> This resolve would take the form of exposing the “troublesome matter” as being the fact that identity-as-interdependent has always been suppressed. The generally accepted view of identity as singular and independent, which justifies self-righteousness and wars of intolerant discrimination, would then have to be discarded.

The fact that Morrison initially titled this novel, filled with doubleness, “War” suggests that doubleness is a specific meditation<sup>6</sup> with which she is responding to problems that result from a blindness to the legitimacy of otherness. The profusion of doubles functions to underscore that deciphering its meaning in the text is vital – whether in relation to the theme of war, or not.

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term “doubleness” instead of doubles, because doubles suggest two of the same kind, while doubleness suggests “plurality in two” or “one and another,” which in effect can be “one and many others.”

<sup>5</sup> Freud’s notion of the uncanny marks the constant repetition of the repressed, which continually returns in an effort to be resolved (Freud 947).

<sup>6</sup> In an interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth, Morrison reveals that her pondering certain issues in *Paradise* took the form of a “meditation, if you will, and interrogation” of these ideas (156).

At times the mention of doubleness seems superfluous, as when Lone's gum – Doublemint – is mentioned three times (12, 276, 289) or when the cars belonging to the strangers who thought they could harass Ruby girls are described as having “double molding” and “two-speed automatic transmission” (12). In a novel not as clearly marked by doubles, these arbitrary descriptions would have gone unnoticed. In *Paradise* they however emphasize the already incessant theme, which demands to be interpreted.

*Paradise* is indeed a proliferation of literal twins, figurative twins, twin situations, and twin histories. The double is a mirror figure, which is ultimately not limited to the numerical two, but instead conveys the idea of a self and an other, thus a self and all others. The double figure thus functions to disrupt the idea of singularity in identity by making otherness part of the self. Existentially, such a position challenges either/ or dichotomies and essentialist paradigms. Harding and Martin argue that Morrison's use of the double is not that of an anti-self or imperfect self, but instead Morrison's double enables the creation of identity in tension with an other to reveal an “interactional” identity of unity in multiplicity (41).

Three sets of twins include Deacon (Deek) and Steward, their grandfather and his twin brother, and Mavis's dead twin babies. Two sets of two brothers are killed in Vietnam: Mavis's two brothers and Deek's only two sons. Two sisters, Soane and Dovey, are married to two brothers, Deek and Steward. The town's founding fathers include Big Papa and Big Daddy, Old Fathers and New Fathers. The symbolism of double sets of human relations seems to suggest completeness in difference.

Twin histories are presented in the stories of Haven and Ruby, but also metaphorically in the history of *Paradise* as a history of the United States. The foundings of both towns are also marked by what they call a “Disallowing.”<sup>7</sup>

The splitting into two of what is really a unity is further reflected in Connie’s insistence that the body and spirit should not be separated or the one valued as more important than the other (263).

*Paradise* further confronts the reader with otherness of a spiritual and intellectual nature. Two opposing preachers, and two versions of God, one cross with a Christ figure and another without, challenge the reader’s own position on these matters. As with previous novels, *Paradise* shifts between the natural realm and a mystical realm of ghosts, mythical figures, as well as characters that are difficult to place in either realm.

I will restrict my analysis to explorations of doubleness as it concerns human-to-human identity formation<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> See *Paradise*, p. 194.

<sup>8</sup> While both Levinas and Lacan deal with notions of the unknowable as it informs the self’s identity, I will refrain from exploring the interplay between the spiritual and the supernatural. For this reason, despite its potential to strengthen my thesis, I will not examine the Convent women’s personal healing, which involves spiritual aspects as well as explicitly shared identities. The doubleness theme is strongly portrayed in this healing process as the women’s healing is predominantly enabled through their overlapping identities, depicted by “the dreamer’s tale” that is shared by all of them. The doubleness is even made explicit in the notion of the women transferring their pain onto images drawn of themselves – as when Morrison writes that Seneca “duplicated” one of her scars onto the drawn image of herself instead of cutting her physical body (264, 265).

## CHAPTER 3. LACAN AND LEVINAS

### 3.1 Introduction

One aspect, among many, which Morrison, Lacan, and Levinas have in common, is that they are performative writers who deal with complex issues, making their work notoriously difficult to understand. Each intentionally requires the reader to work to piece together meaning. The reason may be that each in his or her own way argues that meaningfulness is not limited to the knowable. As already mentioned though, I will refrain from exploring the “in-between” spaces (Morrison), the primordial relation (Levinas), and the impossibility of the “I” recognizing itself (Lacan). While such explorations would provide a stronger foundation for the necessary move away from narrow-minded definitions of identity, it is a topic for a bigger project.

Levinas and Lacan, twentieth century giants in their respective disciplines of philosophy and psychoanalysis, lived and wrote in the same city, at the same time, among the same colleagues, often using the same language and the same sources and yet they never addressed each other’s work (Marcus 32). But they dealt with many of the same issues, including the structure of subjectivity, the function of alterity, and the nature of ethics. For the purposes of this thesis, the highest concern for me is the fact that, for both Levinas and Lacan, the self is fundamentally created on the basis of “the intervention of the other”<sup>9</sup> (Marcus 31).

By using Levinas and Lacan, I am not trying to psychoanalyze Morrison or characters in *Paradise*, nor am I trying to find the true master narrative about the human condition or

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<sup>9</sup> See David Ross Fryer’s *The Intervention of the Other: Ethical Subjectivity in Levinas and Lacan*.

subjectivity. This essay is also not to compare Levinas and Lacan's work, but to use their theories to crystallize something Morrison is saying. While Lacan argues that the subject's identity is fundamentally *based on* the other and Levinas argues that the self's identity is *for* the other, Morrison shows that identity is both based on the other and is for the other.

### 3.2 Lacan: The Mirror Phase

Lacan described his work as a radical rereading of Freud (Leitch et al. 1278-9). This re-interpretation and development was largely influenced by his following literary and philosophical developments of the period, which included developments in linguistics, especially the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson; developments in social anthropology, in particular Claude Levi-Strauss's work; Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic; as well as the influence of surrealism in his thinking (ibid 1279, Stavrakakis 18-19). Lacan's major breakthrough, ascribed to his recognition that the unconscious is structured like a language (Grigg xi, Haute 3), where the signifier and the signified never meet, enabled him to argue that the subject's identity can never be self-identical. For this reason the concept of "otherness" is central to Lacan's thinking, since, as Saussure demonstrated, the meaning of a word is always deferred as it can never be found in the word itself, but only through its relation with other words (972).

Lacan introduces a conception of subjectivity constituted by a radical lacking, which he traces back to the Freudian idea of *Spaltung* (splitting) (Stavrakakis 22). Lacan further explains this split through his notion of the mirror phase, which marks a specific period in the child's development, but is nonetheless also a permanent structure of subjectivity.

The fundamental lack of the split subject causes it to necessarily identify with socially available objects of identification such as other people, political ideologies, patterns of consumption, and social roles (Stavrakakis 23). For Lacan this identification with otherness happens in the psyche. Lacan explains the psyche's structuring of human experience as functioning in a system of interacting realms, which he calls the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary<sup>10</sup> (Bailly 88, Stavrakakis 23).

During his formulations of the Imaginary and the Symbolic it became evident for Lacan that there was something that could not be captured by the signifier and thus always remained "left out" (Bailly 98). That which is "left out" appears to be of the Real. The Real is that aspect of the signifier that remains imperceptible and unsymbolised and yet it is that which distorts and dislocates imaginary and symbolic representations and identifications (Bailly 98, Stavrakakis 20). Although the resources available to the lacking subject are imaginary and symbolic, both these planes are ultimately unable to provide anything resembling a full identity, because of their inability to master the always escaping Real (Stavrakakis 23). Thus, while there would be a great deal to discover in analyzing the in-between and inexplicable spaces encountered in *Paradise* at the hand of Lacan's Real, which is itself described as the in-between that shapes reality while not being part of reality (Parker 129), I will limit my focus to the Imaginary and Symbolic orders.

In Lacan's early work he saw the "mirror stage"<sup>11</sup> as belonging to a specific moment of transformation in the intellectual development of the child ("Ecrits" 76). In his later work, such as the fourth Seminar, Lacan argues that "the mirror stage extends beyond an instance in

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<sup>10</sup> I capitalize the Imaginary, Symbolic, and the Real to distinguish them from their ordinary meanings.

<sup>11</sup> Lacan borrows the term "mirror stage" from Henri Wallon, although he never acknowledges this (Roudinesco 27).

the development of the child; it represents a permanent structure of subjectivity in which the subject is permanently caught and captivated by its own image,” albeit as reflected by otherness.

Prior to the mirror stage the child had no sense of itself as a unitary being, having experienced only fragments of itself (Bailly 29). The first time the child thinks of itself as “I” is when it sees itself in a mirror during the ages of 6-18 months and recognizes the image as its own image representing itself (“Ecrits” 76, Bailly 29). At this point an intellectual relationship of the Subject’s internal world and the external world ensues which is the beginning of consciousness of self (“Ecrits” 78, Bailley 31-32).

It is however not itself the child identifies with, but an *imago*, or image of itself. For this reason it is not the “I” that is established in this moment, but what Lacan calls the Ideal-I of the ego (Lacan 76). This founding act of identity is therefore really an identification with an “other” that is separated from the self (Bailly 30). From the beginning, the child/ subject’s identity is thus both “*what I am*” and “*what others and I see of me*” – the image *is* oneself and simultaneously *not* oneself (Bailly 31). While this aspect of the mirror stage occurs in the realm of the Imaginary<sup>12</sup> the mental process of translating the mirror image into a concept of “self” is also the beginning of the submission of the subjective self to processes of symbolization (Bailley 31-32, “Ecrits,” Lacan 78).

It should be noted that prior to this submission to symbolization, the child is always already caught up within the symbolic. Lacan argues that while the image – as experienced in the Imaginary order - plays an important structuring role in identity formation, “this role is

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<sup>12</sup> The Imaginary is named for the mental process that issue from the encounter between the infant and its image in the mirror. The Imaginary is the psychic realm where the child experiences the idea of a "self" in the face of a mirror image. The mirror stage cements a self/other dichotomy (Bailly 37).

completely taken up and caught up within, remolded and reanimated by the symbolic order” (*The Psychoses*” 9). The fact that the child is always already caught up in the symbolic is demonstrated by the fact that the child already exists in the speech of its family even before its birth. From birth onwards the language of its society and family will further shape the child (Fink 36). At the same time, before the intellectual recognition that occurs between 6-18 months the child’s first mirror is truly the gaze of the mother or primary caregiver (Bailly 37).

Lacan thus posits the subject as coming into being by means of its relationship with otherness. As is evident however, “otherness” takes on two forms. In 1955, Lacan made a distinction between the small other and the capitalized Other. The small other derives from the mirror stage. As we have seen, it is not a real “other” but the reflection and projection of the ego. As such, it belongs to the realm of the Imaginary. Apart from the small other in the mirror, the individual comes to recognize all other people as “little others,” and to treat them as suitable objects of projection and identification that the self may want to emulate (Bailly 65).

On the other hand, the capitalized Other indicates a radical otherness which is beyond the Imaginary (Bailly 66). This Other belongs to the Symbolic,<sup>13</sup> which encompasses social structures, values, laws, and language and operates as the laws of the *unconscious organization* of human society (Bailly 66, 94, Leitch et al. 1281). The Symbolic order thus allows the internalization of mirror images, which allows the ego to form as a sedimentation of ideal images (Fink 36). These images should be understood as being in interplay between

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<sup>13</sup> Lacan took the term “Symbolic” from social anthropology, which revealed that even the most “primitive” societies function through various symbolic orders such as societal rules, taboos, mores and expectations, amongst others that regulate relations in society (Bailly 71).

the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders. Other people, for example the mother, can thus be both a small other and a big Other – on the one hand as someone to emulate or as someone presenting values. Ultimately, “the subject is constituted in and through the encounter with an Other” (Haute 71).

*Paradise* presents the reader with numerous instances of characters whose identity is portrayed as dominated by otherness – be it the projections or reflections of identities, views, commands, prohibitions, and even rejections of other characters. Whereas the citizens of Ruby lived in an isolated world, Morrison shows the impossibility and dangers of assumed “self-identical” identity.

### 3.3 Levinas: Totality and Infinity

As Morrison dedicated *Beloved* to the 60 million and more who died in the Middle Passage and those who survived it, so too Levinas dedicated his work to the victims of the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup> Both Morrison and Levinas have dedicated their work to address the issue of totalizing the other person, in other words, reducing him or her to the self’s thinking. Levinas’s writing is an attempt to “reverse the deadly logic” of Western thinking (Saphiro 759-60).

The core of Levinas’s position can be found in two of his major works, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1969) and *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974). *Totality and Infinity* is firstly a critique of totalizing thinking as exemplified by Western philosophical systems that precede post-structuralism and secondly, it addresses the

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<sup>14</sup> On the memorial page in *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas wrote “To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism.”

question of what lies outside of totality to found subjectivity in the idea of infinity (“Totality and Infinity” 26). In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas goes beyond *Totality and Infinity* to focus less on otherness, but instead on the existential implications of what this otherness means for selfhood. In *Otherwise Than Being* Levinas claims that subjectivity is ultimately not a being for-the-self, but a being for-the-other (“Otherwise than Being” 69-70). Alterity, as the center of subjectivity, is thus the main focus explored in *Otherwise Than Being*.

For the purposes of this thesis Levinas’s notions of totality and infinity are important to explain certain attitudes encountered in *Paradise*. Levinas’s view of ethics as first philosophy serves as a guiding principle whereby the various strands in this thesis can be drawn together to reach a conclusion similar to what Levinas is making – albeit from a different perspective.

Levinas’s writing is a response to the inhumanity perpetrated during World Wars I and II, in particular as it was done by nations that were supposed to have epitomized the highest development of Western philosophy and culture (Marcus 22). As such, his critique is especially directed at the work of Husserl and Heidegger whose philosophy on human subjectivity was current at the time. Levinas argues that both Husserl and Heidegger failed to address the intrinsically totalitarian stance that saw otherness reduced to sameness, i.e. to totalized categories of normative standards and identities (Marcus 24) by which atrocities could be justified.

Whereas Western philosophy, according to Levinas, considered knowledge as capable of being all-inclusive and ultimate in comprehension, he argued that not all meaning could be made intelligible (“Totality and Infinity” 80, “Of God Who Comes to Mind” 55). Levinas

views totality thinking as reductive theory since it objectifies everything to a finite, knowable object (“Totality and Infinity” 13, 43).

Levinas instead proposes a modality of reflection that is both receptive and responsible to what he calls the Infinite, which he discovers in the “face” of the other person. Beyond the features of another person’s face, Levinas finds there is an “exteriority” or infinity that reveals a trace of what is beyond perception, judgment and knowledge (“Totality and Infinity” 194-201, “Ethics and Infinity” 86). For Levinas the relation to the face is immediately ethical, as it spells the first mode of “knowing,” as a facing or responding to the other (“Ethics and Infinity” 87).<sup>15</sup> For Levinas the self’s undeniable responsiveness to the face of the other person is also a response-ability, which is ultimately a responsibility.

In *Ethics and Infinity* (1985) Levinas claims that, “responsibility is the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity” (95). Marcus, however, points out that Levinas does not effectively substantiate this claim (45). Throughout the development of his oeuvre Levinas does indeed substantiate this claim. This substantiation however takes place in unrepresentable notions, much like explaining the Real does for Lacan.

Levinas describes the “*saying*” of what can’t be said as a betrayal and thus deconstructively duplicates terms to unsay and resay the “*said*” through terms like “more passive than all passivity,” “denudation of denuding,” and “infinition of the infinite” (“Otherwise than Being” 14, 49, 93). The ethical relationship is, moreover, described as

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<sup>15</sup> The face disrupts the self’s autonomous existence and egoistic enjoyment of the world and calls it into question in favor of the existence of the other person (“Totality and Infinity” 43, 82-84). It is in this face-to-face relation that the self discovers its ethical relation with the other person, which is one of responsibility. For Levinas the relation to the face is immediately ethical, as it spells the first mode of “knowing,” as a facing or responding to the other (Ethics and Infinity” 87).

“beyond thematizable presence” and “irreducible to knowledge” (“On Thinking-of-the-Other: Entre Nous” 168). It is also described as “a relation without relation” (“Totality and Infinity” 80). This responsibility is described as a response to the other “before any understanding, for a debt contracted before any freedom and before any consciousness and any present”(“Otherwise than Being” 12). Peperzak describes this as having been commanded outside of time, in a time immemorial (108).

It is clear from such language that a whole philosophical explication of time and new concepts is required to explain Levinas’s argument of responsibility as the fundamental structure of subjectivity. Such a course of action will, however, eclipse the purpose of this thesis. I therefore acknowledge these arguments, but instead connect an aspect of Lacan’s theory of subjectivity to Morrison’s treatment of responsibility in *Paradise* and argue that Morrison offers a challenge as ethically demanding as Levinas.

For both Levinas and Lacan subjecthood rests on infinity, on what cannot be completely grasped, on a split, on otherness. The implications of this lacking subject in Lacan’s theory inevitably escapes essentialism and reductionism of the other (Stavrakakis 23). Levinas’s theory similarly rejects totalizing the other and instead insists that the self is responsible for the other. In her own way Morrison portrays both these arguments in *Paradise* thus exhorting the reader to “shoulder the work” in this manner of responsibility for the other.

## CHAPTER 4. IDENTITY MIRRORING

### 4.1 Direct Mirrors of Identity

Mirrors and identity reflections, key elements in the novel, inform a reading well captured by the break-up between Deek and Steward. Morrison depicts Deek as experiencing a hitherto unknown incompleteness when he and Steward stop talking (i.e. having their wordless conversations) after the attack on the Convent (300). The twinned relationship as between separate individuals, yet as complete, may be indicative of the fact that human identity is incomplete without the other; that the self is always a double of the “you and me.” This argument can be extended to the macro level of society.

In this section I consider cases where Morrison portrays characters as accepting/embracing their own identity as reflections from other characters. It can be argued that this section deals with the relationship of the subject and the (small) other although Lacan explained that the Imaginary is nevertheless always taken up in the Symbolic.

Morrison describes Connie’s love for Mother Mary Magna also known as Mother, the nun who rescued her as an orphan and raised her, as “her rope to the world” (247). This rope metaphor evokes an image of an umbilical chord, which implies an intimate connection of vital dependence. Losing Mother becomes a loss of identity for Connie: “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” (247-48).

On the one hand, this depiction reveals her deepest feelings in a way that enables the reader to “step in” to her pain. In this description the author’s imagination equips the reader to step beyond the words articulated on the page. The reader can imagine Connie’s strong

sense of feeling left-behind, forgotten-about, like an empty closet deserted in silence and nothingness. This image magnifies the desolation of – not a piece of paper, lying flat and untouched by time, but a curl of paper – sapped by time to lose its original (controlled) form of flatness. As if an extension of the umbilical rope impression, this curl of paper calls to mind an image of a curled up person in the fetal position. This sense is strengthened by the emphasis wrought by “– nothing written on it –” as if aborted. Morrison has metaphors trigger metaphors leaving the reader with an image of a fifty-four year old woman feeling like an aborted fetus cowering after the loss of an other - another person who was integral to her identity.

On the other hand, the blank piece of paper indicates her lack of documentation, which would have connected her to a past as well as to a society for whom not being on record means not existing. While the metaphor demonstrates Lacan’s point of the role of the other’s imprint on the self, the non-existent documentation underscores Levinas’s point that before and beyond known facts of a person, the self understands there is this person with whom one necessarily has a relation of response. The simple yet powerful dynamics of this relational tango abound in *Paradise*.

The intertwined nature of identity is powerfully pictured in the following scenario between two lovers: “He kisses her lightly, then leans on his elbow. ‘I’ve traveled. All over. I’ve never seen anything like you. How could anything be put together like you? Do you know how beautiful you are? Have you looked at yourself?’” (231) To this the woman replies, “I’m looking now.” She sees herself through his eyes and thus as he sees her. It is therefore in looking at her and seeing her that the man “defines” her. At the end of *Paradise*, right before Steward shoots Connie, Deek looks at her and his life is altered to the

point where he sees himself and no longer likes who he had become. When this relationship comes to an end, Connie laments “he and I are the same” (241), suggesting in loving another she loved herself or even that it was herself in him that she loved.

The idea of knowledge of the self as “a test of love” is presented in the thoughts of Arnette on her wedding day. “She believed she loved him absolutely because he was all she knew about her self – which was to say, everything she knew of her body was connected to him” (148). This knowledge of the self is portrayed as a self that knows itself only through the other. Morrison nonetheless qualifies this self-knowledge twice by juxtaposing and contradicting, “believed” with loved him “absolutely” and “all” she knew about herself with everything she knew of her “body.” To believe implies there is not absolute knowledge. Similarly “all” is qualified and thus limited to her “body” – thereby betraying to the reader that her love was not as absolute as she thought although it was all she knew and understood about herself. When Arnette continues, “Except for Billie Delia, no one had told her there was any other way to think of herself” it seems that it is the Other of the norms and unconscious organization of society that informs her view of herself. Expressed by a double negative and absent of verbs Arnette thinks, “Not her mother; not her sister-in-law,” told her to think of herself in another way. This view reveals that she learned from these women that you passively know about yourself through your husband.

Like these intimate relationships, Seneca also views herself through the eyes of her boyfriend and Mavis views herself from her husband’s perspective. Whereas Mavis believes herself to be “the dumbest bitch on the planet,” Seneca believes herself to be “hopeless” (37, 131). And yet these reflections could as easily be positive with similarly powerful results as seen when Connie gives Mavis a simple compliment.

After Connie complimented Mavis's hands as beautiful and strong, we see Mavis "watching her *suddenly* beautiful hands" (42, my italics). Even after her mind travels back to the road and the mission she was on to go West, it returns to admire her hands (42). Not only does she begin to look at her hands differently, but her actions are also influenced by this "re-definition" for we see "now, working pecans, she tried to economize her gestures without sacrificing their grace." These thoughts bespeak a changed self-image brought about by another's input. Whereas her self-definition leaned towards incompetence it shifted to a greater sense of self-awareness and appreciation with Connie's simple compliment so that she now views herself as able and characterized by qualities of beauty. She moreover takes this compliment further and elevates it to the point where she finds it makes her graceful and elegant.

The characters of Seneca and Mavis demonstrate a further aspect of the identity in relation to others as it relates to agency. Mavis, generally portrayed as incompetent and feeble, gets stuck in the middle of nowhere without gas. As could be expected from the fearful and abused Mavis, she waited, dozed, waited some more and dozed some more (37). Then "suddenly she sat up, wide awake, and decided not to starve. Would the road girls just sit there?" (37) Her strength comes from remembering the numerous girls she gave rides to on her journey. The thought that "the road girls" would not just sit there and wait for someone else to take charge on their behalf, motivated Mavis to do something deliberate to help herself. In this instance we see agency coming from the self's identification with others. Similarly so, Seneca acts out of character when she jumps off the truck to follow a disoriented Sweetie on an unfamiliar road (126). Agency thus follows both from the subject accepting the projections of others as well as from the self identifying with others. The self

does, however, not lack freedom in terms of accepting or rejecting the reflections of others on the self.

During the raid on the Convent, one of the stalkers found himself in a bathroom with mirrors and noticed “only one mirror has not been covered with chalky paint and that one the man ignores. He does not want to see himself stalking females” (9). The text continues, “With relief he backs out and closes the door. With relief he lets his handgun point down” (9). The word “relief” appears twice in these sentences that follow each other. The man’s relief at not seeing his face reflected in that mirror reveals the importance of the other’s view of the self. The man chooses to avoid an accusation he does not want to confront. This mirror would have shown this pursuer to himself, as a killer. Defined by himself he can still get away with thinking of himself as the protector of his community. But the mirror of a Convent bathroom will reflect him from the hunted women’s point of view - as a killer. The man therefore chooses the identity he is willing to accept, just as he chooses to ignore what he knows about himself.

A second reference to a mirror is the figurative mirror revealed when K.D. describes his slapping Arnette to his uncles. Their reaction is described as “like a mirror image in gestures if not in looks, Steward spit fresh Blue Boy while Deek lit a cigar” (55). They are the primary twins in this novel and yet this image does not conjure a picture of similarity. They don’t look alike, they both react, but not in the same way. So what is Morrison suggesting with this description as mirror-like? The description of this image implies that there is unity in spite of division. At the same time the reader may be prepared through this image for the contradiction between the brothers, which will yet be revealed.

A third mirror scene is sketched in a conversation between Connie and Mother. When Connie tells Mother she may think her eyes are still blue, but they have become old-lady washed-out, Mother asks for a mirror in order to check for herself (47). This scene presents “the mirror” in a different light. No matter what other people say about us, whether they are loved ones or enemies, it is still our responsibility to ourselves to verify this information. Taking responsibility for the self means evaluating reflections others project onto the self. Thus, being told you are “a no good bitch” it does not automatically mean you are. At the same time, positive reflections such as compliments of competence or beauty also need the self’s assent.

A fourth mirroring is presented in Connie’s reflection on the humanness of Christ and the fact that “His suffering would mirror ours” (225). Jesus, as the other in whom the suffering of the subject is mirrored, suggests the distinction, yet unity between God and humans. Beyond these direct references to mirrors, mirroring is abundant in *Paradise*.

The harsh confrontation with Fairly saw one traveler comment: “Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference?” (14). In other words, how can they not see that we are the same? We reflect each other. We share a social, economic, and political past and present. How can they not recognize themselves in us shortly before they became self-sufficient? This question of course reverberates across time and human borders. It is the universal question to each reader; how is the next person so different from you that you cannot see yourself in his or her situation? More specifically though, Tally, in *Toni Morrison’s (Hi)stories and Truth*, points out that the years after slavery saw African Americans eager to leave behind remnants of “inferior” qualities of those culturally specific traits that reminded them of their own poor and bedraggled past (25). Morrison is in effect

addressing African American's definitions of themselves in the 1970s as it relates to their different social classes and their shades of skin color.

The reflections discussed in this section underscore the Lacanian notion that the self's identity is established and influenced by other people. Establishing this point forms a premise in the argument that I believe Morrison is making, that wars and discrimination can only be avoided when otherness is recognized as constitutive of the self. The connection between identity and responsibility for the other begins to take shape in the following section on indirect influences that inform identity.

#### **4.2 Indirect Mirrors of Identity**

In this section I discuss cases of identity formation where the self behaves in a way that reflects indirect reflections onto or from others. I specifically focus on Morrison's portrayal of the men, but this is not to suggest that only men form their identity interdependently. The point I am trying to demonstrate is that *Paradise* indeed portrays identity as an interactive affair. This point is perhaps demonstrated clearest through the female characters of the Convent whose healing take place based on their identities overlapping as each shares in the dreamer's tale (264). The two main matters this section explores are how both the Old Fathers (founders of Haven) and the New Fathers (founders of Ruby) define themselves in relation to their women and children and how the New Fathers identify with and define themselves in relation to the mandate of the Old Fathers. The mandate of the Old Fathers includes the town Ruby and the words of the Oven. This section

argues that the 8-rock<sup>16</sup> men define themselves in relation to their ability to protect and provide for their women and children. Their manhood is portrayed as built on the degree to which the responsibility they feel for their women and children is fulfilled. This argument should not be mistaken with Levinas's view of ethics as first philosophy, which reasons that the self's identity is first and foremost an absolute responsibility for the neighbor.

Notwithstanding my caution, I believe Morrison is making a claim for the interdependence of identity and responsibility for the other.

Lacan's notion of the capitalized Other, as operative in the Symbolic order, unlocks the relations that will be discussed in this section. It is less their women as "little others" who can be emulated that inform the identities of the men, than it is the women or the mandate of the Old Fathers, as symbolic Others, that affect their identities.

It should be noted that although Steward and Deek Morgan are the main protagonists who will be discussed in these sections, the town's people generally share their sentiments and motivations. This is especially evinced during the Christmas play when the town relives the Fairly Disallowing and more specifically by men other than the Morgans who aired their views during the discussion of the attack on the Convent, for Lone aptly notes "the only voice not singing belonged to the one conducting the choir" (280).

#### **4.2.1 The Old Fathers' Identity: Mirrored in their Women**

The Oven had sentimental and monumental value for the 8-rock men in particular (103). On the one hand the Old Fathers saw a cook oven as a permanent fixture in the ground

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<sup>16</sup> I distinguish the 8-rock men from the New Fathers of Ruby. The 8-rock men refer to all generations of 8-rocks starting with the Haven founders and include the Ruby generations.

that would testify of them as freedmen having survived the ordeals they faced prior to successfully founding Haven. They triumphed over the humiliation and poverty of being routed out of offices held during Reconstruction and subsequently being reduced to field labor because nobody would give them jobs that required mental labor (99, 193). They had survived the natural elements, which they encountered during their trek West (14, 99). And they made it despite the Fairly rejection. The cook oven, like a womb, would testify to their virility to conquer difficulties and establish permanence. Most of all, the Oven is an attestation to the role their women play in their identities.

For the Old Fathers, the true test of their triumph and achievement lay in the fact that none of their women had ever worked in a white man's kitchen. The Oven, as a kind of communal kitchen, is in stark contrast to the white kitchens where the rape of their women was "if not a certainty a distinct possibility" (99). The thought of this danger to their women was too much for the men to even consider (99). It is then most probably for this reason that the men choose to believe that the blue-blackness of their skin testifies of them as a pure, "untampered" race since 1770 (193-4).<sup>17</sup>

Cynthia Griffin Wolff observes in "Margaret Garner": A Cincinnati Story" (1991) that the slave woman's voice had not been written into American culture until 1851 (438, fn

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<sup>17</sup> The belief in racial purity is difficult to reconcile with the reality of slavery. The obsession the men have to keep their women safe contradicts the view that their women had always been safe and instead suggests that this belief is a powerful myth. Although the 8-rocks are seen to reject all light skinned African Americans, subsequent to the Fairly Disallowing, it is possible to imagine that even before the Fairly encounter, that any light skinned children born by their women would not have been welcome in their midst since these children would be testimony to the vulnerability of their women and their own inability to provide the necessary protection. Moreover, the fact that the Morgan twins' grandfather was nicknamed Coffee and his twin brother, Tea, (302) may be an indication of racial tampering in the very Morgan bloodlines as tea is generally not as dark as coffee. In order to maintain the fiction of their racial purity it is thus necessary to reject traces of the (white) other in themselves, but more importantly, the necessary fiction of their women's safety can then be maintained, which would otherwise be too much for the men to bare.

2). She argues that while people who cared about the issues of abolition have heard of mothers being separated from their children, “*the shocking unresolvable dilemma of the slave MOTHER had never been dissected*” and thus thrust into American consciousness until the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851) (original italics) (438, fn 2). Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) confronts the reader with the slave mother’s moral behavior in the light of the fact that she did not own her own body, nor that of her own children (McKenzie 229). *Beloved* presents us with Sethe, tormented by the indignities of enslavement, who reasoned that murdering her children would be more compassionate than allowing them to endure slavery (Fuston-White 464). Sethe thought “No. No. Nono. Nonono” (155). She collected her children and took them “where no one could hurt them,” “where they would be safe” (155). As with Sethe, the value of keeping their wives and children safe dominates the lives of the 8-rock men. *Beloved* not only presents us with the mother’s desire to protect, but the father and husband’s desire as well. It is Halle’s (Sethe’s husband) experience that is closer to that of the 8-rock men. It broke Halle to see Teacher’s nephews “take Sethe’s milk” (64-66). Halle’s inability to protect his wife caused him to lose his mind (65).

For the 8-rock men it is similarly their ability to provide safety from such “kitchen” dangers that saw them value the Oven to a degree that the women could not understand (103). The magnitude of this ability to protect and provide for the women is at the heart of the impact the Fairly rejection had.

“It was the shame of seeing one’s pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter that had rocked them, and changed them for all time. The humiliation did more than rankle; it threatened to crack open their bones” (95). It was thus the shame that had rocked them, their own impotence that had come close to cracking their bones. In *Quiet as It’s kept: Shame*,

*Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, J. Brooks Bouson points out that in classic shame defense, the people respond to Fairly's dismissal with reactive pride for they became prouder and stiffer subsequent to this rejection (196). This humiliation is "seared in the memories of the Old Fathers and has a formative influence on the collective Ruby memory and group identity" (Bouson 196). Paul D, in *Beloved*, perhaps best explains this bone-threatening shame.

Paul D listens to Sethe's recount of murdering her daughter and he recalls his time in Alfred, Georgia where he did not have the right or permission to enjoy or love anything – because it all belonged to the men with the guns (154). To survive the danger of loving he picked the tiniest things to love, because loving a real person "could split you wide open" (154). Sethe's story causes him to conclude that her love for her children "could cleave the bone" (156). Paul D's understanding that the bone can be split when love cannot be protected, resonates with the views of the 8-rock men. For the men feel their own identities are threatened when their women – as others who inform their identity – are threatened and they cannot protect them against such adversity.

It is not only protection that informs the men's attitude towards their women. We also see the pride and joy, as well as the determination and willingness for sacrifice, to be able to provide for their women. An example is the labor and secret saving for two harvests to buy a winter coat for a wife (8). Steward's memory of seeing "the light in his mother's eyes" (8) seems slightly idealized and fits his views of male and female roles. Also men would spend their earnings from the first harvest or first cuts from the herd to buy their women blue dresses and bonnets (15). Without suggesting that their women are thought of as gods this

imagery suggests an almost Biblical devotion with the idea of first fruits, or a tenth of the first yield being offered to God.

When the men thus decide on an oven in Haven, it symbolizes provision as well as an absence of white kitchen jobs and resultant children that would testify of such “racial tampering” (197). The Oven symbolizes the triumph of their manhood, their perseverance and their triumph of having made it and of being able to protect and provide for their women.

#### **4.2.2 The New Fathers’ Identity: Mirrored in their Women**

Ruby was founded after the disintegration of Haven. One of the reasons for this new beginning was to avoid contact with the “Out There” and keep it from seeping into a dwindling Haven. Out There is described as “where your children were sport, your women quarry, and where your very person could be annulled” (16). “Out there” remains a serious consideration for the people of Ruby, even when there is nothing to harm them for ninety miles around (8).

Gauthier points out that the Morgan twins not only constructed female identity on idealized images of women, but also that they reciprocally constructed their own identity and sense of masculinity as protectors of such women (402). This idealized vision is moreover in addition to the values portrayed in the stories they grew up on.

Like the Old Fathers, the New Fathers base a fundamental aspect of their identity on their ability to fulfill the responsibility they feel to provide for and protect their women and children. They therefore vigilantly guard against outside intrusion that could disturb the tranquility of their hard-won community. When a group of strangers would screech into town and intimidate Ruby women with sexual gestures, the townsmen would come out from

wherever they were and intimidate such men right back out of town with their loosely held guns (13). According to Tally this “obsession and obligation” to keep Ruby safe from outside intrusion leads the men attack the Convent (65). This reaction – where men would leave their jobs and not care that all business would literally come to a standstill – is akin to the Old Fathers’ response to white kitchen work: they refused to have their women exposed to sexual violations of white men.

The men prided themselves on the fact that the people of Ruby were free and protected so that a sleepless woman could go for a walk in the middle of the night and know that she was not prey for ninety miles around (8). During the attack on the Convent, in a long stream of consciousness, an unidentified man (who sounds like Steward) imagines the above-mentioned sleepless woman’s night walk. Twice he thinks how she can walk without light and without fear; twice he mentions that nothing thinks she is prey (8-9). This image of absolute safety is further emphasized by the image of moonlight being the only source of light and the assurance that the woman would remain completely at ease at a foreign or sudden sound coming from the side of the road (8). His description gives the impression that this woman has never been exposed to anything remotely threatening, thereby showing how good a job the men have done of keeping Ruby a safe haven. Missing the irony of the situation, this man notes the safety of this Ruby woman whilst he feels justified in attacking the Convent women.

As a perfect example of the operation of the Symbolic order, we learn that Steward and Deek grew up on the stories of the past forty years, thus being shaped by the language and values of their elders. Steward remembers the *stories he heard* of blue dresses and bonnets men bought for the women with their first earnings (15, my italics). This joy and

pride the men felt in being able to provide their women with pretty things is also experienced in Steward's life. While this is not a father providing for a daughter, we see that the principles and attitudes of the Old Fathers had been reproduced in Deek and Steward when they were young. Deek and Steward felt very proud of themselves for having thrown a surprise birthday party for their only sister, Ruby (8) – their first steps in bringing a woman happiness and showing her they can care for her. Moreover, when Deek thinks of his sister, he thinks of how he and Steward had protected her all their lives (113).

Steward similarly “relives” the Fairly rejection and imagines the humiliation and this thought threatens to crack his bones as well. Simply recalling the level of helplessness of the Old Fathers' Fairly experience makes Steward feel like he wants to shoot somebody (96). Not only does he identify so completely with his elders that he feels the threat to his own person disintegrating, for the image of bones cracking suggests that the supporting structure, the deepest part, and possibly the strongest part of his identity became so vulnerable that it could split apart. This threat to the supporting structure of his life sees him want to take a life in retaliation. The 8-rock men experience their responsibility as both the backbone of their identity, but also the thing that renders them most vulnerable and most dangerous when threatened.

The New Fathers unfortunately take their responsibility to the extent that they define and determine the role of women and children. In the description of the sleepless woman, her possible thoughts are described as her thinking of “... food preparations, war, or family things, or lift her eyes to stars and think of nothing at all” (8). While these are legitimate things to think about, they suggest that beyond domestic concerns and who was away at war the man believes the woman probably has nothing else she could think about. From time to

time the men indeed treat the women as if their only cares are domestic and as if being good is the only moral possibility for women.

This unidentified man's thoughts continue to compare the Convent women to the Ruby women, which gives the reader the insight into what he regards as the proper role and place of women. He is disgusted to find that these women do not abide by the schedule and sense of order men consider appropriate to womanhood: "Slack, they<sup>18</sup> think. August just around the corner and these women have not sorted, let alone washed, the jars" (5). In contrast to this assessment "there wasn't a slack or sloven woman anywhere in town" (8). Instead, the "proper" role of women is portrayed by: "Quiet white and yellow houses full of industry; and in them were elegant black women at useful tasks, orderly cupboards minus surfeit or miserliness; linen laundered and ironed to perfection; good meat seasoned and ready for roasting" (111). Indeed Deek thinks of Soane as "a good woman" who keeps a "good home" and does "good works" (112). This image seems to be both the expectations of the men as well as their preferred view of women. For the men, women who differ from these standards, like the Convent women, do not deserve their protection. Soane, moreover, "worked thread like a prisoner: daily, methodically, for free, producing more lace than could ever be practical" (53). Restricted to being good and monotonously producing unneeded lace testify to the confines the Ruby women live by.

The emphasis on protection and provision in combination with the above descriptions reveals a very strong patriarchal worldview in which both genders have their assigned roles. As such it becomes easy to usurp the power of another as men on occasion think for women

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<sup>18</sup> The stream of consciousness moves from the singular to the plural, which may indicate either Morgan twinned thoughts or that other men, besides the man who thinks about the sleepless woman, share this view of the Convent women as slack.

as portrayed by Arnold Fleetwood saying he will “arrange” his daughter’s mind for her or when Deek tells Soane “you don’t have to [understand], I do” (61, 107). The abilities and work of women are moreover easily taken for granted, as is illustrated when Soane thinks to herself that Deek will bring home quail, saying “This ought to take care of supper” as if he did her a favor and as if there was nothing more to it (100). The time and effort Soane would need to put in to prepare the quail does not seem to cross Deek’s mind. Similarly the fact that she must clean up after him seems to simply be part of her job description as a woman (105). The domesticity of the kitchen scene in which Deek throws his wet hunting clothes on the floor and urges Soane to bring him a cup of coffee (105-107) is indicative of the status quo of male-female relations. From the reader’s perspective Soane feels a certain amount of discontentment toward Deek’s attitude regarding the quail, his response to the young people wanting to change the words of the Oven, his view of an unknown girl in high heels, and his attitude toward friends’ money problems. The measure of frustration she feels is probably related to the fact that she knows she can do little to change Deek’s mind about these matters, for he does not budge to consent to her views, but instead dismisses them playfully or changes the angle of the subject. The Other of the symbolic order seems reflected here in that the unconscious organization of their society seems to “restrict” Soane to a role which she seems frustrated by, but is seemingly unable to alter.

While not exactly a New Father, because he dies before the founding of Ruby, Deek and Steward’s older brother Elder’s experience demonstrates the 8-rock instilled value of responsibility for women. Steward recalls how he and his brothers were “honed,” with no slack being cut, to understand their history and their future purpose and the responsibility it brought with it (94). The day Elder returned from fighting overseas (94-5) he saw two white

men beat up a black woman, who seemed to be a prostitute. He in turn beat them up, but ran away in order not to be jailed. His could not forgive himself for having run away and having abandoned the woman there (95). It is thus not his cowardice – as some may judge his running away as – but his failure to protect an unknown woman that Elder deplored in himself. “Whatever he felt about her trade, he thought about her, prayed for her till the end of his life” (94). His wife had mended the torn uniform, but he told her “to remove the stitches, to let the jacket pocket flap, the shirt collar stay ripped, the buttons hang or remain missing” (94). His dying wish was to be buried in the uniform with its rips on display (95). Instead of forgetting about this incident, he kept its memory alive. The implied statement made by his uniform was louder than the words on his tombstone. It is by this failure that he judged his self-image. Elder’s response reveals three things in contrast to Steward’s reaction to this story.

Steward only sees that the woman was a streetwalker and he even imagines the man’s fist as his own (95). In Steward’s view such women deserve no protection, just like the Convent women, whom he views as prostitutes.

Elder’s reaction reveals that he can identify with that woman as an African American, sympathize with her as the weak, but most of all, that he sees himself as her protector, irrespective of her moral standing. In having failed this assaulted woman, Elder felt he failed himself – his view of himself, as he was taught – to be a protector of women. Steward, on the other hand, does not easily identify with the plight of the weak or with women whom he judges to have loose morals. Elder’s attitude suggests that he would have condemned the way his brothers dealt with the Convent women. Elder seems like the type of

man whom the Old Fathers recommended – the type who would not judge, rout or destroy the needy, the defenseless, the different (302).

### **4.3 The New Fathers' Identity: Mirrored in Ruby**

In many ways the men, especially the Morgan twins, see Ruby as a reflection of their own identity. For Deek and Steward this is the case for numerous reasons. It is not so much the fact that their family largely financed the town (115), as it is the close bond they feel with the mission to revenge the Disallowings by being successful at creating a haven separate from those who rejected them (194). Deek sees himself and Steward as the true heirs of Ruby for having “repeated exactly” what their father and grandfather had done (113). This replication reveals the seriousness they felt at fulfilling the task to create a home for a people of racial purity, whom they had been taught would otherwise be shunned by the world (194). The problem with this close identification, Reverend Richard Misner points out, is that it has left these men without stories of their own (161).

In Steward’s view, the expectations of the Old Fathers’ mission were high, but they were embraced and met (94). These expectations and the memory of the lives and work of the Old Fathers serve as the measuring rod by which Steward determines his actions, because recalling them settled his resolve in how to deal with the young people who wanted to change the words of the Oven (99).

It is also Deek’s near betrayal of this mandate, which could have seen the failure of Ruby come about, that had incensed Steward (279), because Ruby’s failure would have meant “the permanent threat to his cherished view of himself and his brother” (279). It was this threat that topped his anger, which further reveals the close connection between the

Morgan identity and Ruby. The depth of the Morgan twins' commitment to the founding and defending of Ruby is instilled through having grown up on the stories of 8-rock history. These stories provided the socially available objects of identification for the identity formation of these twins. "They listened to, imagined and remembered every single thing because each detail was a jolt of pleasure, erotic as a dream, out-thrilling and more purposeful than even the war they had fought in" (16). The impact of this exposure and its subsequent effect cannot be missed. Every single thing and each detail triumphed and out-thrilled even the pleasures of anything erotic. Most of all, the stories seem to have woven purpose into the very fabric of these twins who never forgot anything (13) – anything relating to 8-rock history, that is.

The impression of a team of two powerful minds who "remember the details of everything that ever happened – things they witnessed and things they have not" and in addition to all the specifics, they also never forgot the message of these stories (13) suggests that nothing can be lost between the two of them. Such a view inevitably promotes totalizing thinking, because "everything about the way the world is," is assumed to be known to them. For if they knew it all, how could there be anything in addition to such knowledge, any other perspective that may prove their knowledge incomplete or somehow faulty? Reducing others to fit the perspectives of such a worldview leads to the totalizing regimes of which Levinas warned.

In their view, thus, "everything requires their protection" (12), which therefore justifies resorting to any means necessary to fulfill this responsibility. It is in order to make sure the "Out There" would not rot away their town that they attacked the Convent (5). The unidentified man who describes the woman walking in moonlight thinks, "*his* was a town

justifiably pleased with *itself*” ... and “anybody who threatened the *town’s view of itself* were good taken care of” (8). From these thoughts it seems that the thinker at first separates himself, from the town in that it was the town in which he lived, but as a town cannot be pleased with itself, it is rather that he is pleased with the town. Ultimately, as the town cannot take good care of those who threaten its view, it is he as the enforcing instrument of such unwritten laws that is truly being reflected in the idea of the town’s dealing with misbehavior. It is thus his view of the town, and his view of himself that he will not allow to be threatened.

Morrison uses the double of husband and wife Deek and Soane to deliver the message that the Ruby mission truly determines the parameters within which the people of Ruby can live out what they want and who they are. At the outset of their affair, Deek tells Connie: “a lot of people depend on me” (230). Soane later tells Connie: “he can’t fail at what he is doing. None of us can. We are making something” (240). Both the New Fathers and their families are thus greatly defined by being Rubyites.

#### **4.4 The Old and New Fathers’ Identity: Mirrored in the Oven’s Words**

##### **4.4.1 The Old Fathers’ Identity: Mirrored in the Oven’s Words**

The Oven words, coined in response to the Fairly rejection, are of uncertain origin. Although it is unclear whether they were heard somewhere, invented, or whispered (7), what is clear is the symbolic power they hold. The words are remembered as “Beware the furrow of His Brow” (86, 195). We have seen the high value the men place on fulfilling their responsibility for their women and children. Even before to the Fairly encounter the 8-rock men did everything in their power to keep their dependents safe. Their opinion of themselves

as well capable of maintaining this image of themselves is captured in the attitude with which they approached Fairly. “Smart, strong, and eager to work their own land, they believed they were more than prepared – they were destined” (13-14). Had they not experienced “five glorious years of remaking a country” and a hundred and twenty years of maintaining their “uncorruptible worthiness” of racial purity (193-4) even if it meant begging for sweatwork (5, 193)? They felt themselves within reach of self-determination that would exclude threats to their person.

The first time Morrison offers the reasons for the rejection, there is no mention of the color of the people’s skin as the motivation behind what will become known as the Disallowing. Their response to the rejection is described thusly:

It stung them into confusion to learn they did not have enough money to satisfy the restrictions the “self-supporting” Negroes required. In short, they were too poor, too bedraggled-looking to enter, let alone reside in, the communities that were soliciting Negro homesteaders. (14)

From this quote we see they were rejected because they did not have enough money and they looked too poor and bedraggled, which confirmed this poverty. While the issue of skin color may have contributed to the rejection, the issue of finances<sup>19</sup> was a very practical and legitimate consideration for the Fairly homesteaders (Tally 28). In other words, if they had had enough money to be accepted into Fairly, they would not have been shamed at their inability to be able to pay for rest and food for their pregnant wives and daughters (95). If they had the money, they could accomplish what their images of themselves required. If they

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<sup>19</sup> Tally argues that the deeper issue Morrison addresses with the economically based Fairly Disallowing, is really the nature of class within the black community (28).

had the money, they could be the men they believed they were. The symbolism of their lack of money directly reflected on themselves as inadequate. This failed self, threatened to crack their bones (95). As a survival mechanism the 8-rocks thus chose to blame the rejection on the color of their skin and not on their inability to live up to their own images. About their skin color they could do nothing; indeed, looking at it as a sign of racial purity adds value to their view of themselves (194). They could live with the memory that it is their skin color that set them apart from others and even solicited discrimination. They could not live with the idea that they failed after one hundred and twenty years of worthiness.

The 8-rocks no doubt had good reason to blame the rejection on their skin color. They were, until this experience, reluctant to offer the color of their skin as an excuse for how others treated them. In the past they “*refused to believe* what they *guessed* was the *real* reason that made it *impossible*” for them to find better work and they “*suspected yet dared not* say that their *misfortune’s misfortune* was due to the one and only feature that distinguished them from their peers” (193, my italics). Their hesitance to accept such a view, evident from the weakness of these italicized verbs, is wholeheartedly embraced in the aftermath of the Fairly refusal. It is as if the 8-rocks had put all their faith and their very last strength into reaching Fairly. They had nothing left but their own inner strength driven by their view of themselves. They could therefore not risk blaming their powerlessness in the face of this adversity on their own inadequacy. In order to move on from this state of utter vulnerability they turned the until-then unutilized value of their skin color into their strength. This experience was formative for them to forge their group identity on consolidating their own sense of racial superiority from this point forth (Bouson 197). The Oven’s words captured this remaking of a people.

#### **4.4.2 New Fathers' Identity: Mirrored in the Oven's Words**

The Oven and its words have a dynamic history. Note, there is a huge distinction to be drawn between the symbolic impact of the Oven itself and its words. As such, both capture 8-rock history and function as mission statements for the New Fathers. The words of the Oven are also the focus of the young generation who want to change these words in order to redefine their life's purpose. The Oven as physical structure symbolically captures the 8-rock past. The values of this past had been transferred from the Old Fathers to the New Fathers. The young generation do not concern themselves with these values and seems unaware of what they are protected from as a result of their elders being concerned about keeping them safe from sexual and racial harassment (93). The Oven's words similarly affect all three generations for they were coined by the Old Fathers to indicate their separation from others who were not 8-rock, the generation of the New Fathers lived by this separatist worldview, and the young generation wanted to reinterpret these words in order to embrace an inclusive worldview which would see them shoulder the work of the Civil Rights Movement with fellow (African) Americans.

The 8-rock history of rejection that resulted in coining these words is well captured in the previous section and explains the sentiments of the generation that grew up on those stories.

The reaction of the New Fathers to the proposed change to the Oven words are indicative of the place these words hold in their lives. They want to preserve the philosophy of these words, seen by the fierce defense of the Morgan brothers who threatened to blow off anybody's head who would "ignore, change, take away, or add to the words" (87, 111). The magnitude of this threat recalls the authority and sanctity of the Bible.

The Oven words, remembered as “Beware the Furrow of His Brow,” cling to the unforgiveness of the serious discrimination the first Old Fathers’ generation as well as the New Fathers’ generation had to face. Steward recalls this history and thinks of the children who want to disrespect their elders who have saved them from humiliations they are not even aware of (93). Holding on to this rancor simultaneously gives the New Fathers license to discriminate and totalize others. From the New Fathers’ perspective these words truly function as the Law of the Father, in the Lacanian sense that it enforces social prohibitions and obligations, which in turn function as a mirroring that informs their identity. The problem arises when the young people want to change both the signifiers and the signifieds, in other words both the words and how they should be understood, in order to redefine the motto for their lives.

The actual words on the Oven are “... the Furrow of His Brow” (86). The New Fathers remember it as having been “Beware the Furrow of His Brow.” The dispute between the two generations turns on whether the motto should be “beware,” “be,” or “we are” the furrow of his brow (87, 217, 298).

Page points out that the young people’s proposed shift to “be” or “we are” suggest they want to live more participatory lives in this that they want to join their strengths with others’ strength to become involved in the larger social context of the country (640). Whereas their parents have a totalizing view on the matter, the younger generation wants to change the motto to one that embraces diversity. For the young people, the motto does not only concern the past, it rather confines the present and robs them of a future they want to define (83, 298).

Unbeknownst to them, “beware” need not only be interpreted as a command from God, as Rev. Pulliam argues (86). Patricia realizes that the pronoun “His” referred to the man who coined it and to the 8-rocks who would live up to it (217). It is thus not God who is the signified of “he,” but the 8-rocks themselves.

Ironically, the New Fathers define themselves in relation to those they had rejected and whom they have been living in isolation from. This motto, as mentioned, is not limited to Deek and Steward only. At the Christmas play these sentiments are clearly demonstrated by many of the town’s citizens. The fury and tears of the town’s people at reliving this history during the play are captured by the repetition of “God will crumble you. God will crumble you” to which the audience agrees, “Yes He will. Yes He will” (211).

And when the words of the Oven culminated in the attack on the Convent, the town’s people realized for the first time that they had become the world they had escaped (292), having internalized what they thought they had outfoxed (306). Levinas’s argument that responsibility is fundamental to the self’s subjectivity is aimed precisely at this type of situation. When people would recognize traces of the other person or group in themselves, outfoxing will remain outfoxing, which means atrocities and rejections of the past will not be repeated.

The “terribleness” of their deeds left them “bewildered, angry, sad, frightened” (292). To describe an early morning “hunting” on unsuspecting women with rope, handcuffs, Mace, and guns ” (3, 5) as “terrible” is an unsatisfactory description of the violence perpetrated. The men had come to hunt the women down under an “obligation” to “stampede or kill” them – like animals (3). “Terrible” evokes the idea of a people in shock, unable to find words to describe an experience of which the magnitude must still sink in. It moreover

intimates that the people of Ruby, especially the New Fathers, had not realized what poisonous “hood-eye snake” they were nurturing through their insistence on living by the totalizing motto of the Oven.

The Old Father’s admonition not to hurt the weak and defenseless (302) seems to clash with the words of the Oven that encourage revenge on others. To the people of Ruby the attack on the Convent seems like a betrayal of the cause (292, 306), and yet, since the cause was that they have others beware the furrow of their brow, the cause implicitly justifies such behavior.

Totalizing-thinking destroys the tolerance that infinity thinking encourages. Totalizing others and reducing them to the self’s image of them, in turn, renders the self vulnerable to similar totalization and reduction. Totalizing others thus perpetuates the cycle of destruction.

## CHAPTER 5. Totality and War

### 5.1 Introduction

In this section I consider the implications of Levinas's philosophical critique of totality and infinity, by which he argues that it is reductive thinking that has formed the groundwork for totalizing systems such as the Nazi regime that justifies the complete destruction of otherness through genocide. In its stead, Levinas argues for infinity thinking, which understands that the otherness of the other person truly stretches beyond their knowable characteristics. Knowledge itself is always a reduction<sup>20</sup> and Levinas, Lacan, and Morrison argue that it is always incomplete. Totality and infinity thinking operate on both micro and macro levels. Both individuals and groups can be totalized and thus treated like the simple objects or statistics, to which they have been objectified or rather – reduced. This point is especially evident in the medical field where patients can either be reduced to their illnesses or treated with the dignity that infinity thinking would afford them. Levinas's argument begins with the individual, but expands to the group, for the way in which the self thinks about one Jew, will be the way in which all Jews are thought of.

*Paradise* portrays a philosophy of infinity thinking in numerous ways. The structure is polyphonic, with nine chapters named after nine women and yet these nine chapters are filled with more voices than only the women the chapters were named after. Most evident of infinity thinking is the openness of both the ending, but also numerous inexplicable events within the novel from the open door or window that could give a glimpse into another realm

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<sup>20</sup> Knowledge requires the isolation of certain features as against others or unknowable aspects so that a coherent whole can be formed, which would make sense of "everything" pertaining to the specific question being asked about the topic. The question asked about a certain subject directs the answer to a great extent and may be the first step in reductive thinking as the assumptions on which the question is based may already be biased.

that is after, in, or in-between life (302, 305, 307) to the healing effected in the Convent as a result of relationships open to the spiritual and shared identities with others (263-5). The openness of *Paradise* offers the reader a worldview of openness towards the other and otherness.

Krumholz maintains that perception of the self in the other creates common ground just as the perception of the other in the self creates new possibilities for self-knowledge (30) – and healing. *Paradise* shows that a rejection of difference on a group level results in a paradise that destroys itself, losing its paradisaical nature (Krumholz 21).

In what follows I will consider the ways in which people are totalized in *Paradise* and the consequences that followed such totalization. While these are not examples of doublesness *per se*, they are examples of mirrors or projections by which the self defines the other person, reading that person's identity through the self's prejudices, values and identity. Ron David argues that *Paradise* challenges us to re-evaluate how we view each other's humanity (192). I lastly discuss the war-paradise dichotomy, which shows that totalizing always leads to war – and war is the misrecognition of both the transcendence of the other person as well as the self's dependence on the other person.

## 5.2 Totalized Women

Menu's light-skinned girl is variously labeled through prejudices deriving from the racial re-evaluation that followed the Fairly Disallowing. Other than Pat and Lone, who simply and neutrally call her his "sandy haired girl" or "pretty redbone girl" (195, 278), the rest of the people who think about her do so from a discriminatory position. Anna thinks of Menu's girl as a "prostitute" (119). Steward calls her "the dung we left behind," and one of

the Convent attackers thought of her as a “fast woman” (278). People are totalized and judged through the symbolism of these values to fit a mold of “the rejected” or “the accepted.” Thinking of her like this shows how deeply entrenched the motto of “reject those who rejected us” live in the Ruby people – even in those from whom one would not expect it. One such person is Anna, who had been living in Detroit for a number of years until she returned home to take over her father’s business.

Anna’s hair receives a great deal of attention. Her hair is not straightened and seemingly in an afro, judged by the fact that it has to be shaped and that it is the ‘70s, (119). She did not intend for it to be a statement, but it nonetheless solicited diverse and intense reactions, because to the people of Ruby it spoke of another world – a world the young people want to embrace, for they admired it, while Reverend Pulliam’s rejection expressed itself in a whole sermon preached on it (119). Of more importance to Anna was the fact that people’s reactions to her hair enabled her to identify who her true friends were (119). She describes the reactions she receives as measurable on a Geiger counter, registering “tranquility” in some and “the intensity of a rumbling, deep-down disorder” in others (119). This hair-affair is an excellent portrayal of just how identities are reflected onto the self as they are mirrored in the identities of those who judge Anna.

The most totalizing and destructive affair in *Paradise* takes place in the way the New Fathers reflect their own fear and failures onto the Convent women. They connect everything that has gone wrong in Ruby to the Convent and find their evidence and confirmation for their suspicions in numerous ways. In this way they reduce the Convent women to fit the image of other and of threat. For Billie-Delia the “war” was between the Stallions, in terms of who controlled the mares and their foal (150). In other words it was about disobedience,

meaning who disagreed with the New Fathers and the way they see the world. Patricia comes to the same conclusion as Billie-Delia, that for racial purity it was the women who worried the men the most (217). 8-Rocks were controlled by the law that “the generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too” (217). This law that would guarantee “unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood” served to control the women, but the men as well. In totalizing others, they in turn totalized themselves. And this mark of their identity would ultimately be the motivating factor for totalizing and murdering the women with their “loose” ways who seemed to threaten this identity. Billie-Delia says men saw the mutiny of the mares and got rid of the women (308). Indeed, the Convent women were uncontrolled, unmanned-over, unconfined and undefined. So much so that their presence had threatened the Morgan lineage twice through the affairs of Deek and Connie and that of KD and Gigi. Deek’s affair could have seen the end of the mission to found Ruby and both his and KD’s affairs could have resulted in adulterated and adulteried 8-rock blood (279). Steward could neither tolerate nor forgive them for “sullyng his personal history with their streetwalkers’ clothes and whores’ appetites; mocking and desecrating the vision that carried him and his brother through a war” and enabled them to found a town (279).

In section 4.2.2, on how the New Fathers mold their identity on their women and children, it was clear that the “mares” were indeed well under control. Their foals are, however, considered to be out of control, demonstrated by their “cut me some slack” attitude and their desire to change the words and motto of the Oven (95). Men like Steward could not shoot their own foals and therefore vented their anger on the Convent women whom they blamed for the behavior of their children (85, 277). Similarly, Wisdom Poole blamed them

for his lack of control over his siblings and the Fleetwoods blamed them for Jeff's broken children (277).

During the attack, the men's totalization of the women are portrayed in how they interpret the things they see. The women are described as "detritus" (4), thought of as up to "devilish things" (7), their rooms are described as not "normal rooms" (7, 8) and the cellar is even described as the "devil's bedroom, his bathroom, and his nasty playpen" (17), the Convent is thought of as "diseased" (8), certain things they see are imagined to be used for the "torture of children" (8), or to be ritual "offerings" (9), and the women are thought of as belonging to some or other "cult" (11). The letter the men see is described as "a letter written in blood so smeary its satanic message cannot be deciphered" (7), is really the letter that a young Seneca fought over in foster homes, because it was the only thing she had left from her sister-mother who abandoned her before she had even learned to read (128). Deek thinks of the Convent as a brothel (114). The discovery in the spring of the car with the dead family is blamed on the nearby Convent (11, 272-3) - a connection Steward could easily have made with the lost white family who had needed gas and directions on a day when a blizzard had threatened (121-2). Outrages of things going wrong in Ruby took the form of evidence against the Convent (11). When the young people thus began "acting up" it was blamed on the Convent (85). Everything that was considered not natural that had been happening in and around Ruby is ascribed to the Convent and the fact that they are believed to be witches with powers (275-7).

This totalizing thinking culminated in an attack to exterminate the Convent women. Subsequent to this act the Ruby inhabitants see themselves and the New Fathers in a new light. They see themselves as having become what they thought they had left behind. The

attack crystallized the fact that they themselves had become the “disallowers” who objectify and totalize others.

### 5.3 War-Paradise Totality

The word war is used in different contexts in *Paradise* to deliver a paradoxical and thus emphasized impact. My interest in exploring its use lies in the fact that it was the novel’s initial title and also because to a great extent, war can be regarded as the opposite of paradise; war is a hell, the opposite of paradise, which would be assumed to be the absence of the horrors of war. A narrow definition that would fit the argument presented in this thesis, is that war is totalization of the other and ultimately its rejection and or destruction. *Paradise* is an interrogation of “why paradise necessitates exclusion” (Bouson 192, Farnsworth 156). Morrison’s interest was to explore the idea of what happened to those who were excluded from/ rejected by the “come prepared or not at all” African American homesteads that were founded after Reconstruction ended (Bouson 192). *Paradise* is, at the same time, commenting on the United States as a paradise, paradoxically built on exclusion and the objectification of a whole people.

“War” is at the centre of three concentric arguments, which begin with Billie-Delia’s view of the underlying politics in Ruby as a “war” between the Stallions (150). The argument then extends to portray Soane’s view that her sons would be safer in the Vietnam War than in the United States. Reverend Misner’s experience of war overlaps with that of Soane, but it also extends beyond it.

Billie-Delia’s view of the war between the Stallions, in terms of who controlled the mares and their foals, is specific to the community of Ruby (150). This stance reveals the fact

that despite the apparent absence of “Out There” in Ruby, the people are nonetheless not living in paradise, because “In Here” operates on strict controls, meant to negate “Out There” realities, which, in effect, disables “In Here” from creating its own reality not contingent on “Out There.” Allegorically this scenario inverts both the outside-inside dichotomy and the black-white dichotomy. Outside and inside, like self and other, can be made applicable to any individual and group, based on race, class, language, place and more. Moreover, the danger of rejecting the outside or the other secures the possibility of ultimately rejecting the self, i.e. totalizing and damaging your own to fit a reduced view of them.

Soane thought her sons would be safer out there in the war in Vietnam, than in here in the United States where they ran the risk of being lynched and imprisoned for no reason other than the fact that they were African American (100-1). *Paradise* comments on two relations through this impression. The greatest indictment is leveled at a country where a mother had reason to believe the battlefields of foreign countries offered a safer place for her sons than their own country. Although Soane based her assumption of the relative safety of war on the fact that other men have returned from war (100-1), the reader understands that Morrison employs war as a metaphor to juxtapose the general notion of war as a situation of horrors against Soane’s notion of war as safety in comparison to the situation of supposed peace in the country of the free. Thus, if the horrors of war look like peace in comparison to the situation for young black men in the USA, then the situation in the USA must have been exceptionally horrific. Secondly though, *Paradise* cautions the reader to recognize that paradise or safety is not only the absence of bombs or lynchings and imprisonments from others. There can be no paradise despite the absence of such evils, when totalizing thinking is accepted against infinity thinking. Totalizing others is war.

Reverend Misner considers the clergy during the Civil Rights movement as being involved in a war (1159-60). The opposition they experience, however, does not only come from the US government and racist Americans; they even experience hostility from local communities such as Ruby. Pat calls Reverend Misner's Civil Rights class a "war" class (207) and he understands that Reverend Pulliam's love sermon was really a declaration of "war" on his work, because his teaching saw children question, criticize, and defy the identity of the elders and their history.

In all three cases the issue of doubleness and identity is relevant. The "Stallions" build their identity in response to their responsibility for the "mares" and "foals" and yet they totalize them instead of allowing their infinity to enrich the community and even the identity of the stallions. A similar misrecognition of the whole of American identity is portrayed when black Americans are not recognized as the "twin" of white Americans, despite having fought as one for one motherland in foreign wars (194). Thirdly, as much as white people do not recognize black people as their double in American identity, so too the people of Ruby neither recognized their identity and role in "white America" nor their shared identity with other black people who happened to not be of 8-rock stock. In all three these cases misrecognition spells loss and potential destruction.

## CHAPTER 6. IDENTITY, INFINITY, RESPONSIBILITY, TOTALITY

The theme of identity - as discovering its responsibility in the face of the other's infinity is clearly portrayed in the character of Deek Morgan. His life also exemplifies the contradiction inherent in the Oven's symbols, which by its words promote totalizing others and yet by its symbolic value promotes the protection of women. This section thus ties together the arguments of this thesis in the character of Deek.

In his article "Furrowing All the Brows: Interpretation and the Transcendent in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," Page argues that Deek's life reflects the potentially positive changes for the town (645). Deek's confusion about his relationship with Steward indicates his need to grow on his own beyond this bond with his brother. For Page, this symbolizes the town's need to grow beyond its confining bond with its own legend and thus to move from "a restrictive fusion to a liberating fragmentation" (645). On an individual level, the hitherto completeness of the Morgan twin's relationship is suggestive that the self's identity in relation to other people is complete as a "you and me." On a social level, the Morgan twin's relationship implies that Ruby had been in relationship with itself only, but after the break caused by the Convent attack Ruby stood a chance to grow beyond the bond with itself and thus become accepting of other societies. Deek forms a bond with someone other than his own twin when he reaches out to the other in the person of Reverend Misner. Similarly the attack on the Convent reveals to the people of Ruby that their views about the other is dangerous and needs revision. The younger generation now has reason to justify their need and Ruby's need to get involved in the greater affairs of life that involve other people.

On a more personal level, Morrison portrays through Deek's experiences that confronting the effects of totalizing the other can bring the self face to face with itself. When

after the attack on the Convent the men are asked: “What manner of evil is in you?” Steward replies: “The evil is in this house” (291). Instead of justifying his crime, Deek on the other hand takes responsibility for it. Deek responds: “My brother is lying. This is our doing. Ours alone. And we bear the responsibility” (291). Morrison evaluates this moment when she writes, “It was Deacon Morgan who had changed the most. It was as though he had looked in his brother’s face and did not like himself anymore” (300). Later Deek tells Reverend Misner about his grandfather Zechariah who split up from his twin brother, because he saw the way his brother thought about things when hard pressed. Deek believes what his grandfather saw in his brother scared and shamed him, because the shame was in himself (303). Similarly Deek saw that he too, like Steward, was capable of answering, “The evil is in this house” and it shamed him to realize that that is the kind of man he was. It was as if he saw himself in a mirror reflection.

When Deek’s grandfather thus “disallowed” his brother by never speaking to him again or inviting him to trek West, he had in effect totalized him, having reduced him to that one characteristic that saw him fold under pressure. And in rejecting that characteristic – which he recognized as potentially his own – he was distancing himself from a part of himself that he wished to deny. Similarly the Ruby men scapegoat the Convent women in order to deal with flaws within themselves. In the same way, by destroying the Convent women, Deek thought he would destroy his own shame over his affair with Connie.

Yet, in a moment of truth, looking at Connie just before Steward shot her, Deek had a glimpse of infinity, which he cannot deny nor forget. In that moment he “sees in her eyes what has been drained from them and from himself as well” (289), and what he saw “made the sun look like a fool” (301). For an instant it was clear that she could reveal another realm

to him. He realizes there are things indescribable and uncontainable about her and that having reduced her to an object of blame he has missed out on the uniqueness of her person and he sees how much she deserved not to be killed – but rather protected. His attempt to protect her at this moment failed, but this revelation changed him fundamentally (289).

Deek acknowledges that he had become “what the Old Fathers cursed: the kind of man who set himself up to judge, rout and even destroy the needy, the defenseless, the different” (302). The burden of not being a protector but a destroyer makes his life “uninhabitable” (302). It is however only by his confrontation with the infinite about Connie that he discovered his true identity. In Steward’s attitude to the attack Deek recognizes his old self, for it is a new Deek who can see that a man destroying the defenseless is not who he wants to be.

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

This thesis has put Lacan, Levinas, and Morrison in conversation. Each of the three writers argues from a different perspective. All three, however, acknowledge and probe the idea of the other as infinite, inexhaustible, uncontainable –yet, as part of the self’s identity. Viewing otherness as such inevitably confronts one with the ethics of how to deal with that which cannot be reduced to containable knowledge. Whereas the works of Lacan and Levinas are generally inaccessible to readers outside of theory, Morrison’s novels are accessible to a wider audience and thus enable the dissemination of values all three authors promote.

*Paradise* cannot be summarized as a novel that merely warns against intolerance. It also goes beyond the argument to re-imagine more inclusive, accepting communities that disrupt the exclusion of others (Romero 415). It is in fact arguing that the self is the twin of the other person. Grasping this truth will hopefully lead to social relations of tolerance for difference in all walks of life.

An analysis of a novel by an African American that teems with doubleness as it explores identity is incomplete without exploring the impact of W.E.B Du Bois’s work on double-consciousness in relation to such a novel. My neglect to venture into such an exploration is not due to an oversight, but to the constraints of this thesis. The fruitfulness of such a study is inevitable and therefore highly recommended.

Future studies would furthermore benefit greatly by venturing into Levinas’s theory on the ethics of responsibility, understanding Lacan’s notion of the Real and its influence in human behavior, and analyzing the in-between spaces and various dynamics involved in the healing and nurturing of the Convent women. Such studies would certainly strengthen the

argument Morrison is making for readers to join her in shouldering the work toward avoiding war and instead enabling human-to-human relations of inclusion.

In this thesis I have analyzed portrayals of identity as it is informed by relationships of the self and the other. I have used the work of Lacan to point out how Morrison depicts the other mirrored in the self and I have used Levinas's notions of totality and infinity to highlight Morrison's illustrations of the self mirrored in the other – as when the self views the other through the self's self-conception or worldview. As mentioned at the outset of this thesis, Morrison's work is always political. She does not aim to entertain. Her works are meant to impact human consciousness and affect change. Her works do not advocate specific courses of action, just as Levinas's ethics are not of prescriptive rules. Morrison sketches an image of the self to the self and leaves the self with the choice of what to do with the self-revelation held up in *Paradise*. Each reader is left with the response-ability to either neglect or take up the responsibility of viewing the other as a reflection of him or herself. Each group, affected by such an understanding, is similarly left with the same responsibility of choice.

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