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Definers and Defined

A study of the portrayal of black masculinity in the characters and communities in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Paradise*

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Abstract

This thesis utilises the novels *Beloved* and *Paradise* by Toni Morrison with the purpose of examining her portrayal of black masculinity within a historical and social context, particularly in view of how and when race is complicated by gender and vice versa. It utilises a close reading of both individual characters and the communities that surround them based on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Critical Race Theory – with a focus on individual gender performativity in relation to shifting ideas of masculinity within and outside African American communities, and issues such as institutional or systemic racism when examining the different communities. Given the span of history in which the novels are set, I give brief summaries on the issues of slavery, slave narratives and the civil rights movement. Finally, a brief comparison of characters, communities and their issues, looking at similarities across the novels.

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Contents

Definers and Defined i

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 6

Judith Butler and Gender Performativity 6

Critical Race Theory 8

Historical Context – Slavery and Slave Narratives 10

Historical context – the Civil Rights Movement and its aftermath 12

Chapter 2 – Race and the gender performativity of the individual 15

Mr Garner and schoolteacher 16

Sixo 20

Halle 22

Stamp Paid 23

Paul D 24

Deacon and Steward 29

K.D 33

Reverend Misner 35

Elder Morgan, Jeff Fleetwood and Menus Jury 38

Chapter Conclusion 39

Chapter 3 – Community, masculinity and race 42

Sweet Home 42

The Chain Gang 44

124 Bluestone Road 46

Haven 49

Ruby 53

The Convent 59

Chapter conclusion 60

Chapter 4 – Comparisons 61

Individual comparisons 61

Community comparisons 63

Conclusion 65

Works Cited 68

Introduction

Toni Morrison's novels *Beloved* and *Paradise* are centred around African-American experiences in different periods of time in American history, yet many of the struggles that are evident in former slaves such as Sethe and Paul D are echoed in the lives of the inhabitants of Ruby or the women at the Convent. Concerned with memory, the loss of memory and their rediscovery, Morrison delves into horrors such as the Middle Passage, slavery itself and the difficult adjustment period after Emancipation. But if *Beloved* is Morrison's exploration of a forgotten, or at least muted history, then *Paradise* serves a rather different purpose. Memory is still a central aspect to the novel, but in *Paradise*, the history of the town Ruby is simultaneously calcified and holy, yet also mutable when it profits the town's luminaries. While much of the focus in the novels is on the female characters, Morrison is still very concerned with the issues of masculinity in the face of the different times and settings. Manhood during a time of slavery is markedly different – perhaps even impossible in its socially acceptable form – from manhood in an isolated all-black town in Oklahoma. Thus, issues of race complicate the notions of masculinity in both novels, necessitating the examination of these issues as Morrison portrays them. While the white American characters are few and far between in *Paradise*, if not rendered colourless as is the case with the women of the Convent – where only the character Consolata is physically described – issues of race remain very prominent. However, Morrison focuses less on the obvious conflict between Euro- and African Americans, and more on colourism, inverting society's privileging of lighter skin by setting up the 8 Rock families, noted for their dark skin and "pure" blood untainted by slave owners, yet these ideas of purity suggests that any pollution is not physical so much as it is mental or spiritual– the ideals of femininity, masculinity and racial purity espoused by the luminaries of Ruby hints to an absorbing of the values held not by their ancestors, but rather by the people who enslaved their ancestors.

Popular media, which includes literature, has played a part in how groups of people are viewed. For example, there is the portrayal of Jews as greedy and conniving Fagins or Shylocks, or as participating in murder with “a Christian killed – usually a small child, typically male – but the child’s blood is supposedly utilized in some ritual context” (Dundes vii). When it comes to black men, current stereotypes tend towards the criminal, but historically black men – or, as is the case of the 1915 film Birth of a Nation, white men in blackface – would be depicted as unintelligent rapists against whom white women needed protection. These stereotypes have been so ingrained in the social structure of western civilisation that counter-narratives are absolutely vital – this is particularly noticeable as the numerous cases of young, black men killed by police brutality has been pushed into the public awareness by the proliferation of viral videos and movements such as Black Lives Matter.

Beloved was published in 1987 and is perhaps one of Morrison’s most well-known and well-loved works. Following the stories of former slaves Sethe and Paul D, *Beloved* is unstuck in time, as the narration shifts between the living and the dead as well as between past and present. At the heart of the novel is Sethe’s killing of her daughter and the reaction of the other characters as they learn of this event. Running concurrent with Sethe’s story is that of Paul D, his struggles with his past and his own sense of self, particularly in regard to conflicting ideas of manhood. Of course, one cannot write about this novel without mentioning Margaret Garner, the inspiration for the character of Sethe, who in killed her daughter when she was discovered by the slave owner she escaped. In “The Garner Fugitive Slave Case”, Julius Yanuck writes about Margaret Garner’s case and its far-reaching repercussions:

> The frightful act precipitated a controversy between the national government and the state of Ohio [. . .] The constitutional issues were grave, if not dangerously close to insoluble, but the Garner case had yet other meanings for the nation. It demonstrated forcefully the deep personal tragedy of slavery. The way Margaret Garner's little girl died embarrassed the South and disturbed the North more than a hundred arguments of antislavery philosophers (47).

By drawing on this case, Morrison taps not only from the well of horror that was slavery, but also the moral dissonance created by a mother killing her children – showing the impossibility of maintaining familial bonds under that particular system.

While *Beloved* was met with mostly rapturous praise, Stanley Crouch in his review of the novel, wrote:

> It is designed to placate sentimental feminist ideology, and to make sure that the vision of black woman as the most scorned and rebuked of the victims doesn't weaken. Yet perhaps it is best understood by its italicized inscription: "Sixty Million and more.' Morrison recently told Newsweek that the reference was to all the captured Africans who died coming across the Atlantic. But sixty is ten times six, of course. That is very important to remember. For Beloved, above all else, is a blackface holocaust novel. It seems to have been written in order to enter American slavery into the big-time martyr ratings contest, a contest usually won by references to, and works about, the experience of Jews at the hands of Nazis." ("Literary Conjure Woman")

On the writing of *Beloved*, Morrison said in an interview with Bonnie Angelo: "It was about these anonymous people called slaves. What they do to keep on, how they make a life, what they're willing to risk, however long it lasts in order to relate to one another" (Morrison and Guthrie 257). Sethe is the clear primary voice of the novel, however while Morrison's main focus is on motherly love and female community, as Deborah Ayer Sitter puts it: "as Morrison suggests at the end of Beloved, the meaning of Sethe's story cannot be fully understood except in relation to his" (17). There are several parallels between Sethe and Paul D's stories – they share memories of Sweet Home; both endure the loss of family and both are victims and survivors of violence and rape. Sethe's journey through the novel has been subject of much scrutiny, but without the countermelody of Paul D's story, it remains unfinished, the narrative structure of their first meeting reflect this in the way their points of view commingle, shifting swiftly between her thoughts to his. Morrison's "narrator begins the tale, and immediately allows an interplay of voices to begin. Torn fragments of the past float out of Sethe and Paul, who have met again after eighteen long years" (154 Rodrigues). While the other male characters – though mostly relegated to appearing in memories – are important to the understanding of the issues surrounding masculinity and race within the novel, Paul D

is the more prominent masculine figure, yet his sense of manhood is so influenced by other characters, particularly Mr Garner and Sixo.

In contrast to *Beloved, Paradise* was upon its release in 1997, subject to frequently sharp criticism with regards to the portrayal of black men. The novel was originally meant to be named “War”, which harkens to the numerous conflicts it portrays– whether the centrepiece, the attack on the Convent, or the conflict between men and women, between the young people of Ruby and the town’s elders, or simply the insider/outsider conflict in the overarching issue of exclusion. In “Toni Morrison’s Mix of Tragedy, Domesticity and Folklore”, Dinitia Smith writes that:

> On a trip to Brazil in the 1980s, Ms. Morrison heard about a convent of black nuns who took in abandoned children and practiced candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian religion; the local populace considered them an outrage, and they were murdered by a posse of men. ‘I’ve since learned it never happened,’ Ms. Morrison said. ‘But for me it was irrelevant. And it said much about institutional religion and uninstitutional religion, how close they are’” (qtd in Saguaro, 159).

The individual stories of the characters must also be seen in conjunction with the stories of the communities that they find themselves embraced by, exiled from, or eagerly escaping. Feminine community is a recurring theme in the works of Morrison, but in *Beloved*, she presents some all-male communities, such as the Sweet Home Men and the chain gang which Paul D finds himself forced into. Neither of these two groups form organically and both groups break apart, but they stand apart from the hegemonic idea of the western masculinity.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the theory utilised, that is gender performativity and critical race theory, a short overview of the criticism around the novels and a brief look at the historical context to the historical periods the novels are set in. Meanwhile, Chapter 2 is focused on the individual at the intersection of gender and race as presented in the two novels. Finally, Chapter 3 studies the communities within the novels and the fraught conflicts that has arisen from a history of Othering and the attempts of constructing identities build on a

foundation of prejudice – one's own and that of others. Chapter 4 offers a brief look at the similarities between both characters and communities in the novels.

This thesis will focus on an analysis of Morrison's exploration of the conflicts that arise when gender and race meet – with a focus on how the individual characters deal with expectations and prejudices as well as the effects on communities, and how society changes or does not change in relation to these issues. The main focus will be on masculine performativity in relation to race and the shifting views on manhood in America, as well as how the institution of race-based slavery influenced social mentality with regards to gender both in the immediate aftermath of emancipation and after the Civil Rights Movement. Portrayal of black masculinity in Beloved and Paradise and particularly how Morrison chooses to show the difficulties that lies in the places where gender and race collide.

Chapter 1

This chapter looks at the theories which will be used to examine *Beloved* and *Paradise*, Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity and Critical Race Theory. Both build upon the notion of the social construction of identity. Gender performativity forms an important part of the study on account of the shifting sense of masculinity not only across the space of the two novels, but also within the individual novels, and within the stories of individual characters. Masculinity and its meaning are among the many questions Morrison tackles in her works. However, these questions are further complicated by the issues of race, racism and the history of slavery which looms over the novels and the characters alike. Critical Race Theory gives an insight into these issues and can map out the relationships between characters and communities with better clarity. Further, the chapter will examine the historical context in which the novels are set – slavery and emancipation as well as a look at slave narratives in the case of *Beloved*, while *Paradise* requires a look into the Civil Rights movement and its aftermath, along with the formation and function of the Black Panther Party as a concerted effort of black solidarity.

Judith Butler and Gender Performativity

Judith Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble* was first published in 1990 following her 1988 essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". Firmly classifying Butler is a difficult task given the myriad influences from which her theory draws upon, whether she is following Foucault as a poststructuralist, or if the main focus should be on the feminist aspect of her thinking. Before engaging with the theory, it is important to settle the definition of gender versus sex used in this study. The latter term refers to the biological aspect of male, female or possibly intersex, terms that can be used for human beings as well as animals. Gender, however, is better understood as the social aspect – man and woman, exclusively human notions. Gender performativity draws from on the concept of performativity or performative utterances, a term used by J.L Austin, whereby

an utterance is not simply reporting on an event but is performing itself as it is spoken. For example, the sentence “I promise to visit you” is performative in that a promise is made when it is uttered – whether or not the promise is kept is insubstantial, the performative act was the making of the promise (Culler). In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”, Butler writes that:

> gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – and identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts.* Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (519)

For example, the manner of one’s dress, walk or speech are all aspects of gender performativity – societal views of the acceptable modes for masculine and feminine dress, behaviour and manner of speech are changeable, which suggest the social construction of gender. Women wearing trousers has become acceptable in the western world, but men wearing skirts is still fairly taboo, whilst in other cultures, skirts, or skirt-like clothes are perfectly ordinary garments for men to wear. Thus, at its heart, Judith Butler’s theory on gender performativity stands in opposition to the notion of gender essentialism, rejecting the binary male/female division. According to Butler, gender is not a biological reality but rather a social construction – though a person is born with the sexual characteristics of a male does not mean that masculinity is a foregone conclusion. While the characters in Toni Morrison’s novels do not necessarily explore beyond their assigned genders, there is a great deal of conflict between different ideas of masculinity, and the problems of race-based masculinity. On the other hand, Butler states that: “as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished.” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”, Butler, 522). Returning to the example of men wearing skirts – while a man wearing skirts might walk down a street unmolested, society might exert pressure through exclusion or verbal mockery. Morrison’s novels deal with two different periods of time and very different social situations, in *Paradise*, this survival strategy is quite evident as “correct” gender performativity determines

whether one is considered an acceptable member of society – however, in *Beloved*, the strategy is muddled by the conflicting demands of slavery.

In Susan Neal Mayberry's *Can't I love what I criticize*, the four fundamental aspects of American masculinity, as put forth by Robert Bannon, are quoted: "Avoid Sissy Stuff, Be a Big Wheel, Be a Sturdy Oak, and Give 'em Hell" (Mayberry 6). The first charge to "avoid sissy stuff" is a warning against behaviour that is feminine in any way, the second encourages competition as a way to achieve, the third exhorts stoicism, and the final advocates for aggression. More specifically related to masculinity as it was viewed in the Antebellum South, Amy Greenberg details two different kinds of manhood, what she calls restrained manhood and martial manhood:

> Restrained manhood was practiced by men [. . .] who grounded their identities in their families, in the evangelical practice of their Protestant faith, and in success in the business world[. . .] They were generally repulsed by the violent blood sports that captivated many urban working men [. . .] Their manhood derived from being morally upright, reliable, and brave." (Greenberg 11-12).

On the other hand, men of the martial bent "reveled in their physical strength and ability to dominate both men and women [. . .] Martial men believed that the masculine qualities of strength, aggression, and even violence, better defined a true man than did the firm and upright manliness of restrained men" (Greenberg 12).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory or CRT was originally conceived of in relation to law and legal practices, and its founders include "Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberlé W. Crenshaw [. . .] CRT challenges the experience of whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color" (Taylor, 122). Because the white experience has been the lens through which much of both American and European history, literature and entertainment has been viewed, Critical Race Theory is an important tool to not only

recognise this fact, but to explore points of view outside of the dominating perspective. In "Critical Race Theory: An Annotated Bibliography", Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic enumerate several themes within CRT. Not all of these themes will be seen in this study as they fall under the more legalistic aspects of the theory, such as the third theme listed: "Revisionist interpretations of American civil rights law and progress" (462). However, the use of stories to serve as counter-narratives, or "naming one's own reality" will be used, as will intersectionality, anti-essentialism and institutional racism.

Critical Race Theory encourages stories as a method for challenging stereotypes and common beliefs through narrative. An early example of this is slave narratives such as that of Fredrick Douglass, which countered the idea of benevolent slavery, or in modern times, the sharing of viral videos revealing police brutality. Counter-narratives and storytelling gives a more complete picture of the lived experience, the common-place issues that aren't readily apparent to the majority, different interpretations of a situation. The experience of a black man would be different from a white man might differ widely despite belonging to the same social or economic class. This in light of the different stereotypical narratives surrounding African Americans compared to Euro-Americans.

Intersectionality can easiest be explained as the understanding of how different aspects of identity, such as gender, race and/or social class intersects. In the words of Kimberlé Crenshaw: "In mapping the intersections of race and gender, the concept does engage dominant assumptions that race and gender are essentially separate categories. By tracing the categories to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable" (West 378n7). Perhaps most commonly, intersectionality is spoken of in relation to feminism and as a path to a better understanding of the experiences of women of colour navigating the space where race and gender meet and the varying expectations and the particular prejudices to be encountered there.

In order to define anti-essentialism, one needs to know what is meant by essentialism. Put simply, it is the thought that every member of a certain group – for example within a gender, race or nationality – "think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways." (Ladson-Billings 40). Delgado and Stefancic put forth a series of questions, for example

whether "the black community [is] one, or many, communities? Do middle- and working-class African-Americans have different interests and needs? Do all oppressed peoples have something in common?" (462). Traditionally, a gender essentialist would consider the differences between men and women to stem from dissimilarities in biology, and these natural dissimilarities would see the establishment of different "social outcomes and individual qualities" (MacKinnon, 72). Of course, an issue with such essentialism lies in the issues that it encounters in meeting intersectionality – the social outcomes in the Western world for a white woman is unlikely to be the same for a woman of colour.

Another of the primary themes of CRT is the idea of institutional racism, which posits that racism in America is not simply the act of the unenlightened individual, but rather as something ingrained in the social and political system of the country, that is, institutionalisation and the ordinariness of racism.

Historical Context – Slavery and Slave Narratives

In an interview with Bonnie Angelo, Toni Morrison spoke of writing Beloved and slavery "I was trying to make it a personal experience. The book was not about the institution – Slavery with a capital S" (Guthrie 257). Much has been written about the slave trade and slavery in America, and to put forth a comprehensive history of its beginning, middle and end would be useful for the understanding of the context of Toni Morrison's Beloved, the scope is beyond this work, however a short overview is necessary. Slavery in the United States spanned from long before the nation's conception in 1776 until the Civil War ended in 1865. Forming the foundation of the economic prosperity of the southern states, the institution of slavery millions of Africans transported in barely survivable conditions across the Atlantic to spend the rest of their lives in bondage working in the fields or in the homes of Euro-Americans. The Middle Passage, hauntingly recaptured in the later chapters of *Beloved* is a dark chapter of history, dark both in its inhumane practice but also in the lack of voices able to speak of the horrors. In "In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process. The Colonial Period" A. Leon Higginbotham writes that: "Although slavery was not legally sanctioned until 1641, records dating as early as 1636 reveal that the Puritans had already

evolved their own version of local slavery. Initially, the local slavery system was penal." (Cottrol 66) Prior to 1641, the system was not limited by either gender or race, though according to Higginsbotham, non-whites were disproportionately given longer sentences, but slavery under these laws were not necessarily life sentences and restitution could be earned. The dehumanisation of the enslaved is very clearly put forth in this description of the legal status of a slave Edwin Olson's "The Slave Code in Colonial New York": "As a chattel it was illegal for a slave to make contracts to buy and sell of his own accord. He could be bought, sold, and taxed as property, and bequeathed and inherited by will. He could not testify against any freeman, white or black. His right to marry and to take property was not legalized until 1809" (Olson 148). This was the state in which millions of Africans and their descendants found themselves trapped until either death, escape or the Emancipation at the end of the American Civil War in 1865, and though a century and a half has passed since then, the aftereffects – the mentality that made racialised slavery possible still haunt society.

Slave narratives, whether from escaped slaves or from the WPA Slave Narrative Collection later on, offers some counter-narratives against the notion of African and African Americans being in any way more violent or primitive than their Euro-American oppressors. In "My Bondage and My Freedom", Fredrick Douglass writes:

> Although my old master—Capt. Anthony—gave me at first, [. . .] very little attention, and although that little was of a remarkably mild and gentle description, a few months only were sufficient to convince me that mildness and gentleness were not the prevailing or governing traits of his character. These excellent qualities were displayed only occasionally. He could, when it suited him, appear to be literally insensible to the claims of humanity, when appealed to by the helpless against an aggressor, and he could himself commit outrages, deep, dark and nameless [. . .] A man's character greatly takes its hue and shape from the form and color of things about him. Under the whole heavens there is no relation more unfavorable to the development of honorable character, than that sustained by the slaveholder to the slave (Douglass, chapter v).

Douglass' eloquence with regards to his own enslavement speaks against the notion of African Americans being "of barbarous, wild, savage natures" (quoted in Wiecek 270) as put forth in South Carolina's 1696 slave code. It also shows that the notion that the nature of

slavery was not only damaging to the enslaved – as should be obvious – but also to the enslaver. On the other hand, there are the narratives collected by the Federal Writer's Project in the period 1936-1938 which offer other insights into the state of slavery, though with a temporal gulf of over seventy years which memory had to bridge. In Norman R. Yetman's "The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection", he writes that: "The slave holdings of the ex-slave's owner varied considerably, ranging from over a thousand slaves to situations in which the informant was the only slave owned by the master. The treatment these individuals received ran the gamut from the most harsh, impersonal and exploitative to the extremely indulgent, intimate and benevolent" (535). In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sweet Home is a smaller affair than the great plantations, but the two slave owner characters, Mr Garner and schoolteacher, show not only how different slave owners could be, but also the precariousness of the lives of slaves.

Historical context – the Civil Rights Movement and its aftermath

The broad strokes of the Civil Rights Movement in the US should be familiar to most – if only in the form of sound bites from the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr or the imagery of Rosa Parks refusing to move to the back of the bus. That these have come to exemplify, if not symbolise the struggle for social justice and ending segregation is no accident and is a testament to the movement's skill at media management. In the case of Rosa Parks:

> By emphasizing those aspects of Parks's life which conformed most closely to proper womanly behavior as defined by post-war society, and by deliberately representing other aspects of her life – such as her employment outside the home – in ways which could also be reconciled with those norms, boycott leaders, the black press, and the sympathetic sections of the white press which followed their lead, partially defused, or at least redefined, the full radicalism of Parks's defiance (89, Chappell, Hutchinson and Ward).

In this manner, the Civil Rights Movement weaponised respectability, forcing the acknowledgement that it was not behaviour that was the cause of the segregation, but rather, skin colour, effectively creating a counter-narrative to the stereotype of aggression that was

attributed to African Americans. Of course, the year prior to Rosa Park's famous refusal to get up out of her seat, and the subsequent Montgomery bus boycott, the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision of 1954 ruled segregation in schools as unconstitutional.

"Since the murder of Martin Luther King, new commitments had been sworn, laws introduced but most of it was decorative: statues, street names, speeches. It was as though something valuable had been pawned and the claim ticket lost." (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). While the Civil Rights Movement achieved the end of legal segregation, a look at the current news picture clearly shows that racism still plays a large role in American society, whether ingrained into the political system through practices such as redlining or as a societal issue visible in the use of racial profiling, the discrepancy in sentencing time, or the numerous young, black men who have been killed by both police and civilians. In the conclusion of *The Psychic Hold of Slavery: Legacies in American Expressive Culture,* Robert J. Patterson writes: "The modern civil rights movement is at least discursively connected to chattel slavery because the discrimination Jim Crow segregation made legible was predicated on antiblack epistemologies that structured and buttressed slavery. Consequently, whenever we discuss civil rights, we also talk about slavery; whenever we discuss slavery, we also talk about civil rights" (Patterson, 215). After the words "all men are created equal" had finally been reinforced by the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Of course, even federal laws cannot change a society overnight, and the ideas of the racial inferiority of African Americans had centuries to take root, and the issue with laws often lie in the people who are meant to enforce them. The problem of police brutality was at the heart of the foundation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence, "Copwatching Black Panthers would jump out of their cars when officers initiated an investigative stop and observe the activity from a lawful distance with their weapons on display, mirroring officer actions, drawing a gun, and ejecting cartridges when officers did so" (Fan 66). While the image of Black Panther members carrying guns in public is perhaps the most enduring one, the party also organised programmes like "the Free Breakfast for Children Program, liberation schools, free health clinics, the Free Food Distribution Program [. . .] the Free Busing to Prison Program, the Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation" (Bloom and Martin 184) among others. While the projected image of the Black Panther Party was one of militaristic strength, a central tenet was the focus on the community, as is clear in the number of programmes aimed at aiding poor and beleaguered

communities. Yet while the use of the militaristic image projected a disciplined masculinity as a counter- narrative to the barbarous savage, the Black Panther Party is better remembered for the perceived threat than the great deal of good achieved through social programmes.

Chapter 2 – Race and the gender performativity of the individual

While it may seem ironic to begin a chapter on black masculinity with a study of two white, male characters in, the characters of Mr Garner and schoolteacher are vital not only to the understanding of the development of the characters in *Beloved*, but also of the characters in *Paradise*. Representing Euro-American hegemony and its power to define not only the concept of masculinity, but of what constitutes a human being, these characters are utterly different in the way they go about exercising power, yet both are the same in the exploitative nature of what they do. Sixo is the opposing force – an African masculinity or African inspired masculinity, submitted but not submissive, going outside the system to achieve some fulfilment and defining himself by refusing to use the language of his oppressors. On the other hand, there is Halle, who works within the system, learning to read, letting himself be doubly exploited to free his mother, and ultimately goes mad upon seeing the violation of his wife, Sethe. In Stamp Paid is the ferryman, who bridges the gap between North and South – freedom and slavery. Paul D is the main male character of *Beloved* and the breadth of his experiences – his time in slavery, his escape, his time in prison, as a weaver woman's kept man, as a not-soldier dragging bodies off the battlefield – complement the depths of Sethe's experiences.

The male characters of *Paradise* are almost all black, yet the shape of their ideas around masculinity seems more reminiscent of Mr Garner or even schoolteacher than Sixo or Paul D. The novel opens with a group of men massacring a group of women before the narrative turns back to show black men subjugating both women and other men in the name of the utopian ideal for which they claimed to kill: "For Ruby". A reader might wonder where the nuances of *Beloved* went. Yet the homogeneity of masculinity is a part of the pattern of the novel just as surely as the disparate experiences of the female characters. Central to *Paradise* is the Morgan family: Deacon and Steward Morgan, twins and two of the leaders of the town of Ruby; and their disappointing nephew K.D., all three of whom take part in the attack. The main oppositional voice belongs to Reverend Misner, whose status as a church leader is complicated by being an outsider. Finally, as military service is an ingrained

tradition in the community, the chapter finishes with a look at three soldiers from Ruby – Elder Morgan, Menus Jury and Jefferson Fleetwood, the former only viewed through the lens of Steward's perfect memory, while the latter two find themselves as parts of the group of men that invade the Convent to kill five unarmed women.

Mr Garner and schoolteacher

"Mr. Garner acted like the world was a toy he was supposed to have fun with" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). Unlike the Sweet Home Men, Mr Garner has the freedom to act out what his society viewed as manhood, and even holding out a sliver of those same qualities to his slaves. Unlike schoolmaster, Mr Garner is clearly modelled on what Amy Greenberg terms "martial manhood" that is, a masculinity revelling in "physical strength and the ability to dominate both men and women" (Greenberg 12). Him illegally allowing them to carry guns seems like an ironic echo of a speech made by Frederick Douglass,

> The opportunity is given us to be men. With one courageous resolution we may blot out the hand-writing of the ages against us. Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on the earth or under the earth which can deny that he has *earned* the right of citizenship in the United States (quoted in Casey 132).

Mr Garner not only made himself as a "good master" by allowing these behaviours that would – had they been white – have marked them as well and truly men, he has also tied the Sweet Home Men more closely to himself and to Sweet Home itself, as outside of its boundaries, this martial manhood would likely result in not only worries for a slave rebellion, but also see the unlucky Sweet Home Man killed immediately. Additionally, by granting manhood to the Sweet Home Men, Mr Garner elevates himself above normal men. His lack of aggression towards the Sweet Home Men suggests that he does not consider them equal – he is already dominating and defining them, aggression is reserved for the men who have the status to challenge his dominion, that is, other white, slave-owning men – the society whose opinions

on his masculine performativity matters. On the other hand, by defining the Sweet Home Men as "men", can also be read as a practical matter with an amusing (to Mr Garner) addition of letting him challenge his neighbours. By allotting the men with a certain level of manhood, Mr Garner allows them to become their own overseers, albeit in a far more benign manner than an actual overseer might have been. Instilling pride in the Sweet Home Men, pride of being awarded the title and pride in the place where he is allowed to *be* a man, Mr Garner leaves them with a dilemma – to stay and be a man-slave or to escape into the unknown where manhood is in no way guaranteed.

Dominion and control are the main themes of Mr Garner's gender performativity – it is most visible in his treatment of the Sweet Home Men, but also in his interactions – or lack thereof – with his wife. This is particularly visible in "the debts that surfaced the minute she was widowed" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 2). The relationship of Mr and Mrs Garner is not foregrounded as the two characters never truly interact – they belong to two very different spheres, that is, the traditional domestic, feminine sphere and the public, masculine one (Kuersten, 16). Mr Garner's confidence in his control is what ultimately dooms Sweet Home – his failure to confide in his wife and prepare her for an eventuality such as his death, and the difficulties a woman would have faced leaving the domestic sphere to deal with issues of trade or the law, issues she very likely could not have left to the Sweet Home Men.

Slavery was the ultimate expression of institutionalised racism as it permeated not only the slave states of the South, but also intruded on the legal systems of the northern free states through the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which, among other items, prevented presumed fugitive slaves from being bailed, and their rights to a trial by jury and to speak in their own defence were taken away. Though Mr Garner is non-violent in his exploitation, Morrison speaks against the "good slave owner" narrative, as she lets her characters work through their own experiences and seeing that Mr Garner is part of the same oppressive system that allowed behaviour such as that of schoolteacher.

"Did I let Halle buy you or not?"

> "Yes, sir, you did," she said, thinking, But you got my boy and I'm all broke down. You be renting him out to pay for me way after I'm gone to Glory" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1).

His exploitative practices are disguised as kindness – Baby Suggs, whose advanced age would make her anything but profitable becomes another source of income when Halle is offered the chance to buy her freedom with extra labour. Besides this, Mr Garner also relies on the slavery institution itself as a social enclosure even as he flaunts the rules of that same system. Yet Mr Garner's relationship to men of his own status is, from what is revealed in the novel, competitive if not outright antagonistic. His death is attributed to a stroke, but "Mr. Garner died with a hole in his ear that Mrs. Garner said was an exploded ear drum brought on by stroke and Sixo said was gunpowder" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch 2). Morrison never confirms natural causes or whether a "neighbor, or stranger, or peddler, or brother-in-law" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1) had reached the end of their patience and finally decided to shoot him. Whatever the cause, Mr Garners death set the stage for the far more brutal methods of schoolteacher.

At the most simplistic level of the reading of the novel, schoolteacher might be regarded as the "evil" slave owner in comparison to the "good" Mr Garner, but both represent the same oppressive system, and both represent variations of Euro-American modes of masculinity of the time period in which the novel is set. Morrison disrupts the reader's expectations about masculinity first by Mr Garner – his behaviour and language suggest a certain level of aggression, yet he is the slave owner who does not torment the Sweet Home Men, then by introducing the educated, nameless schoolteacher uses the whip and instruments such as the bit. In schoolteacher, Morrison has created a character who has the outward trappings of a man adhering to the school of "restrained manhood", his piety being among the first qualities mentioned by Sethe when speaking of the man to Denver. Schoolteacher's penchant for using violence as a method of control is reminiscent of a Mr Covey – called the "Negro Breaker" – in Fredrick Douglass' *My Bondage and My freedom*: "during the first six months that I was there, I was whipped, either with sticks or cowskins, every week. Aching bones and a sore back were my constant companions. Frequent as the lash was used, Mr. Covey thought less of it, as a means of breaking down my spirit, than that of hard and long continued labor" (Douglass, Chapter xv). There are some notable similarities beyond their use

of violence to have their way. Douglass describes Mr Covey as “not a large man; he was only about five feet ten inches in height” (Douglass, chapter xv), physically schoolteacher is described as “a little man. Short. Always wore a collar, even in the fields [. . .] A pretty good farmer [. . .] Not strong as Mr. Garner but smart enough” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). Whether schoolteacher is using violence to compensate for his lacking physicality, or whether his use of the whip is simply a product of a culture that demands the use of such tools is left unspoken. Morrison does not step into the character’s point of view and so one might question if the motivation behind such treatment is even relevant, since schoolteacher is rendered as anonymous as the “60 million and more” that the novel is dedicated to. This anonymity serves a two-fold purpose – by having none of the former slaves from Sweet Home know his name, the term schoolteachers add a threat to the very notion of education and the education system that was used to perpetuate the notion of the inferiority of non-whites.

It is in schoolteacher that Morrison shows the mental effects of institutionalised racism on the individual white slave owner – the detached cruelty and the dehumanising classification of Africans and African Americans as primitive or even animalistic. “[During] the eighteenth century the *nègre*’s enslavement was increasingly being understood from a zoological point of view” (Curran 168). In an exchange between himself and one of his students, schoolteacher utters: “No, no. That’s not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 2). As phrenology claims that external features determine internal virtues and vices. In Susan Branson’s “Phrenology and the Science of Race in Antebellum America”, it is posited that the

> popularity and influence [of phrenology] in antebellum America illustrate the way scientific ideas were adopted into social, political, and cultural practices, and, in turn, how the goals of scientific inquiry and the dissemination of scientific knowledge were shaped by social and cultural circumstances and agendas. More often than not, scientific developments were employed to reinforce prevailing norms about social relations. Phrenology was no exception to this practice; phrenologists based their assessments of mental capacity and behavioral traits on assumed inherent physical and mental differences between races. (164)

Where Mr Garner permitted a certain level of freedom for his slaves, schoolteacher elevates himself instead by pushing the slaves down, and one of his main tools, besides the bit and the whip, is science, or at least what was considered science at the time. Besides offering a justification for buying and keeping slaves because of their inferior status, it also creates a divide between even the poorest white man and the wealthiest black man that neither money, freedom nor status could bridge. Schoolteacher represents an essentialist point of view, though it is somewhat vague and undefined to the reader – whatever characteristics, animal or human remains unspoken. However, Morrison relies on the reader having been exposed to enough of such rhetoric to be able to fill in the sheet. This in turn sparks the realisation of how entrenched these ideas are – for example, "when African Americans consult with white physicians regarding physical pain, they can expect that their pain will be taken less seriously than if they were whites with the same complaints" (114, Maly and Dalmage). Ideas such as this highlights the need for narratives like *Beloved*, that explore the long-lost depts of depravity through which people suffered, and the ideas that made that suffering not only possible, but a key part of the economic system of America. In the end, as Halle says: "What they say is the same. Loud or soft" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.2).

Sixo

In *Beloved*, Sixo is Morrison's clearest repudiation of the imposed white masculinity of Mr Garner and schoolteacher. Unlike the rest of the Sweet Home Men, Sixo has memories of Africa – though whether they are his own or someone else's is left unsaid – and as such, has a notion of a different kind of masculinity. This heritage gives him purpose and life beyond the confines of slavery and Sweet Home: Going out into the forest at night to dance, travelling long distances to meet with Patsy the Thirty-Mile woman and telling stories that makes the others "cry-laugh" Sixo embraces what life he can have within the system of slavery – not only sneaking out to meet with the Thirty-Mile Woman: "Sixo went among trees at night. For dancing, he said, to keep his bloodlines open, he said. Privately, alone, he did it. None of the rest of them had seen him at it, but they could imagine it, and the picture they

pictured made them eager to laugh at him—in daylight, that is, when it was safe" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 1). Sixo is the only one among the people of Sweet Home who don't regret Mr Garner's death, and he is the only one who doesn't laugh at the measuring of their heads. There is something of the trickster in the character of Sixo, as evident in his storytelling, the cleverness with which he navigates the fraught waters of slavery and in the manner in which he has the last laugh. Yet, for all his cleverness and abilities, it takes Sixo long into the dominion of schoolteacher to finally decide to run – of course, this may be on account of the Thirty-Mile Woman, or simply an affinity for the other Sweet Home Men who have little to no experience outside of the conditional safety of the farm. As Sixo is burning alive, his shouts reveal to Paul D that the Thirty-Mile woman is pregnant as she is escaping, and his bloodline has been kept open and has been ferried beyond the reach of men like schoolteacher to freedom. "His feet are cooking; the cloth of his trousers smokes. He laughs. Something is funny. Paul D guesses what it is when Sixo interrupts his laughter to call out, "Seven-O! Seven-O!" Smoky, stubborn fire. They shoot him to shut him up." (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 2). Sixo not only stands as a counter to Euro-American masculinity, his is also a counter-narrative to the image of the beaten-down, miserable wretch that slaves are frequently portrayed as.

There is none of the desire to dominate that is present in masculinity Sixo displays, and aggression only at the very end, and even then the manner in which he shows it is very different from the "Men who knew their manhood lay in their guns" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). The one instance of Sixo attempting violence ends in his death:

> Sixo turns and grabs the mouth of the nearest pointing rifle. He begins to sing. Two others shove Paul D and tie him to a tree. Schoolteacher is saying, "Alive. Alive. I want him alive." Sixo swings and cracks the ribs of one, but with bound hands cannot get the weapon in position to use it in any other way. All the whitemen have to do is wait. For his song, perhaps, to end? (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.2).

Rather than violence for the sake of dominance or competition, Sixo fights because like Sethe, he knows what waits back at Sweet Home – he fights to die and achieves victory in the process.

Halle

Halle is Morrison's counter-narrative to "Black women [being] held responsible in some academic literature and in the popular press for Black males' maladaptive characteristics behaviors" (Lawson Bush 381-382). Mothers, like fathers, are largely absent in the system of slavery, and because of the uncertainties of a live as property – to be bought or sold at the discretion of someone else – has left many of the characters in *Beloved* unwilling or unable to love as Halle does, "The best thing, [Paul D] knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). Judging by Halle spending five years of Sundays working to pay for his mother's freedom, resulting in him only seeing Sethe in the daylight on Sunday mornings, Halle was not a proponent of Paul D's notion of loving only a little bit. When Halle's daughter Denver reminisces about a man she never met, she reflects also on his relationship to his mother: "Grandma said she was always afraid a whiteman would knock her down in front of her children. She behaved and did everything right in front of her children because she didn't want them to see her knocked down. She said it made children crazy to see that" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.2). Halle did not see his mother get knocked down, instead it is being forced to helplessly witness the complete dehumanisation of his wife that made him "crazy".

The marriage of Halle and Sethe is unusual for its setting – it is willingly entered by both parties, and the choice is given to Sethe rather than Mr Garner or even Halle. Halle's behaviour is counter to the idea put forth by bell hooks that "one of the primary rewards offered to [men] for obedience to patriarchal thought and practice is the right to dominate females sexually" (hooks 78). It is kindness that draws Sethe to him, not his obedience to the rule of Mr Garner which is the only access to societal patriarchy for an enslaved man. The Sweet Home Men – "though fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, [and] rubbing their thighs" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1) – nevertheless respect the decision, showing restraint despite utter desperation.

Stamp Paid

Stamp Paid, like Halle, finds himself in the position of being unable to protect his wife from the predations of a privileged, white man. “The standard scholarly interpretation of how slavery affected black manhood is perhaps best captured by the comments of one former slave, Lewis Clarke, who declared that a slave “can’t be a man” because he could not protect his female kin from behind sexually assaulted by owners and overseers” (Foster 445-446). While not as violent as the milking of Sethe, Stamp Paid’s wife, Vashti, extracts a promise from him to keep himself alive rather than attempting to kill the master’s son. By making this request, Vashti simultaneously saves him and dooms him to the strain of having to watch her put on the black ribbon with the cameo that signalled the transition between wife and mistress. When she declares the end of the affair and that she “is back”, Stamp Paid – or Joshua as he was called before the name change – thinks of killing her: “She had a real small neck. I decided to break it. You know, like a twig—just snap it. I been low but that was as low as I ever got” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.2). Slavery denies the enslaved gender performativity and in the case of masculinity, one of the most enduring behaviours associated with manhood is as suggested in the Lewis Clarke quote, the protection of female family members from abuse. Morrison denies the reader the full reasoning behind Stamp Paid’s desire to kill his wife – it could be an externalisation of his shame, and to kill her would be the elimination of the source of this. On the other hand, *Beloved* is centred around the killing of a loved one as a way of protection from the horrors of slavery, Stamp Paid may have realised that the state of “being back” was dependent not on their will, but on the whims of the master’s son, or some other white man in the future. In lieu of killing Vashti, Joshua symbolically kills himself by giving himself the name Stamp Paid and declaring all debts paid. Morrison doesn’t reveal the origin of the name – whether it is like the names of Paul A, Paul D and Paul F, given to him by a slave owner or if it is a name given to him by family – but in the act of renaming himself Stamp Paid strives to put the past behind him, reinventing himself – no longer a slave, he instead becomes a “sly, steely old black man: agent, fisherman, boatman, tracker, savior, spy” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1).

Paul D

As the primary masculine point of view in *Beloved*, Paul D is influenced by all the preceding characters in turn, and he is torn between the hegemonic masculinity that was imprinted on him by Mr Garner, the dehumanisation of schoolteacher, and the examples of alternative masculinity in Sixo and Halle. He displays little of the outright aggression that was central to Mr Garner's view on masculinity, but in exorcising the ghost of 124 there is a notion of exerting one's will on another – even if that other is an incorporeal, apparently-malignant spectre. Paul D enumerates the way in which Mr Garner allowed the Sweet Home Men to act as men:

> He grew up thinking that, of all the Blacks in Kentucky, only the five of them were men. Allowed, encouraged to correct Garner, even defy him. To invent ways of doing things; to see what was needed and attack it without permission. To buy a mother, choose a horse or a wife, handle guns, even learn reading if they wanted to—but they didn't want to since nothing important to them could be put down on paper. (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 1)

Mr Garner's idea of masculinity is filtered through Paul D's other influences, but the wording is significant, particularly the use of the word "attack" – aggression is a large part of the martial mode of masculinity, not necessarily violent aggression – at least not towards what might be considered lesser beings.

Perception and being perceived is an important aspect of *Beloved*. When Paul D is first introduced, it is presented through Sethe's point of view: "Except for a heap more hair and some waiting in his eyes, he looked the way he had in Kentucky. Peachstone skin; straight-backed. For a man with an immobile face it was amazing how ready it was to smile, or blaze or be sorry with you. [. . .] With less than a blink, his face seemed to change – underneath it lay the activity" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). By highlighting the face and the

empathy, giving only cursory mention of the rest of the body, Morrison seems determined to underline the humanity of Paul D. The activity underneath his stoically immobile yet expressive face speaks to a vibrant interior life. This, in turn, serves as a counternarrative to not only the dehumanisation of slavery, but also to the continuing trend of, as Allen and Metcalf puts it, “local and network news programming regularly associates black men with crime, making criminality the most common stereotype of black masculinity in the media. Black men are disproportionately portrayed in scowling mug shots or in handcuffs” (Allen and Metcalf 22). Morrison not only draws the focus away from the previously-enslaved body – it is straight-backed, not bent or cowering – but rather to the face, which is neither scowling nor devoid of human feeling, yet still maintaining a calm surface. By giving the reader such a first impression, Morrison allows Paul D to be a human being before he is a former slave, or a former convict. Beyond this first impression, Paul D’s humanity is compounded when he looks at Sethe: “Halle’s girl – the one with iron eyes and backbone to match [. . .] A face too still for comfort; irises the same colour as her skin, which, in that still face, used to make him think of a mask with mercifully punched-out eyes. Halle’s woman” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). Again, Morrison focuses on the face, and again an immobility of face that suggests rather than declares a harsh life where displays of emotions would have been discouraged. The repetition of Sethe’s relationship with Halle suggests a both a repression of feeling, as well as a reminder to himself that Sethe is married, it also shows a shift in his perception of Sethe – she starts out as Halle’s girl in Paul D’s mind, but as he enumerates the similarities and differences, he concludes that she is not a girl, but rather a woman. The fact that both of them focus on the other’s back, whether in the physical or the metaphorical sense, echoes the whipping that Sethe experienced, but also the all-too-familiar image of slaves or former slaves with masses of scars covering their backs. Perception is shaped by many factors, but first and foremost the perceiver’s past and prejudices. By giving the reader their first introduction to Paul D through the eyes of Sethe, he is cemented as a man through not only his stance and his stoic expressiveness, but the masculinity he portrays is not the one that is frequently associated with black men and it lays the foundation for a nuanced exploration of that topic throughout the novel. By having Paul D presented as a strong, capable man embodying several traditionally masculine traits, sidesteps any stereotypes that might overshadow the discussion of what masculinity is or what it can be.

Very quickly, the original impression of Paul D is shifted, as the past only hinted at initially is crystallised. One of the driving factors behind Paul D's issues with Sethe lies in the deep-seated insecurity which a life of enslavement, imprisonment and dehumanisation has left behind. This insecurity is specifically tied to the idea of manhood and the character's perceived inability to "be" a man. A perhaps particularly telling example comes when Paul D, unable to engage in sex with Sethe compares himself to Sixo: "Now *there* was a man, and *that* was a tree. Himself lying in the bed and the "tree" lying next to him didn't compare" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). Sixo's rebelliousness and willingness to risk punishment or death to spend time with Patsy the Thirty-Mile Woman is a traditional demonstration of manhood – even as a free man, free of either Mr Garner or schoolteacher's definitions, Paul D feels inadequate. Morrison shows the internalising effects the dehumanisation inherent in slavery has, and the lingering effects of attitudes and language. "Although Sixo is his model of a manly man, the qualities Paul D associates with manliness originate in the dominant culture of the white slaveholder Mr. Garner." (Sitter 24). The dissonance of these two ideas of masculinity is a primary source of insecurity for Paul D, being unable to commit to either – having none of Sixo's apparent rootedness in African culture and being fundamentally unable to function as a man in white society being African-American. When his masculinity is challenged, he turns to the most primal way of proving it - both Halle and Sixo had done before it him – getting a woman, Sethe, pregnant "And suddenly it was a solution: a way to hold on to her, document his manhood and break out of the girl's spell—all in one." (151, Beloved). Unconsciously, he is attempting to use Sethe for reproduction, not out of any desire for a child, but to keep her with him and to once again banish Beloved. However, the revelation of Sethe's violation of motherhood and womanhood – the killing of one's own child – puts an end to the old notion of having a child to fix a failing relationship. The uncertainty in the character of Paul D is the uncertainty of the individual trapped between two cultures.

Masculinity has long been conflated with the ideal of stoicism and contrasted with a perceived emotionality inherent in femininity. However, Paul D's display of repression is less a conscious choice to appear "manly", and more of a defence mechanism. The tobacco tin is a metaphor for Paul D's unwillingness to confront and engage with his past, much as the presence of Beloved in Sethe's house can be read as the materialisation of a past that will not and/or cannot be buried along with the dead child. "It was some time before he could put

Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest." (Morrison, Beloved). *Beloved* is a novel that is concerned with the past, both good and ill, and Paul D is a character for whom the combination of an exceedingly painful past and an unwillingness or an inability to share it results in repression and difficulties with forming meaningful connections with his community. When the tin breaks, the emotional torrent is violent:

> Surrender was bound to come anyway, why not meet it with a laugh, shouting Seven-O! Why not? Why the delay? He had already seen his brother wave goodbye from the back of a dray, fried chicken in his pocket, tears in his eyes. Mother. Father. Didn't remember the one. Never saw the other. He was the youngest of three half-brothers (same mother—different fathers) sold to Garner and kept there, forbidden to leave the farm, for twenty years (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.2).

By having Paul D's thoughts spiral in this manner as he exiles himself, Morrison deals with the issue of male trauma and the difficulties of handling such thoughts alone.

When Beloved manifests, it is of course her relationship with her mother and her sister that is taking up the greater focus, but Morrison does not ignore the way Beloved rapes Paul D:

> His strength had lain in knowing that schoolteacher was wrong. Now he wondered. There was Alfred, Georgia, there was Delaware, there was Sixo and still he wondered. If schoolteacher was right it explained how he had come to be a rag doll—picked up and put back down anywhere any time by a girl young enough to be his daughter. Fucking her when he was convinced he didn't want to (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1).

Sexual violence is a charge that has been laid particularly at the feet of black men for a long time, and in Paul D, Morrison challenges the stereotype of the black man as a perpetrator and places the character rather as the victim. Paul D's experiences with the embodied Beloved shifts the reader's perspective, as Barnett puts it:

> Morrison uses the succubus figure to represent the effects of institutionalized rape under slavery. When the enslaved persons' bodies were violated, their reproductive potential was commodified. The succubus, who rapes and steals semen, is

> metaphorically linked to such rapes and to the exploitation of African Americans' reproduction. Just as rape was used to dehumanize enslaved persons, the succubus or vampire's assault robs victims of vitality, both physical and psychological. By representing a female rapist figure and a male rape victim, Morrison foregrounds race, rather than gender, as the category determining domination or subjection to rape (419).

The relationship between Beloved and Paul D is inherently warped, as Beloved represents a young child – revenant though she appears to be – and Paul D is already in a relationship with her mother – and this in turn reflects the distorting effect slavery had on sexual relationships, and the aftereffects of centuries of sexualised violence. Paul D is enfeebled by this relationship, "She moved him [. . .] and Paul D didn't know how to stop it because it looked like he was moving himself. Imperceptibly, downright reasonably, he was moving out of 124" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). Beloved is a creature of contradictions – she has intimate memories of Sethe and childhood, such as the earrings, however, towards the end of the novel, she appears to have memories of the Middle Passage, perhaps even the memories of Sethe's mother. When viewed in relation to Judith Butler's ideas of gender performativity, the repeatedly sexually aggressive nature of Beloved conflicts with her otherwise female presentation but aligns with the stereotyping of black women which plays into the privileging of Euro-Americans as sexually pure and non-promiscuous. For Paul D, this treatment recalls "the most bitter part of slavery, the loss of his manhood in powerless obedience to the commands of others" (Schmudde, 414). The societal demands of masculinity have become internalised and his failure to live up to them causes a great deal of mental anguish that is evident throughout the novel and informs a great deal of Paul D's actions, particularly his inability to cope with the story of Sethe.

Unlike Sethe, Paul D does not have a "tree" growing on his back – the most prominent scars he possesses seem to stem not from beatings or whipping, but rather the humiliation and the dehumanisation of his position. In "The Making of a Man: Dialogic Meaning in Beloved", Deborah Ayer Sitter argues that Morrison uses the metaphor of the tree to explain the divide between Sethe and Paul D, the fundamental disconnect in their methods of coping with their experiences and their ways of seeing the world through their associations with the image of a tree. By making Sethe bear the brunt of the physical abuse that so often accompanied chattel slavery, Morrison disrupts the traditional narrative of men being the protectors of women by

placing them in a setting where protection is impossible. Likewise, the sexual abuse in the novel – barring the rape of Stamp Paid's wife and milking of Sethe – is primarily directed at the black men.

Deacon and Steward

One of the most visual behaviours that indicate the masculinity of the Morgan twins is their tobacco habits. Deacon smokes Te Amo cigars – as Richard K. Reed suggests in *Birthing Fathers: The Transformation of Men in American Rites of Birth:*

> Cigars as symbolic objects carry their own highly specific lexicon in American culture. If tobacco communicates maleness, cigars denote wealth, power, and self-indulgent masculinity. Although the vast majority of American cigars are cheap and of poor quality, the imagery of cigar production tells an important myth [. . .] The cigar as an object reaffirms a man's power over other people as both class and sexual objects.

Deacon Morgan, like any self-respecting fictional banker smokes cigars, reflecting his position in the society of Ruby and his sense of self-worth. On the other hand, Steward uses Blue Boy chewing tobacco. As with the cigar, chewing tobacco has masculine associations, but it is less related to wealth and power and more connected with the rugged masculinity of the cowboy, an image that Steward, whose "preference was to mount around four a.m. and ride Night till sunrise. He loved to roam the pastures, where everything was in the open" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). It is also likely this habit that has robbed Steward of his ability to taste. Significantly, both of them quit their tobacco habits in the aftermath of the attack on the Convent, this might signify Deacon renouncing the trapping of wealth and power, whereas Steward is distancing himself from the image of the lower-class cowboy as he is "concentrating on making the nephew and the sixteen-month-old grandnephew rich (thus the new house), easing K.D. into the bank" (Morrison, Paradise, "Save-Marie").

As twins, Deacon and Steward share much, including memories. Most prominently, perhaps, is the perfect remembrance of the nineteen women being photographed. The narration focuses on Deacon, and of the twins, he is the most focused on femininity – whether it is perfect femininity, or the flawed one of Consolata and the women of the Convent. Deacon Morgan, much as the rest of the men of Ruby, has certain expectations of the women in the town, but Deacon's expectations are explored in great detail. His memory, shared with his brother and perfect in its clarity and the harmlessness of nineteen young women being photographed:

> They wore summer dresses of material the lightness, the delicacy of which neither of them had ever seen. Most of the dresses were white, but two were lemon yellow and one a salmon color. They wore small, pale hats of beige, dusty rose, powdery blue: hats that called attention to the wide, sparkly eyes of the wearers[. . .] Their skin, creamy and luminous in the afternoon sun, took away his breath [. . .] His remembrance was pastel colored and eternal. (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca")

This private image of perfect womanhood is a superficial one – neither Deacon or Steward knows more about the women than the photographer lining them up on the steps. The language Morrison surrounds these young women with suggests innocence, youth and an ephemerality that stands in contrast to the physicality of his adulterous relationship with Consolata, one of the women at the Convent. The nineteen women are safely contained in the trap of Deacon's memory, without names, voices or personalities, as harmless as colourful butterflies, to be admired from a distance. Consolata, on the other hand, is described as "An uncontrollable, gnawing woman who had bitten his lip just to lap the blood it shed; a beautiful, golden-skinned, outside woman with moss-green eyes [. . .] a Salomé from whom he had escaped just in time or she would have had his head on a dinner plate" (Morrison, Paradise). This projection of a vampire- or succubus-like figure onto Consolata is a clear case of Deacon attempting to disclaim any responsibility for the affair, but also suggests a fear of the uncontrolled woman, and therefore reducing her to something inhuman in order to establish a border between "proper" women and the devouring temptresses who, like Eve, stand ready to pull any unwary man down into sin with her. Lost in the shuffle between memory and the Salomé is Deacon's wife Soane, with whom Deacon "spoke [. . .] in the opaque manner he thought appropriate" (Morrison, Paradise, "Save-Marie"). Trapped in

between his vision of perfection and the threat of Consolata is the relationship between Deacon and his wife. In an exchange between Deacon and Soane, Morrison succinctly shows how protection has become a condescending paternalism.

"I don't understand, Deek."

"I do." He smiled up at her. "You don't need to" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca").

Deacon, and the men of Ruby, in their desire to take burdens away from their wives, sisters and daughters, reduce them to their reproductive functions and "choir competitions and Bible class and ribbons for fat vegetables and baby showers" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). Yet, even good and proper women, such as the dutiful Sweetie Fleetwood, are left to wander out of town and into the open arms of the Convent if there is a bank that hasn't been opened yet – the concern for community is secondary to the concerns of capitalism.

If Deacon is the one focused on women and femininity, then Steward is the arbiter of masculinity of the two. The clearest articulation of the character's ideas on manhood and masculine behaviour is expressed in his words regarding the changing of the words on the old communal Oven which has become an idol of a communalism that is no longer truly present in the town: "If you, any one of you, ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of that Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hood-eye snake" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). Steward Morgan's aggressive protectiveness is not focused on women, or the town of Ruby, but rather the image of the past, of the Old Fathers and their founding of Haven. Any attempt at reinterpretation of the events so crystal clear in his perfect, shared memory is both a personal insult and an insult of the mythology that has formed around the town. Protection moves out of the realm of threats with the attack on the Convent and becomes action. Steward's idea of who are worthy of protection and who are not is clearly showed after the recounting of the story of Elder Morgan's attempt at protecting a black girl from two white men – "Steward liked that story, but it unnerved him to know it was based on the defense of and prayers for a whore. He did not sympathize with the whitemen, but he could see their point, could even feel the adrenaline, imagining the fist was his own" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). Women behaving outside of their prescribed roles are not only unworthy of protection, they are also unworthy of life. This view is taken out of the realm of imagination when Steward shoots Consolata.

Like the twins' shared memory of the nineteen ladies embodying femininity, so do the Old Fathers form the foundation of what Steward classifies as masculine. Meanwhile Steward is scoffing at "Misner's notions of manhood: backtalk, name changes—as if word magic had anything to do with the courage it took to be a man" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). There is no elaboration on this courage, However, while the twins take pride in the communal spirit of the Old Fathers and the residents of Haven, "Having been refused by the world in 1890 on their journey to Oklahoma, Haven residents refused each other nothing, were vigilant to any need or shortage" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). This is in stark contrast to Deacon's complaining about the decline of Ruby, yet not doing anything to help economically despite their personal prosperity. The lack of help comes from a disgust of the "cut me some slack" attitude that Steward attributes to the town's youth.

In *Can't I Love What I Criticize?* Mayberry claims that "The essential for [Steward] lies not in meaning but in gain or loss" (253), and uses as examples Dovey's musing on how every gain in Steward's life is accompanied by some kind of loss, and his pondering "if that generation—Misner's and K.D.'s—would have to be sacrificed to get to the next one." (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). However, the more he sacrifices of himself, of others, to maintain Ruby as perfectly preserved as his and Deacon's memories, the more the town unravels. Shooting Consolata, and destroying the perceived cause of the death of a possible grandnephew and the "permanent threat to his cherished view of himself and his brother" (Morrison, Paradise, "Lone"), Steward instead loses his bond to his brother – effectively, in order to preserve his personal history and the familiar narrative, he sacrifices the continuation of that narrative. The violence – in the form of threats or actualised – that Steward Morgan relies on to solve problems is commonly viewed as a masculine trait, and it is a trait which Steward embraces, unlike Deacon who, repents the attack and, after a penitent's barefoot walk through the town, confesses to Misner, setting himself on a path to a different kind of manhood, though unlike Zechariah, he does not abandon his brother.

Morrison consistently underlines the social and economical power of the Morgan family, but she also delves into the dynastic worries of succession, with the irresponsible K.D. at the top of their worries – at least until the issues with the Convent women and the rebellious youths begin to make themselves known.

> Almost always, these nights, when Dovey Morgan thought about her husband it was in terms of what he had lost. His sense of taste one example of the many she counted. Contrary to his (and all of Ruby's) assessment, the more Steward acquired, the more visible his losses. The sale of his herd at 1958's top dollar accompanied his defeat in the statewide election for church Secretary because of his outspoken contempt for the schoolchildren sitting in in that drugstore in Oklahoma City [. . .] in 1964, when he was forty, Fairy's curse came true: they learned neither could ever have children (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca").

Likewise, Deacon's main concern is with the prosperity of the bank, not the aimless wandering of a woman who has not left her children's side in years. Steward's worries about Reverend Misner feed into the desire to maintain the social and economic status quo: "Reverend Misner often treated fodder like table food. A man like that could encourage strange behavior; side with a teenage girl; shift ground to Fleetwood. A man like that, willing to throw money away, could give customers ideas. Make them think there was a choice about interest rates." (Morrison, Paradise, "Grace").

K.D.

Heir not only to the Morgan properties, but also the privileges of the Morgan family as one of the coveted 8-rock families, and the patriarchal attitude of the twins. Despite an exalted bloodline, throughout much of the narrative, K.D. is framed as a disappointment. Unlike his uncles or his dead cousins, K.D. never served in the military, excluding him from this tradition of manhood in Ruby. Nor does he seem to have a job besides grooming Steward's dogs a few days twice a year, at least not until "Steward [. . .] took K.D. under his wing, concentrating on making the nephew and the sixteen-month-old grandnephew rich (thus the new house), easing K.D. into the bank" (Morrison, Paradise, "Save-Marie") at the very end of the novel. His sexual indiscretion with Arnette Fleetwood, as well as him slapping her causes issues with the Fleetwood family, equal to the Morgan family in purity, if not in wealth. "When he described the incident to his uncles they had frowned at the same time [. . .] However disgusted both were, K.D. knew they would not negotiate a solution that would endanger him or the future of Morgan money" (Morrison, Paradise, "Grace"). The concern is

not on Arnette, but rather the threat of anybody not a proper Morgan getting their hands on the family wealth. To underline the extreme need for purity that K.D. fulfils by virtue of simply never leaving Ruby, the Morgan twins exclude even the children of Elder Morgan, their older brother, on the ground that they are “roosting everywhere except at home, some of whom visited Ruby for a week only to cut it short, so eager were they to get away from the peace they found dull, the industry they found tedious and the heat they found insulting. So it was useless even to think of them as part of the legitimate line of Morgans.” (Morrison, Paradise, “Seneca”). Lusting after, and ultimately rejected by one of the women at the Convent, K.D. eventually settles down with Arnette – fulfilling his duty as a good son of Ruby – marrying a woman of pure lineage and having a new 8-rock baby “with all its fingers and toes and who knows maybe a full brain too” (Morrison, Paradise, “Lone”) which secures the Morgan lineage for another generation and thus secures the history and the memory of Ruby.

In K.D. Morrison challenges again “the idea that black male violence stems from a dysfunctional African American matriarchy” (Read 527), as not only is K.D. orphaned at seven years old, but he is raised in the extremely patriarchal town named after his own mother. The violence K.D. exerts, taking part in the attack on the Convent, instead can be read as a patriarchal community lashing out against a small, matriarchal hold-out. Of course, the personal reason for K.D.’s participation in the attack has less to do with any kind of grand war of the genders, and more to do with his humiliating love-lust for Gigi that turned into stalking. The attack promises to erase it far more efficiently than his marriage to Arnette “could flush that Gigi bitch out of his life” (Morrison, Paradise, “Divine”). Like the other Morgans, K.D. has a foundational memory – it is not an idealised picture of femininity, instead it is a memory of a swimming pool with what “seemed to him as though hundreds of white children were bobbing in it, their voices a cascade of the world’s purest happiness, a glee so sharply felt it had brought tears” (Morrison, Paradise, “Grace”). When Gigi becomes linked to this memory, he becomes as obsessed with her as Deacon and Steward are about the maintenance of their own memory, as obstinate as Elder Morgan was with meeting his maker wearing his tattered uniform as a testimony to the memory of “that whiteman’s fist in that colored woman’s face” (Morrison, Paradise, “Seneca”).

Reverend Misner

Even without comparing him to characters like Steward Morgan, Reverend Misner is portrayed as a man with behaviours that are generally viewed as feminine. In particular, his devotion to diplomacy over aggression is notable – he serves as a moderator of sorts in the issue between the Morgans and the Fleetwoods, though the meeting proves to be less about finding the truth or reconciliation and more about power and money. Later on, when he invites the town to talk about the disagreement about the Oven, he tries to guide the town to at least listen and understand the frustration of their children while at the same time respecting the importance the elders place on it. Additionally, there is a deep vein of kindness in the character of Misner which manifests not only in his desire to heal the rifts between the families in Ruby, but also in his listening to the confession of Deacon Morgan and tries to help make the man's life inhabitable again. Similarly, he decides to stay in the town, to guide it through the changes that he is certain are on the horizon in the wake of not only the attack on the Convent, but also after the first death in over twenty years, "because after 1953 anybody who died did it in Europe or Korea or someplace outside this town" (Morrison, Paradise, "Patricia").

When Steward Morgan scoffs at "Misner's notions of manhood: backtalk, name changes" and his "word magic" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"), he ignores the courage that it would take to challenge traditions as set in iron as those of Ruby are. In teaching "Negro History" with Pat Best, Misner introduces alternative ways of being and alternate ways of viewing the world and the past. Talking to Pat Best, who plays the realist to his idealist, Misner explains his point of view:

> There was a whole lot of life before slavery. And we ought to know what it is. If we're going to get rid of the slave mentality, that is."
>
> "You're wrong, and if that's your field you're plowing wet. Slavery is our past. Nothing can change that, certainly not Africa."

> “We live in the world, Pat. The whole world. Separating us, isolating us—that’s always been their weapon. Isolation kills generations. It has no future.” (Morrison, Paradise, “Patricia”)

It is with this kind of rhetoric that Misner pushes the youth to look beyond the mental trap that the New Fathers have constructed on the works of their predecessors – a trap that either moulds them into duplicates of their parents, with safe, 8 Rock marriages and pastel houses, or, like Billie Dalia, spits them out of town altogether.

Despite the fact that the central event of the novel – the attack on the Convent – happens in 1976, eight years after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, Misner is one of the few among the dozens of characters have any relation to the Civil Rights Movement. “The reputation of the church Misner had left to come to Ruby floated behind him: covert meetings to stir folks up; confrontations with rather than end runs around white law” (Morrison, Paradise, “Grace”). Misner knows that as the USA expands, such confrontations would be inevitable at some point, and that the method of Ruby – isolation – would not only be impossible, but that without a united voice, it would be all too easy to starve out such enclaves. After “the murder of Martin Luther King new commitments had been sworn, laws introduced but most of it was decorative: statues, street names, speeches. It was as though something valuable had been pawned and the claim ticket lost” (Morrison, Paradise, “Seneca”). Whether Morrison is pointing out the whitewashing of the message or the loss of momentum after the death of King, Misner’s students reflect the groups that rose up not necessarily to change laws, but to change society’s perception through mottos such as “Black Power” and “Black is Beautiful”, setting up insistent counter-narratives to the heavy privileging of both white power and white beauty. By educating the youth in these issues, Misner is not creating soldiers, but rather prepares them for a world far more nuanced than Ruby, a world that will crash down upon the town whether it wills it or not.

As in *Beloved*, religion is an important aspect to the community, and while Misner’s sermons are not as effusive and physical as those of Baby Suggs, his message is one bearing a great deal more positivity than those of his fellow preachers.

> Evil Times, said Reverend Pulliam from New Zion’s pulpit. Last Days, said Pastor Cary at Holy Redeemer. Nothing was said at Calvary right away because that

> congregation was still waiting for the new preacher, who, when he did come in 1970, said Good News: "I will vanquish thine enemies before thine eyes," saith the Lord, Lord, Lord (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca").

Though his message is centred on love, Misner displays a significant amount of masculine behaviour in relation to his ministry. One of the wars in the novel is between Misner and Pulliam – it is a war of words and one of the battles is waged at the wedding of Arnette and K.D, with Pulliam opening with a salvo that strikes at the heart of Misner's faith and him mute in anger: "You do not deserve love regardless of the suffering you have endured. [. . .] You can only earn—by practice and careful contemplation—the right to express it and you have to learn how to accept it. Which is to say you have to earn God [. . .] God is not interested in you" (Morrison, Paradise, "Divine"). Rather than counter this angry sermon with one of his own, Misner pulls the cross down from the wall and holds it up to the congregation hoping that the fundamental shape – "This mark of a standing human figure poised to embrace" (Morrison, Paradise, "Divine") will speak the words he does not trust himself to say. While his reaction is not aggressive, Misner does not back down from the challenge thrown at him, and among the watchers, Billie Delia sees the two reverends as "stallions [. . .] fighting about who controlled the mares and their foals. Senior Pulliam had scripture and history on his side. Misner had scripture and the future on his" (Morrison, Paradise, "Divine"). The contest between Misner and Pulliam sees Misner rising to the challenge rather than attempting diplomacy.

Unlike the other men of Ruby, Misner cultivates relationships with women other than the woman he ultimately proposes to. He makes time to talk to the otherwise invisible Mabel and Sweetie Fleetwood "the women who were nowhere in sight. Both of the Mrs. Fleetwoods spent all their energy, time and affection on the four children still alive—so far" (Morrison, Paradise, "Grace"). He has an extended conversation about the history of Ruby with Pat Best – one of the few people in town who are light-skinned. Yet for all of this, he does not challenge the extreme patriarchy of Ruby much – there is no reaction to the exclusion of not only Arnette herself from a meeting pertaining to an injury of her person, nor does he react to Arnold Fleetwood uttering "I'm her father. I'll arrange her mind" (Morrison, Paradise, "Grace").

Elder Morgan, Jeff Fleetwood and Menus Jury

Ruby is home to many veterans, for example, both Deacon and Steward served in the second world war, and Deacon's sons, Easter and Scout were killed in Vietnam. While Morrison does not reveal particular details of their service, she does suggest the importance of the military in the community, despite the community being as isolationist as it is. In the words of Soane Morgan: "Their father had served in the forties. Uncles too. Jeff Fleetwood was back from Vietnam none the worse. And although he did seem a little shook up, Menus Jury got back alive. Like a fool she believed her sons would be safe [. . .] Safer in the army than in Chicago, where Easter wanted to go" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). The military has been a highly masculine enclave for a greater part of human history, and this was very much the case in the American military until relatively recently. Additionally, "in recent decades one institution, more so than others, has provided black men an opportunity to escape their low status in American society. That institution is the military which, it is claimed, offers blacks better opportunities in the sense of both greater freedom from discrimination and better chances for upward mobility" (Weigert, 57). Whether this observation is factual or not is less important than the belief itself, and it suggests a reason for the number of Ruby men who scattered "into the army" and, upon returning "saw what had become of Haven, heard about the missing testicles of other colored soldiers; about medals being torn off by gangs of rednecks and Sons of the Confederacy—and recognized the Disallowing, Part Two" (Morrison, Paradise).

Elder Morgan, serving in the first world war, is only a memory at the time the novel is set, but his story resonates with the issues of the masculinity promulgated in Ruby, as well as the view of women in the Madonna/Whore binary. Elder Morgan "saw two men arguing with a woman" whom he believes to be a prostitute, which allows him to sympathise with the white men, it is only when it escalates to violence that "the scene slid from everyday color to

black and white [. . .] The two whitemen turned away from the unconscious Negro woman sprawled on the pavement. Before Elder could think, one of them changed his mind and came back to kick her in the stomach. Elder did not know he was running until he got there and pulled the man away" (Morrison, Paradise). Elder insists on being buried in his tattered army uniform, holding on to the shame of running away and leaving the woman behind. The uniform and the medals become a source of shame, but it is a shame Elder embraces even in death, or as Mayberry puts it: "Like his old father, the eldest son continues to indulge blues pain" (247).

Like the sons of Deacon Morgan, Jefferson Fleetwood and Menus Jury took part in the Vietnam war, but they survived where the Morgans were killed. However, both experience issues that may or may not be linked to their service. Jefferson "Jeff" Fleetwood's offspring are all described as sick and bedbound, though Morrison does not explain their condition beyond a high level of dependency "Both of the Mrs. Fleetwoods spent all their energy, time and affection on the four children still alive—so far" (Morrison, Paradise). At the end of the novel, one of these children dies, ending the spell of immortality or stagnation that has kept Ruby practically deathless for two decades. Morrison is never explicit with regards to the cause of the children's illness, but the reader is left to infer that it is either on account of the tendency towards intermarrying within the community, or that Jeff Fleetwood was exposed to chemicals while in Vietnam. Menus Jury came back from Vietnam "a little shook up", and while his drinking is publicly attributed to the war, it is suggested that it has more to do with the loss of his home, having been pressured to give it up after bringing home a "pretty sandy-haired girl from Virginia" (Morrison, Paradise, "Patricia"). Both Jefferson and Menus take part in the attack on the Convent despite the fact that both received help – Jefferson's wife was cared for there, as was Menus helped with his drinking problem.

Chapter Conclusion

While the portrayal of masculinity differs in the two novels – as should be expected given the two very different temporal settings – the unsympathetic presentation of the majority of the male characters in *Paradise* was cause for strong criticism at the time of its

release. At the top of the list of unpleasant characters in *Paradise* is Steward Morgan, whose overpowering views on masculinity, violent tendencies and certitude in his own righteousness is more reminiscent of Mr Garner and schoolteacher than Sixo or Halle. This shows that even isolated, miles away from the nearest white person, Stewards attitudes around masculinity and patriarchy is built on the same Western framework that saw his ancestors bought and sold as property, not men. Unlike Deacon Morgan, there is no walk of repentance for Steward, who closes the novel much as he began it, only withdrawn from the brother with which he shared everything. Meanwhile, Deacon's pastel memory of nineteen black ladies and the vision of equally pastel buildings with industrious women inside show the breadth of expectation of female participation in the society of Ruby. Women are protected – except when there is a bank that needs opening. K.D. with his renouncement of any responsibilities for Arnette's pregnancy is a child of privilege whose failed pursuit of one of the women at the Convent ends in him joining in the attack as a way to erase her from his thoughts. In stark contrast to the three Morgan men, Reverend Misner is not only an outsider to Ruby, he is also a diplomatic, kind-hearted man far from the latter-day martial men who easily threaten violence, and in the end, attack five women who dared to not bend themselves to the unspoken rules of Ruby. Finally, three of the many soldiers in *Paradise* – Elder Morgan, Jefferson Fleetwood and Menus Jury. All three carry wounds that are unrelated war, for Elder, it is the attack on the unnamed woman. For Jeff Fleetwood, it is his children, all sick and bedbound, and for Menus Jury it is the fact that the town was so against the idea of him marrying an outsider "redbone" woman that he was forced to sell his house.

In *Beloved*, the indelible influence of European or Euro-American ideas around masculinity on the enslaved men is complicated by contemporary notions surrounding race, particularly the view of African and African Americans as inherently inferior with claims of scientific proof such as the size of skulls. While white characters like Mr Garner and schoolteacher can navigate their masculinity without fear, the other characters find that even if they are given the definition of "man", the definition is not worth much without the space to walk the walk and talk the talk. Sixo opts out of the Western-defined set of masculine traits altogether, choosing instead to rely on his own traditions. Halle, the dutiful son, simply keeps his head down and works to earn his mother's freedom, until he is broken by the sight of his wife being milked like an animal and himself unable to interfere. Stamp Paid is unbothered by the idea of manhood, he's paid his price and that's that – this is in stark contrast to the

primary male character of the novel: Paul D, whose ideas of himself, of his manhood and his race are utterly tangled up with the influences of Mr Garner, Sixo and Halle. Like Mr Garner, his first instinct is to challenge the ghost of 124, and like Sixo he can sense the ghostly presence of the Natives, but unlike Sixo he does not attempt to communicate with them.

Chapter 3 – Community, masculinity and race

The communities of *Beloved* are all disrupted in some form – Sweet Home is dominated by the institution of slavery, which renders the majority of its inhabitants into property, the chain gang Paul D finds himself a part of after attempting to kill Brandywine can barely be called a community as the interaction with his fellow inmates is intensely regulated. Even the community surrounding 124 Bluestone Road is, outside of memory, largely fractured. This is in stark contrast to the stable communities of Haven and Ruby, whereas the Convent sees its inhabitants drift in and out, along with the occasional long-time visitor, up until the attack which kills the five women there.

Sweet Home

The name Sweet Home is both parodic and not – the physical place is described as having a "shameless beauty" as Sethe remembers that it: "looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world." (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). As a place of violence and incongruent natural beauty, the plantation also embodies slavery itself. The commodification of Africans began before their arrival at the American plantations, however, the process was perfected there, particularly as the trade of slaves across the Atlantic came to a halting end. In the exploitation of black women's reproductive abilities, the slave owners could maintain a steady supply of oppressed bodies, these without a lived concept of freedom. Morrison gives an example of this in the character of Baby Suggs, who lost all eight of her children. However, Morrison also points a light at the treatment of men in this system – the use of black men as studs. In *Beloved*, Mr Garner is notable in that he

“didn’t stud his boys [. . .] or rented their sex out on other farms.” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). This is in contrast to schoolteacher who laments the loss of Sethe, as she had “at least ten breeding years left” (Morrison, Beloved). Just as motherhood is a complicated experience during and in the aftermath of slavery, so does Morrison show the difficulties – if not the impossibility – of fatherhood within a system that places no value in such things. This, in turn, suggests that some of the issues surrounding black masculinity in *Beloved,* might stem from the fact that the only example of masculinity available was Mr Garner. None of the Sweet Home Men reveal any kind of relationship to their fathers, and only Halle has a relationship with his mother.

Under Mr Garner, Sweet Home is described as being better than most plantations or farms that employed slaves. “The Garners, it seemed to her, ran a special kind of slavery, treating them like paid labor, listening to what they said, teaching what they wanted known.[. . .] Never brought them to her cabin with directions to “lay down with her,” like they did in Carolina” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 1). By treating his slaves as he does, Mr Garner effectively robs them of the desire to escape – Halle buys his mother’s freedom to allow her to sit down and rest in her old age, and even Sixo does not begin to talk of actual freedom before the sweetness is drained away by the introduction of schoolteacher. In this, Morrison shows the insidiousness behind even the most benign forms of slavery, as it convinces the Sweet Home Men that the known – being allowed to carry guns and correct or even defy Mr Garner – is better than risking the unknown beyond the borders of Sweet Home for something that only Sixo and Halle are shown to have any concept of. After the death of Mr Garner, however, Sweet Home takes on the traits that are perhaps most associated with slavery in the US.

While schoolteacher introduced ugly realities of slavery to the people of Sweet Home, it is Mrs Garner who begins the process of reminding them, as she sells Paul F to pay off the debts that surfaced in the wake of Mr Garner’s death. Morrison reminds the reader that white women were slave owners as well – that these women participated in and benefited from the system. By selling Paul F, Mrs Garner opens the door for reality to slip into the Edenic narrative of Sweet Home and revealing the truth, which shocks those who “had been isolated in a wonderful lie, dismissing Halle’s and Baby Suggs’ life before Sweet Home as bad luck. Ignorant of or amused by Sixo’s dark stories. Protected and convinced they were special.”

(Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 2). The sale of Paul F, however, is only the prelude to the total transformation of life at Sweet Home.

Sweet Home is a microcosm of the institution of slavery, from a benign owner who left plenty of room for the Sweet Home Men to perform their work and without the threat of the whip hanging over them, which is followed by the brief, confusing transition period as certain realities begin to hit home. Finally, the full brunt of cruelties, physically, mentally and emotionally, begin at the hands of a soft-spoken Christian man who fancies himself a scientist. Not only does Sweet Home cover the bases of owners, most of the Sweet Home Men are strong characters – as befits the purpose of giving the "anonymous slaves" a voice. However, any amount of strength can only stand against the full weight of the institution of slavery for so long before it buckles. The notion of a scientific basis for racism haunts not only Sethe as she struggles to not remember the lists of characteristics or the measuring of her head, it haunts the entire African American narrative, as the ideas espoused by so-called scientific racism still linger in the back of the Western consciousness. Unlike "I didn't care nothing about the measuring string. We all laughed about that—except Sixo. He didn't laugh at nothing. But I didn't care. Schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth. I thought he was a fool. And the questions he asked was the biggest foolishness of all" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 2).

The Chain Gang

If the milking of Sethe is the ultimate expression of the status of the female slave in the Antebellum South – marking her at the same level as a cow, then Morrison uses the chain gang and the space of the cage into which Paul D is placed to show the extremely low status of male slaves.

> the one thousand feet of earth—five feet deep, five feet wide, into which wooden boxes had been fitted. A door of bars that you could lift on hinges like a cage opened into three walls and a roof of scrap lumber and red dirt. Two feet of it over his head;

three feet of open trench in front of him with anything that crawled or scurried welcome to share that grave calling itself quarters (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 1).

The different expressions reflect the different qualities valued in a slave dependent on gender, particularly after the capture and transport of slaves from Africa ended. Sethe is equated to a cow, valued primarily for her ability to reproduce and provide more bodies for the profit of her owner. The chain gang is a more sustained grinding down of humanity, but Paul D's time there breaks him in a way the abuse of schoolteacher couldn't have hoped to do. The chain gang, disallowed from speaking with one another, talk instead with their eyes and, at their escape, by tugs on the chain. In "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet: Beloved, the American Chain Gang, and the Middle Passage Remix", Dennis Childs places the communal effort of the women's exorcism of 124 Bluestone Road alongside the escape of the chain gang men as "a signal of how resistance has long been the unpredictable excess of the formations of (neo)slavery" (Childs 293). The linkage between slavery, the chain gang and the modern prison system in America is a sharp rejoinder against objections to the notion of the presence of institutionalised racism.

The experiences of Paul D and the other men of the chain gang at the hands of the prison guards gives voice to the continued institutionalisation of sexual violence. "Of all the memories that haunt Morrison's characters, those that involve sexual abuse and exploitation hold particular power: rape is the trauma that forces Paul D to lock his many painful memories in a "tobacco tin" heart [. . .], that Sethe remembers more vividly than the beating that leaves a tree of scars on her back" (Barnett 418). Morrison both explicit and not in her descriptions of the rape of the chain gang prisoners, the reader is not left with any illusions even as it avoids pornographic details. "Kneeling in the mist they waited for the whim of a guard, or two, or three. Or maybe all of them wanted it. Wanted it from one prisoner in particular or none – or all [. . .] Occasionally a kneeling man chose gunshot in his head as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 1). Mixing the bleakness of rape with humour as dark and unpleasant as the box-cage Paul D spends eighty-six nights in, Morrison underlines the state of dehumanisation of the men on the chain gang, the effect of which casts a pall over Paul D's character until he can imagine a future. "Her characters' experiences symbolize the degree to which, from slavery to neoslavery, surveillance, incarceration, and collective punishment have made *normal life* tantamount to a state of siege, if not all-out war, for those branded as internal aliens or

natural-born enemies of the state on the basis of the social construct of race" (Childs 289). Some practices of the American prison system grew out of the chain gang, enabled by the rather insidious wording of the 13th Amendment of the United States' Constitution: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction".

After the escape, the men stumble across a group of sick Cherokee who name them Buffalo men and let them stay, offering not only food, but a place to stay. "The joining of the Buffalo men to the Cherokee resisters envisions the historical communion between escaped slaves and dispossessed Natives that fueled the resistance to white domination by maroon and Indian–black freedmen communities" (Kennedy 204). While Paul D does not stay, several of his companions do, cementing the bond between the two oppressed peoples. The kindness of the Cherokee – many sick and dying – is a stark contrast to the hell which the former chain gang men escaped and the victims of the same oppressive system band together. By inserting this band of rebellious Native Americans, Morrison disrupts the black and white binary of the narrative and introduces the possibility of cooperation in the face of institutionalised racism that pushes both African American and Native American to the fringes of society and the edges of ancestral lands respectively.

124 Bluestone Road

124 Bluestone road is, at the beginning of the novel, a space dominated by women – both living and dead. When Paul D enters 124, he is in a way "intruding" on a feminine space as a man. In a similar vein the ghost of Beloved intrudes on the space of the living. However, these intrusions are in many ways necessary – Paul D is a catalyst for the past which Sethe avoids, to embody itself in order to be acknowledged. "[Paul D's] reflections on manhood are muffled by a stronger female voice. Sethe's story seems to dominate, but as Morrison suggests at the end of Beloved, the meaning of Sethe's story cannot be fully understood except in relation to his. Paul D's determination to 'put his story next to hers" (Sitter 17) is not just a clever way of bringing closure to this novel. On the other hand, Sethe's story becomes a catalyst for Paul D, allowing him to reflect not only on the past, but on his own perception of

himself. The dialogue between their two stories constructs the context in which Morrison conducts a deeper dialogue with the meanings of words which have the power to liberate or enslave Schoolteacher's influence stretches beyond his person, even as a slave owner, in that his teachings live on not only in his nephews, but also in the last of the Sweet Home Men. When Sethe asks Paul D what she could have done besides killing her daughter to keep her from slavery, his answer is: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). Unconsciously draws on schoolteacher's teachings, the words suggest that Paul D is tallying up Sethe's characteristics and that like schoolteacher, he has an animal side on the paper as well as a human one.

124 functioned as a way station for the Underground Railroad, and after Emancipation continued to function as a meeting place. "A point of interaction for powerful antithetical forces: North and South, black and white, past and present, this world and the other" (Schmudde, 410). Schoolteacher's arrival brings a clash of slavery and freedom into the life of Sethe, much as Paul D's appearance draws memories and the past out of her and act as the catalyst for the killing of her daughter. This is also the place where Paul D's past meets the present when he is controlled by Beloved and the contents of his tobacco tin spills. If 124 represents the eternal present, then Beloved's utter domination of the space forces its inhabitants to either leave – as Denver does, or be slowly consumed by the past.

While outside the specific space of 124, the Bodwin siblings are part of the community that surrounds it. Morrison discusses up the importance of portrayal and perception in Beloved by questioning how even erstwhile allies, such as the Bodwins, view African Americans. She does this by showing that even among the abolitionists, the idea of Africans and African Americans as lesser, as a natural serving class, is evident:

> Denver left, but not before she had seen, sitting on a shelf by the back door, a blackboy's mouth full of money. His head was thrown back farther than a head could go, his hands were shoved in his pockets. Bulging like moons, two eyes were all the face he had above the gaping red mouth. His hair was a cluster of raised, widely spaced dots made of nail heads. And he was on his knees. His mouth, wide as a cup, held the coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small service, but could just

> as well have held buttons, pins or crab-apple jelly. Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words “At Yo Service.” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.3)

This caricature-figurine, located in the home of apparently-benevolent white abolitionists should seem like a contradiction, however, Morrison is simply underlining the deep-seated racism that a system like slavery would foster, even in well-meaning allies such as “the Bodwins [who] hated slavery worse than they hated slaves” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 1). It is clear than an Other has been firmly entrenched in the cultural psyche, an Other that shares only superficial human characteristics with themselves.

The Bodwins are representatives of the abolitionist movement – they take active part in helping the African American community. However, Mr Bodwin’s reasons echo Mr Garner’s sentiments with regards to naming the Sweet Home Men as men – “Those heady days were gone now; what remained was the sludge of ill will; dashed hopes and difficulties beyond repair [. . .] Nothing since was as stimulating as the old days of letters, petitions, meetings, debates, recruitment, quarrels, rescue and downright sedition. Yet it had worked, more or less, and when it had not, he and his sister made themselves available to circumvent obstacles [. . .] Good years, they were, full of spit and conviction.” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 3). Morrison presents Mr Bodwin as a character detached from the subject of slavery enough that is seems to him less an issue of human suffering and more as an adventure where he can play the hero. This plays very much into a White Saviour trope, wherein “a white messianic character saves a lower- or working-class, usually urban or isolated, nonwhite character from a sad fate.” (1, Hughey). This trope is defused by not only decentralising these characters, but also by examining motivations and values behind their actions. As Morrison does for “these anonymous people called slaves”, she also steps into the thoughts of the abolitionists and shows not only the admirable, but also voices the issues and dangers inherent in a masculinity that demands opposition to prove itself.

Haven

In order to understand the story of Ruby, it is necessary to understand the history of Haven, from whose crumbling remains the New Fathers set out with their families. The foundation of Haven is very much the story of an exodus, detailing the trials and tribulations of a "journey from Mississippi and two Louisiana parishes to Oklahoma [. . .] unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith. Turned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children" (Morrison, Paradise, "Ruby"). The United States is a country built on stories of journeys, from the crossing of the Bering Strait to the South American migrants hoping for a better life across the border. By placing such a narrative into the novel, Morrison draws upon not only the idea of the American Dream, she also links it to the Biblical Exodus. "The Exodus narrative [. . .] tells not only of the Hebrews' escape from Egyptian slavery under the protective eye of God, but it also sees this formerly enslaved group named God's "chosen people."" (Hartnell 109). The use of the Exodus narrative, of an oppressed minority breaking away and finding a place of their own is inherently optimistic and it can function as a counter-narrative to the impossibility of finding a better place outside of the current system, yet

> In Paradise, Morrison portrays how African Americans have houses, but not homes. Haven, this group's first settlement, and then Ruby fail to live up to their names because racist and sexist ideologies do not respect the borders established by the townspeople. These communities based on a utopian ideal are not homes because the racial ideologies that the inhabitants of Ruby sought to escape follow them within their hearts and minds. (Schur, 277)

Haven is established through hard work, the land bought from a family of State Indians and for a time, its people flourish. As the Hebrew Exodus is marked by miracles, so is the journey to Haven, primarily in the form of their supernatural guide: "A small man, seemlike, too small for the sound of his steps. He was walking away from them. Dressed in a black suit, the jacket held over his shoulder with the forefinger of his right hand. His shirt glistening white between broad suspenders" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). Well-dressed, the small man can be

viewed as symbolising the future prosperity of Haven and its inhabitants, or at least the hopes for a prosperous future.

The Old Fathers, the leading figures of the exodus and the patriarchs of the 8-Rock families, function as Moses, receiving and interpreting "the signs God gave to guide them—to watering places, to Creek with whom they could barter their labor for wagons, horses and pasture; away from prairie-dog towns fifty miles wide and Satan's malefactions: abandoned women with no belongings, rumors of riverbed gold" (Morrison, Paradise "Ruby"). That abandoned women are counted among "Satan's malefactions", shows that the idea of the sullied woman as an object of scorn is in evidence at the very beginning of the community and it is an idea that culminates in the Convent attack. By placing this idea in the mouths the founders, Morrison shows how an unchallenged idea can ferment within a group until it bursts into violence – an example of this is the original notion that Africans are little better than animals, eventually leading to the thought of taming the wild men and putting them to use for their betters.

> As in much of Morrison's work, racist ideologies transform "domestic" sites into racialized spaces due to the racism and sexism built into their foundations. Paradise thus testifies to the difficulties of building a real home within the racialized soil of the United States. (Schur, 277)

The absolute authority – however benevolent in other matters – of the Old Fathers sees no challenge to the idea of women as a threat to the cohesion of the party, nor any challenge to the view of lighter-skinned African Americans as tainted which leads to Menus Jury forced to give up his home, or the projection of promiscuity onto Billie Delia. "[As] Morrison's novel vividly shows, what initially begins as a counter narrative can come dangerously close to resembling the master narrative it set out to negate; thus the African American communal narrative traced in *Paradise* comes increasingly to look like a repetition—rather than a contestation— of a racist U.S. mainstream" (Hartnell 110). Of course, Morrison does not let the untouchable and revered image of the Old Fathers go unquestioned. As the Morgan family takes a central role in Ruby, so does Big Papa, or Zechariah Morgan feature heavily in the tale of the journey to Haven. However, before Zechariah Morgan there was Coffee and Tea, twin brothers, part ways when Tea chooses to dance while Coffee takes a bullet in the foot and

proceeds to walk two hundred miles barefoot. The story of Zechariah that Deacon tells Misner mirrors the tale of Deacon and Steward, only they are the ones with the guns, Consolata does not get the option to dance for her life, and Deacon does not walk two hundred miles.

The laws of the Old Fathers are not inscribed on stone tablets for all to see, instead they scattered throughout the novel, some explicitly and some which can only be inferred. Among the most important is the charge not to scatter, albeit it is mostly inferred from the name Zechariah, "the Zechariah who had visions? The one who saw scrolls of curses and women in baskets; the one who saw Joshua's filthy clothes changed into rich ones; who saw the result of disobedience. The punishment for not showing mercy or compassion was a scattering among all nations" (Morrison, Paradise, "Patricia"). Being a name chosen rather than given, this speculation seems reasonable, along with the strong sense of unity among the Old Fathers and their flock. "His own slave history rendering him terrified of divisions among families, he allows his fear to separate him from his brother" (Mayberry 246). This distaste for scattering can be seen in Steward Morgan as he dismisses the children of Elder Morgan as heirs to the Morgan empire, having abandoned Ruby. At a more dire note, there is "the blood rule. The one nobody admitted existed. The one established when the Mississippi flock noticed and remembered that the Disallowing came from fair-skinned colored men. Blue-eyed, gray-eyed yellowmen in good suits" (Morrison, Paradise, "Patricia"). Pat Best, who can admit to the rule as she is herself the result of her father breaking it – that is, sullying the pure blood of Haven with that of light-skinned African Americans. This purity is such a central issue that Pat suspects that – given the limited pool of pure blood – the maintenance of 8-Rock stock requires a fair bit of intermarriage with overtones of incest. "God bless the pure and holy. Amen" (Morrison, Paradise, "Divine").

While the Oven is contested territory in Ruby, it was the centre of life in Haven, a meeting place for everyday use as well as significant events such as baptism. However, Morrison reveals a reason behind the creation of such a place rather than individual ones:

> "Zechariah corralled some of the men into building a cook oven. They were proud that none of their women had ever worked in a whiteman's kitchen or nursed a white child. Although field labor was harder and carried no status, they believed the rape of women who worked in white kitchens was if not a certainty a distinct possibility—

> neither of which they could bear to contemplate. So they exchanged that danger for the relative safety of brutal work (Morrison, Paradise, “Seneca”).

Thus, the hallowed Oven is not only a symbol of the spirit of cooperation and community, it also stands as a witness to the purity of the wives, sisters and daughters of Haven, and concurrently, it speaks to the protective abilities of the men of Haven. Whether the Oven carries with it all these meanings as it is carried along to Ruby is a question of whether one believes as Steward or as Reverend Misner. According to Steward, “A cross was no better than the bearer” (Morrison, Paradise, “Divine”), whereas Misner – standing still, holding up the cross before the wedding party – encourages contemplation from the point of view of the beholder. While the New Fathers hold onto the original meaning, they are not the men who constructed it and with a kitchen in every house, the purpose – communal cooking – is rendered null and void. Had the Oven retained its status as a meeting point for more than idle teenagers, its symbolic value for the community might have held. Instead, it seems only to retain the demand for purity, not only of blood, but of allegiance to Ruby, and Ruby alone.

The end of Haven is written in its beginning – as Israel was founded by former slaves as a promised land to them by God, so Haven rose up out of the hard work of ex-slaves. But Israel was conquered by the Romans and became just another province in a vast empire, and likewise, Haven found the “unassigned land” of Oklahoma Territory turned into Oklahoma State, and the world is pressing in on the pure oasis, leading to a second exodus, albeit it is carried out by car rather than the humble struggle of walking. “As new fathers, who had fought the world, they could not (would not) be less than the Old Fathers who had outfoxed it; who had not let danger or natural evil keep them from cutting Haven out of mud and who knew enough to seal their triumph with that priority” (Morrison, Paradise). In the move from Haven to Ruby, and the shift from Old to New, Morrison questions

> how one moves from liberation to conservation [. . .] How can you make a liberationary gesture and how can it make you end up as the world’s most static conservative. These are also very religious people. They do not want to hear anything from the outside. The outside is hell, is Babylon to them. They don’t anything stirring up, they don’t want any civil rights, they don’t want any of that (Morrison, Toni Morrison: Conversations 191).

One reason for this shift might lie in the death of Ruby Morgan and her figurative rebirth as a town, perpetually smothered in the protection of her brothers. Having left behind a crumbling Haven, there is no need for anything more – Ruby is paradise, and anything that disrupts it, threatens to change it or has a whiff of the outside world, must be driven out or destroyed. That Ruby becomes a paradise for only a select few shows that paradise is not only dependent on exclusion, it also requires some measure of exploitation.

Ruby

In Ruby, the founding of Haven has attained the air of myth to such an extent, the story is merged with the Nativity and replayed every Christmas. The centrepiece of the Nativity Exodus play is the Disallowing – the event in which the Old Fathers and their families were denied entry into the town of Fairly and their pride further wounded by being offered food. Attributing this insult to the

> four figures in felt hats and too big suits stand at a table, counting giant dollar bills. The face of each one is hidden by a yellow and white mask featuring gleaming eyes and snarling lips, red as a fresh wound. Above a sign tacked to the table front, which reads INN, they count money, make slurping noises and do not stop when a parade of holy families dressed in torn clothes and moving in a slow two-step approaches them. Seven couples line up before the table of money.
>
> [. . .]
>
> Lorcas Sands leaves the group of families and in a loud but breaking voice addresses the masks: “Is there room?”
>
> The masks turn toward each other, then back to the supplicant, then back to each other, after which they roar, shaking their heads like angry lions. “Get on way from here! Get! There’s no room for you!” (Morrison, Paradise)

By repetition, the community strengthens its own identity as apart, not only from white America, but from light-skinned African Americans as well. The theatrical grotesquery of

both masks and behaviour bear some similarities to the stereotypes and caricatures of other oppressed groups, and "By denying sentient personhood to others [. . .] the caricaturist shores up the embattled bourgeois self, restoring confidence in the unstable margins of "American" individuality" (Wonham 206). Likewise, by affirming the inhumanity of the people who denied them entrance into Fairly, the people of Ruby not only strengthens the borders that keep Ruby a separate entity, but also reassures them that they were right in their views of Billie Delia's promiscuity, that they were right not to get help for Delia, and that they were right not to let Menus Jury settle down with a light-skinned girl from Virginia. The counter-narrative has shifted away from speaking truth to power and is instead focused on maintaining the hegemony of the 8-Rock families by instilling a colour-inverted, miniature system of racism or colourism.

While united in the offset from Haven, Morrison reveals some dissention in the ranks even then, albeit unspoken.

> The women nodded when the men took the Oven apart, packed, moved and reassembled it. But privately they resented the truck space given over to it—rather than a few more sacks of seed, rather than shoats or even a child's crib. Resented also the hours spent putting it back together—hours that could have been spent getting the privy door on sooner [. . .] Oh, how the men loved putting it back together; how proud it had made them, how devoted (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca").

The juxtaposition of resentment and devotion shows the deep divide between the genders in Ruby, one that neither party attempts to bridge in any meaningful capacity. The men, buoyed by their inherited powers recreates Haven, only better. Meanwhile, the women find themselves caught up in their wake, resentfully silenced by the ghosts of the Old Fathers. At the time of the attack on the Convent, the ideas of patriarchy have clearly been absorbed by some of the women of Ruby, while others, like Soane, simply keeps her thoughts to herself rather than speaking to Deacon about his drift away from the communal values of Haven and into the individuality of capitalism.

Both Haven and Ruby are isolationist to a point and both by design are not meant to welcome visitors – this is made most visible in the lack of features such as hotels or diners. However, Ruby seems particularly hostile to those not intimately familiar with its streets,

such as: "Mavis' immediate impression of the little town was how still it was though no one lived there. Except for a feed store and a savings and loan bank, it had no recognizable business district" (Morrison, Paradise, "Mavis"). By not catering to travellers, such as the white family driving for Lubbock, Texas, they ensure that any visitors without family in town can stay. However, even places like the drugstore "doesn't look like a drugstore—looks like a regular house" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). Ruby, for all its vaunted safety, relies heavily on a sort camouflage to make itself look uninteresting and not worth a stop for any white or light-skinned black passers-by. On the surface, it is simply "a sleepy town with three churches within one mile of one another but nothing to serve a traveler: no diner, no police, no gas station, no public phone, no movie house, no hospital" (Morrison, Paradise, "Ruby").

One of the primary conflicts of the novel besides the gender "war" is between the old and the young – the battle lines are not as clear as that, what with K.D., Jefferson Fleetwood and Menus Jury following the New Fathers rather than attempting to set off into the new "Out There", not an "Out There" of wilderness, but rather the world that Ruby left behind. "This fourth generation envisions history as encompassing more than the town's past. History is inclusive, fluid, and immeasurable [. . .] History is national, cultural, personal, and racial. It is primordial, Africa, slavery, freedom. And it is recent" (Furman 95). The main conflict, centred around the Oven takes on an air of sectarianism, particularly on the part of Steward Morgan who threatens to "blow [the] head off" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca") anyone who tries to make a change on the hallowed words, "'…the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). To an outsider like Misner, the difference between the Old Testament command of "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" and the New Testament encouragement to "Be the Furrow of His Brow" may seem fairly trivial – after all, the Oven stands abandoned most of the time – but the mythology surrounding the Oven has elevated it, not only in the eyes of the New Fathers and their followers, but to the young people of the town as well, albeit for very different reasons. To the New Fathers, the Oven is a monument to their connection to the past, while that connection seems more akin to a chain for the youth leading to a disturbance on the otherwise placid surface of the pond.

> young people in trouble or acting up behind every door. Arnette, home from college, wouldn't leave her bed. Harper Jury's boy, Menus, drunk every weekend since he got back from Vietnam. Roger's granddaughter, Billie Delia, disappeared into thin air.

> Jeff's wife, Sweetie, laughing, laughing at jokes no one made. K.D.'s mess with that girl living out at the Convent. Not to speak of the sass, the pout, the outright defiance of some of the others—the ones who wanted to name the Oven "such-and-such place" and who had decided that the original words on it were something that enraged Steward and Deek (Morrison, Paradise "Seneca").

Of course, an attentive reader quickly realises that most of these issues do not arise from any coordinated effort to cause trouble, and most are caused directly by the oppressive nature of Ruby and its stringent adherence to the laws of the Old Fathers.

The New Fathers are lacking in personal achievements, perhaps most notably the story of the founding of Ruby is not as either thought or spoken of as frequently as that of Haven – it is lacking the romance of communal pain. The death of Ruby is a blow, but it is a personal one to the Morgan family. "But why were there no stories to tell of themselves? About their own lives they shut up. Had nothing to say, pass on. As though past heroism was enough of a future to live by. As though, rather than children, they wanted duplicates. (Morrison, Paradise, "Divine"). Duplicates like K.D, Jefferson Fleetwood and Menus Jury, who follow the directives without question or "back-talk". However, in the words of Toni Morrison herself, the New Fathers "have nothing themselves to pass on. And that is when you freeze history, and you simply pass it off as a performed, already made, already understood, already furnished. And that kind of history is valuable, but it's not porous. If it's not porous, if it doesn't translate, then it is a museum piece" (Morrison, Toni Morrison: Conversations 164). Dissatisfied with the prospect of trapping themselves in a pastel display case, the youth rebels, taking a cue from the Black Power movements outside of Ruby, aiming for greater inclusivity and prospects beyond curating the same collection of memories for all eternity.

The power of definitions that is so clear in *Beloved* appears to some degree in *Paradise*, particularly in the Oven conflict, as the youths seek to engage with the past beyond the mythology carefully curated by the New Fathers. As Destry Beauchamp attempts to debate Deacon Morgan about the meaning of the hallowed words, he runs into a stone wall of definitions and acceptable language.

> “No ex-slave would tell us to be scared all the time. To ‘beware’ God. To always be ducking and diving, trying to look out every minute in case He’s getting ready to throw something at us, keep us down.”
>
> [. . .]
>
> “That’s my grandfather you’re talking about. Quit calling him an ex-slave like that’s all he was. He was also an ex–lieutenant governor, an ex-banker, an ex-deacon and a whole lot of other exes, and he wasn’t making his own way; he was part of a whole group making their own way.” (Morrison, Paradise, “Seneca”)

Morrison is sympathetic to Deacon – his issue with having the whole of Big Papa’s personality and history reduced to simply “ex-slave” is a painful sore, reminding the reader that as revered and as storied as Zechariah Morgan is, under slavery, society considered him nothing but a piece of property. However, none of the exes that Deacon presents are relevant to the discussion – nor does Destry seem to put any malice in the term, it was the reality of the vast majority of Zechariah Morgan’s generation. This constant policing of tone makes any useful discussion difficult if not impossible.

> In modern culture, language represents power as well as connection. Because Ruby is modernized, communal space has been lost, and the Oven is no longer literally functional [. . .] Controversy occurs, as [Morrison] illustrates by outlining arguments prior to actual Oven letters, about who controls interpretation and the application of history. Problems also arise concerning attitudes of address. Although some of the Sons, “strained and close to tears,” vehemently stand their ground, others like K.D. and Jeff Fleetwood go not-so-placidly the way of their fathers. (Mayberry, 248-249)

Dovey considers that “It would have been better for everyone if the young people had spoken softly, acknowledged their upbringing as they presented their views. But they didn’t want to discuss; they wanted to instruct” (Morrison, Paradise, “Seneca”), however Destry, Royal and their friends are attempting to engage with their elders not as their children, but as people more or less their equal in worth if not experience. The desire for the youths to speak softly also recalls the complaints against disruptive protests – as if the marches arranged by the Civil Rights Movement did not disrupt daily life on purpose as a way to gain attention to the issues at hand.

Reverend Misner's education of the younger people of Ruby is not limited to Bible verses and hymns, but also history – particularly African American history. When discussing it with Pat Best, this exchange occurs:

> "Bible class? More like a war class. Kind of military, from what I hear."
>
> "Militant, maybe. Not military."
>
> "No budding Panthers?"
>
> "Is that what you think?"
>
> "I don't know what to think."
>
> "Well, let me tell you. Unlike most of the folks here, we read newspapers and different kinds of books. We keep up. And yes, we discuss strategies of defense. Not aggression. Defense." (Morrison, Paradise, "Patricia")

Though the Black Panther Party's work extended far beyond marching with guns, this image has become so prevalent that even in an all-black town, that is the only think that is associated with the group. The attitude of Ruby is generally to avoid rocking the boat with regards to whites, and so, even to one of the less traditional people of the town, the measures taken by the Black Panthers would seem as drawing unnecessary attention to oneself. Yet this is exactly what the young people of Ruby want – to step out of the shadows and join the rest of the African American people in their struggle against white hegemony.

Besides the words on the Oven, another sign of rebellion – in more ways than one – is "the fist, jet black with red fingernails, painted on the back wall of the Oven. Nobody claimed responsibility—but more shocking than collective denial was the refusal to remove it [. . .] The clenched fingers, red-tipped and thrust sideways, not up (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). Differing from the traditional fist, the red nails might signify it as a female fist, underlining the need for reform not only in the racial sense, but a shift in the perception of gender – the two being intrinsically linked in the consciousness of Ruby. After all, the purity of the 8 Rock families depends on the purity of their women. Additionally, the fist is turned sideways – perhaps signalling that the fight must begin at home rather than aiming at the greater struggle outside of the invisible walls of Ruby. "One generation's paradise may be the next generation's prison. An inherited paradise is lifeless, a community frozen in time. It might provide a measure of security for its creators, but it also forestalls the possibility of social

evolution and regeneration for everyone" (Furman, 94). This lifelessness is evident in the dwindling of the 8 Rock families, Jefferson and Sweetie Fleetwood have four children, but they are all sick – likely afflicted with some unnamed and deforming congenital disease. The sons of Deacon and Soane Morgan are killed in Vietnam. Steward and Dovey are infertile, and with the death of Billy Cato – that family line ended.

The Convent

In the opening chapter of *Paradise*, the motivation for the attack on the Convent is a list of tragedies, or "Outrages that had been accumulating all along took shape as evidence. A mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold-eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in one family" (Morrison, Paradise, "Ruby") and so on. However, through the viewpoint of Lone DuPres, more personal reasons are revealed, such as Menus Jury: "Getting rid of some unattached women who had wiped up after him, washed his drawers, removed his vomit, listened to his curses as well as his sobs might convince him for a while that he was truly a man" (Morrison, Paradise, "Lone"). Arnold and Jefferson Fleetwood have transferred the reason for "Sweetie's children" away from the dangers of tangled branches of Ruby's family trees or the unreachable Veterans Administration and onto the local scapegoats. As Mayberry put it, they "perceive the problem as anything but their own blood" (Mayberry 251). As the centrepiece of the gender conflict in *Paradise*, the attackers of the Convent are introduced in a curious paragraph: "They are nine, over twice the number of the women they are obliged to stampede or kill and they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, a palm leaf cross, handcuffs, Mace and sunglasses, along with clean, handsome guns." (Morrison, Paradise, "Ruby"). This introduction comes at the heels of the oft-quoted line "They shoot the white girl first" (Morrison, Paradise, "Ruby").

Chapter conclusion

The communities Morrison portrays in *Beloved* and *Paradise* are widely different. Where the exclusively black communities of Haven and Ruby are troubled by notions of racial purity and stagnant ideas on gender and sexual purity, 124 is a community of three that has to relearn how to exist within the surrounding society whilst labouring under the strain of ghosts of the past. The chain gang present a tale of horrors that match, if not surpass the latter days of Sweet Home, when racial sciences tore at the humanity of Sethe. Like 124, the Convent is a female-dominated space that is invaded by men – although this invasion is closer to schoolteacher than Paul D. In both cases, the male mentality is one of protectiveness – Paul D exorcises Beloved to protect Sethe from its spite, whereas the men of Ruby

Chapter 4 – Comparisons

While thorough examinations of individual characters do open up avenues of both understanding their gender performativity or how situations concerning race or gender intersect with one another, the two novels bookend an informal trilogy, and as such have certain themes in common that are visible upon comparisons between characters, communities or events.

Individual comparisons

While there are no white men of any significance in *Paradise* with which to compare the two slave owners of *Beloved*, their displays of power can be measured up against the manner in which Deacon and Steward Morgan comport themselves. There is, of course, no comparison in terms of systemic power – the Morgans do not have power beyond the boundaries of Ruby excepting what their money can buy, whereas federal laws props up the slave owners far beyond the a pair of town-leaders. In terms of systemic power, therefor, there is truly no comparison. However, there is a tendency towards violence that seems to be shared between at least Steward Morgan and Mr Garner – though whereas Mr Garner goes out to antagonise his neighbours, Steward ultimately shoots his brother's former lover. The motives behind these actions are wildly different, of course. Mr Garner, with the self-assuredness of a man who can claim to own other men rides away from Sweet Home with the State in his back. When Steward and Deacon, K.D., Menus Jury and the others attack, there is a twisted

protective notion woven in between the myriad of reasons for the attack. Schoolteacher, in his unique horror have no counterparts among the characters of *Paradise*.

Paul D takes up more space of *Beloved* than any of the characters of *Paradise* are permitted, though given the vast number of named people populating that novel, this is no great wonder. The horrors through which Paul D lives are far in the past for the people of Ruby, and while the Old Fathers were former slaves, their characters are so diffuse and so coagulated into a single entity named the Old Fathers, that only Zechariah Morgan stands out, and apart from that strange mix of apparent pride and shame that sees him walking away from his brother forever. Paul D's recoiling from Sethe after learning of her killing her child can be read in a similar manner – that Paul D recoils not from the act itself, but the possibility that, were he in her position, his own love might be thick enough to do the same thing. Reverend Misner, like Paul D, has the qualities of a good listener, which in turn suggests great personal stores of empathy.

Halle never steps foot off Sweet Home beyond his work to free his mother, his days are so filled up with work that "For years [Halle and Sethe] saw each other in full daylight only on Sundays. The rest of the time they spoke or touched or ate in darkness. Predawn darkness and the afterlight of sunset" (Morrison, Beloved, Ch. 1). Although her character has not been examined at length, this devotion is reminiscent of Sweetie Fleetwood's unceasing caretaking of her children – to the extent that seeing her outside the house is cause for surprise, "she was moving resolutely north, where Deek knew there was nothing for seventeen miles. What could the sweetest girl, named for her nature, be doing coatless on a chilly October morning that far from the home she had not stepped out of since 1967?" (Morrison, Paradise, "Seneca"). On the other hand, Halle's insights into the nature of slavery seems closer to Misner and his knowledge of the issues faced by African Americans outside of Ruby's relative safety.

As the freest of the Sweet Home Men before their attempted escape, Sixo's love for his Thirty-Mile Woman echoes in Menus Jury and his "pretty redbone girl they told him was not good enough for him; said she was more like a fast woman than a bride. He let out like he drank because of what Vietnam had done to him, but Lone thought the pretty redbone girl's loss was more to the point." (Morrison, Paradise, "Lone"). While both relationships are

unsanctioned, Sixo, with his open bloodlines and his stories has more agency than the son of a prominent family of a free all-black town. Through the pressure cooker that is the community of Ruby and its expectations, Menus Jury finds himself unable to summon the courage to defy his father and leave town, choosing instead to obey and give up not only the house he had bought, but the redbone woman.

Misner, whose concept of love is “unmotivated respect” bears a resemblance to Baby Suggs prior to her retreat from the world. His attempts to teach “That whites not only had no patent on Christianity; they were often its obstacle. That Jesus had been freed from white religion, and he wanted these kids to know that they did not have to beg for respect; it was already in them, and they needed only to display it.” (Morrison, Paradise, “Patricia”). This resembles Baby Suggs’ call for the people to love themselves, “And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up.” (Morrison, Beloved, Ch.1). The call to self-love is a powerful thread running through the novels, easily lost in the horrors or slavery, or in the small-town drama.

Community comparisons

Though certainly a thought utterly perverse to the sensibilities of its inhabitants, Ruby shares certain traits with Sweet Home, and only under the more or less benign power of Mr Garner – not in function, certainly, although the industrious women praised by Deacon are viewed by his nephew in a somewhat different light: “Aunt Soane worked thread like a prisoner: daily, methodically, for free, producing more lace than could ever be practical” (Morrison, Paradise, “Grace”). It is certainly not slave work, but the intensity with which it is described resembles the untiring labour of Halle. As to the similarities between the two communities – both are at the mercy of leaders who exhibit sometimes extreme masculine traits such as tendencies towards violence or aggression. There is also a sense of being trapped within Ruby for certain characters – Sweetie is tied by her love for her children, Menus Jury’s overpowering father ensured his son remaining, albeit as an alcoholic, Pat Best, who finds herself absorbing the values of the town against her own will, and the young people

who feel the need to actively rebel against the town's excessive focus on its past to the detriment to its future. Meanwhile, Sweet Home – at least under Mr Garner – kept its slave tied by the virtue of being better than the surrounding farms, by being the best or only alternative its inmates knew of, and by granting certain rights – the right to be called a man, the right to carry a gun and the right to disagree with Mr Garner himself. Of course, the race dynamics are reversed – as Ruby privileges the dark 8 Rock families whereas all true power of definition rests with the white slave owners. Within the novels, both these places are compared to decidedly feminine spaces, 124 in the case of *Beloved* and the Convent for *Paradise.* The Convent is – while inhabited – a vibrant, if somewhat madcap place, with a large, welcoming kitchen. 124, once a meeting place for the surrounding area as well as for visitors, has, under the yoke of the baby ghost been reduced to a quiet household of two (three of one counts the ghost). There are masculine intrusions in both cases – the attackers from Ruby and schoolteachers and his fellow horsemen from Sweet Home, yet both have counterexamples of different modes of masculinity to weigh against the negatives.

Conclusion

In her 1998 review of *Paradise*, "'Books of the Times: Worthy Women, Unredeemable Men", Michiko Kakutani wrote:

> 'Paradise," Toni Morrison's latest novel -- and her first since winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 -- addresses the same great themes of her 1987 masterpiece, "Beloved": the loss of innocence, the paralyzing power of ancient memories and the difficulty of accepting loss and change and pain. It, too, deals with the blighted legacy of slavery [. . .] Unfortunately, "Paradise" is everything that "Beloved" was not: it's a heavy-handed, schematic piece of writing, thoroughly lacking in the novelistic magic Ms. Morrison has wielded so effortlessly in the past. It's a contrived, formulaic book that mechanically pits men against women, old against young, the past against the present.

Like the Stanley Crouch's review quoted in the introduction of this work, Kakutani is highly critical to Morrison's *Paradise*. Whether one agrees with the notion of Paradise being formulaic or not, *Paradise* hosts a great many characters whose expression of gender varies in only the smallest margins reflecting the narrowness of Ruby as a setting. On the other hand, the characters of *Beloved,* whose long journeys from slavery to freedom takes them through different situations as well as putting them in contact with different characters have a somewhat richer expression. This might also relate simply to the very large number of characters in *Paradise*, whose presentations are twisted by their relationships to one another, and other people's relationships to them.

Morrison in "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" warns that "When you kill the ancestor you kill yourself " (Morrison, "Rootedness" 402), yet the reader feels compelled to root for the rebellious youths of Ruby that seems to want to do just that. However, the ancestor – the Old Fathers – have been replaced by pastiches, exaggerated caricatures of extreme moral rectitude whose demands cannot possibly be met. Thus, what the young people

of Ruby in truth are attempting is the difficult task of reimagining and reconfiguring a calcified and hallowed past despite the threats from their elders. The tension in Ruby does not – as so many of its inhabitants are convinced – come from the Convent, it is coming from the strain of holding on to a single vision of the past. In wishing to take part in the world, the young people of Ruby – too young, too unmarried and too obstinate to receive any kind of appellation – strive towards that ephemeral thing that was lost at Martin Luther King Jr's death, that thing that was replaced by statuary and street names. Morrison never names it, but one might speculate that there was a drive, a spirit that could have pushed for something more than just legislative changes, that might have pushed forth a message of the beauty of black bodies, the need for self-love and the need for a new system, divorced from the racist institutions that proliferate.

In *Paradise,* Morrison's main conflicts are not necessarily along the gender lines – far more time is spent examining the issues of revering history to the point that any evolution on the concept of gender and gender roles and acceptable behaviour. The New Fathers attempt to hold onto the power that comes with their inherited positions, built on rigid expectations of both race and gender. However, the world – with its new ideas of what it means to be a man, and what it means to be black – can't be kept away, and conflict arises. This conflict is not about men and women, or young and old, instead it is about the ability to adapt to a changing world – for better or worse – and the need to stick to the well-trodden path and maintain the past. In this regard, the young men and women of Ruby are not only trying to re-invent an Oven that is not the gathering place of anyone anymore, they are trying to re-invent the ideals it represents, to recontextualise the history that represses the town and its inhabitants. To the New Fathers and their "duplicates" – formed through both social and parental pressures – this means a shift in the balance of power, as well as what they perceive as a way of changing history, not simply looking at that history from a different angle. The ending of the novel is ultimately ambiguous with regards to the fate of Ruby – Steward has taken up training K.D., Deacon has set out on the long path of redemption and Misner decides to stay in Ruby.

Beloved wrestles with its ancestor – her name is Beloved, she experienced the Middle Passage, and yet she is also Sethe's baby, with specific memories to prove this. One terrible act opens up the memories to another – this is an idea played out not only in Beloved's strange duality, it reappears in her interactions with Paul D. The sexual violation and the

helplessness Paul D experiences under Beloved's rule of 124 Bluestone Road forces him to remember the things he had locked away. Enslaved, Paul D endured both the powerlessness of not belonging to himself, being bought and sold like a piece of furniture. Like Beloved, schoolteacher or Brandywine or the chain gang guards could move him. Like Beloved, the guards at the chain gang camp used him for their own pleasure. This experience breaks the tobacco tin, revealing his "Red heart" (Morrison, Beloved Ch.1). Morrison's exploration of Paul D's character counters stereotypes of the thuggish criminal, the brute, the primitive, as Paul D finds his heart – once boxed away and untouchable – exposed and raw against the horrors he has experienced, as he finds himself pushed away from the one person with whom he could share his story and who might understand it. In *Beloved*, Morrison questions how the black man came to be characterised as animalistic, when white slave owners behaved with the unbridled cruelties all too visible throughout slave narratives, when European sailors transported hundreds of thousands, millions of black men and women in gruesome conditions.

The complicated duality of Beloved is elsewhere within the novel as well, as Mr Garner and schoolteacher ostensibly appear to be two markedly different characters – both in their gender performativity and in their treatment of the Sweet Home Men – yet they both belong to the same system, and they both benefit from said system. A third spoke of that wheel offsetting the binary is Mr Bodwin and his sister. As abolitionists they are genuinely helpful to Sethe and other escaped slaves, yet they are still affected by the narratives surrounding Africans and African Americans of that time. Yet, despite their importance – positive or negative – to the community of Sweet Home and the characters therein Morrison rarely allows these characters to take the centre stage, Mr Garner and schoolteacher both features primarily in memories, and their points of view are hardly explored. By turning the lens over to the perspective of the enslaved rather than their enslavers, or the white abolitionists, Morrison can explore the trauma more fully.

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