"Everything about Her Had Two Sides to It": The Foreigner's Home in Toni Morrison's "Paradise"

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“Everything about her had two sides to it”: The Foreigner’s Home in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*

Toni Morrison knew in 2005 that she would soon find yet another way of using her art to cross continents and contents. The writer who presents Reverend Misner’s sudden decision to stay with Ruby not as straightforward defeat but as the circular triumph of returning to and thus recognizing beginnings, informed members of the Morrison Society after the Cincinnati opening of the Margaret Garner Opera, libretto by Toni Morrison, that supercilious Louvre directors had requested she guest curate an exhibit which she tentatively planned to call “Home.” Dryly attributing the administrators’ selection of a black artist to the current unrest in Paris of former colonies, Morrison noted the transnational significance of her topic in the face of contemporary alienation. She also chuckled that one of her sons half-jokingly suggested she incorporate a sample pyramid into her show. Outfitted by Egyptian royalty right down to the slaves deemed requisite to insure civilized life after death, live burial of others certainly confirms the extremes to which people will go to get home.1

Morrison’s *Paradise* (1997) predicts her ongoing fascination with the movement and relationship between host and home. These paired, twinned concepts become the primary figure for capturing the delicate but necessary balance between community insider and outsider, the illusory, constantly shifting quality of home despite a human yearning for permanence.2 The idea of twins suggests the possibility of difference alongside belonging, found ultimately within the fluctuating home of the individual psyche. While *Paradise* presents multiple permutations of blood twinning in the persons of the Morgan brothers Coffee and Tea; Zechariah Morgan’s grandsons Deacon and Steward; their wives Dovey and Soane, sisters who come to “look more alike than [their husbands] do”; Merle and Perle Albright; Brood and Apollo Poole, various additional unrelated characters exist as each other’s close opposites: Mavis and Gigi; Arnette and Billie Delia; Seneca and Pallas; Reverends Cary and Pulliam; even the convent/mansion and the town of Ruby (12).

Acknowledging the common practice by many lonely or solitary children of creating a make-believe double, Morrison extends her trope further when both Dovey Morgan and Consolata Sosa entertain what skeptics might call imaginary friends. Dovey’s friend enters her garden only in the light of day, and Connie’s cowboy comes at night to sit on her kitchen steps. Especially in Connie’s case, Morrison riff’s on the work of a fellow writer, perhaps also a friend.3 A Princeton University colleague of Joyce Carol Oates since 1989, Morrison would undoubtedly be familiar with Oates’s frequently anthologized short story “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” (1970) in which Arnold Friend pays a call on fifteen-year-old Connie. Although Morrison converts Connie’s youthful reveries into those of middle-aged women, both writers convey the essence of transnationalism reflected by the Louvre exhibit that juxtaposed canonical with contemporary art—the phenomenon of being simultaneously a foreigner and at home. All figures of the nineteen-sixties, the friends in *Paradise* play on or invert aspects of Arnold Friend: his shaggy hair, mirrored sunglasses, striking footwear, knowing ways, and musical language. Oates’s white girl, lacking a solid sense of self and seduced by popular love songs, looks to an ominous stranger for a home outside herself. Because she feels like an outsider in her own...
body, alienated from family and friends, she longs for the dangerous freedom offered by a destructive male. Learning painfully that “Most scary things is inside,” Morrison’s black women, on the other hand, accept the blissfully impermanent home within themselves as they embrace their benign opposites (Paradise 39). Oates maintains that she drew inspiration for “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” from Bob Dylan’s song “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue” (1965). Dedicated to the folk-rock musician and songwriter, her story is also loosely based on the experiences of serial killer Charles Schmidt, known as “The Pied Piper of Tucson.” All three situations involve adolescents who have already served up on a silver platter their “baked Alaska breasts,” that is to say, given over their feminine selves to what Morrison maintains in The Bluest Eye as perpetually counterproductive escapism; the serial killers of idealized physical beauty and romantic love render them prime prey for unstable men (Paradise 73). Oates begins her story with Connie’s “quick, nervous giggling habit” of glancing into mirrors and “checking other people’s faces to make sure her own was all right.” Convinced that being pretty “was everything,” surrounded by an envious, nagging mother, a deliberately dowdy older sister, and an emotionally detached father, Oates’s Connie prefigures Paradise girls like Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas, who succumb to impossible Western ideals about physical beauty. However, Connie becomes even more lost to the “trashy daydreams” provoked by popular music (752). Alternatively over-stimulated and absorbed by the sounds that, like the background music at a church service, “made everything so good” (753), Connie and her friends correspond with Pauline’s education into romantic love via hymns and spirituals in The Bluest Eye and forecast Paradises descriptions of the “organized trenches of high school,” the seats of cruelty “decked out in juvenile glee” where “final wars are waged” (254).

The sexual experimentation of a fifteen-year-old female escalates from making out in a back alley with awkwardly insensitive Eddie to forsaking her home for the “boy” with shaggy black hair, in a convertible jalopy painted gold,” who turns out to be much older and more sinister than his shabbily hip clothes date him (754). Appearing in her driveway precisely as the rest of her family leaves for the day, wearing scruffy, oddly angled boots that suggest a deformed foot (or cloven hoof) and sunglasses that reflect everything in miniature, accompanied by a sleazy sidekick who proposes they cut all outside communication by pulling out the phone, Arnold cultivates and embodies the incantation of Connie’s own self-destructive insecurities. For her, and for many teenage girls, popular music drowns out religious fervor to generate an imaginative world of unfulfilled desire, which “originate[s] in envy, thrive[s] in insecurity, and end[s] in disillusionment.”5 Even as she obsesses about the males she meets at the drive-in restaurant or shopping mall, “all the boys fell back and dissolved into a single face that was not even a face, but an idea, a feeling, mixed up with the urgent insistent pounding of the music and the humid night air of July.” With a mocking wag of his finger, Arnold translates this feeling into words: “Gonna get you, baby.” Love, for Connie, is “sweet, gentle, the way it was in movies and promised in songs,” anticipating a “glow of slow-pulsed joy that seemed to rise mysteriously out of the music itself” and making reality “look small” (754-55). Oates confirms that the empty values of the adult world surrounding Connie along with the subtle violence of her teenage subculture cause her to indulge disturbing romantic fantasies. Even though Arnold threatens the lives of her family if she does not come out her door, we understand she comes to believe with him that “It’s all over for [her] here” as the erotic excitement of fear succumbs to a numbing void. Where Connie has been is clearly the “cardboard box” of her “daddy’s house”; where she is going Oates renders indefinite. Her language leads us to conclude, however, that this “sweet little blue-eyed girl,” whose eyes happen to be brown, leaves her home to go into a vast sunlit land of male-imposed darkness. What else is there for a “girl like [Connie] but to be sweet and pretty and give in?—and get away before her people come back?” (763-64).
Taking its cue from Bob Dylan’s song, which claims that “the vagabond who’s rapping at your door / Is standing in the clothes that you once wore,” Oates story suggests that Connie’s friendly enemy may actually be a manifestation of herself. His face is “a familiar face, somehow”; he dresses “the way all of them dressed,” and he “wasn’t tall, only an inch or so taller than she would be if she came down to him” (757). Presented as ambiguously as Connie herself, Arnold, in fact, suggests a foreboding doppelganger to the girl because:

Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home: her walk that could be childlike and bobbing, or languid enough to make anyone think she was hearing music in her head, her mouth which was pale and smirking most of the time, but bright and pink on these evenings out, her laugh which was cynical and drawling at home—“Ha, ha, very funny”—but high-pitched and nervous anywhere else, like the jingling of the charms on her bracelet. (753)

“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” explains why girls from good homes might willingly go with a cult fanatic or serial killer like the Pied Piper of Tucson. White male values promoting physical beauty and romantic love reduce America’s Connies to “I-give” women uncomfortable with their bodies and perpetually driven to hope for a perfect home away from home (Paradise 73). As it affirms that home lies within, however, and always has at least two sides to it, Morrison’s Paradise provides young women with protection from trashy daydreams and, thus, from predatory males.

Revealing certain similarities to Oates’s character, Morrison’s friends differ from Arnold Friend in that they embody supportive, internally focused alter-egos rather than external serial killers. Morrison inverts the figure to contrast the controlling maleness to which her culture programs the white girl to submit with the feminine masculinity endorsed and employed as self-defense by middle-aged black women. One woman with such an androgynous friend is Dovey Blackhorse Morgan who, together with her sister Soane, descends from an African Indian patriarch of the all-black town of Haven and marries one half of the set of banker twins and eight-rock New Father founders of Ruby, Oklahoma.7 Dovey first appears as she lies in bed on her stomach, refusing to look out the window every time something scratches on the pane because she knows her friend never comes at night. She forces herself to consider instead whether she will feed her husband garden or canned peas the next day, a question which turns her thoughts to Steward’s losses. Seriously worried as a new bride about his notorious gustatory pickiness, laughingly reassured by her sister, “If he’s satisfied in bed, the table won’t mean a thing,” Dovey opts now for the canned peas because “Not a taste bud in Steward’s mouth could tell the difference.” The young soldier newly discharged from World War II cares far more than his twin about realizing the exact details of his dreams about down-home food. However, “Blue Boy packed in his cheek for twenty years first narrowed his taste to a craving for spices, then reduced it altogether to a single demand for hot pepper” (81).

Morrison employs food imagery here to suggest a feminine method of weighing the results of competitive, single-minded masculine attitudes toward gain and loss. Never a proponent of material means to satisfaction, she insists with cook Julia Child and Beloved’s Baby Suggs on the value of experiencing rather than owning good things as well as the dangers of over-packing anything “too much” (Beloved 137-38). Dovey muses that “Almost always, these nights, when [she] thought about her husband, it was in terms of what he had lost” (82). While too much tobacco dulls his taste buds, additional excess includes a rabidly narrow political conservatism that loses for him a statewide church election, sold rights to natural gas wells shrinking his ranch and destroying the trees that made it beautiful, and ultimately, the pain of sterility spurring quarrels with Ruby’s youth that lead him to wonder if the current generation “would have to be sacrificed to get to the next one” (94). Steward predictably gets the last word in a heated discussion between the fathers and children.
of Ruby over the meaning of letters on a community icon: "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." "Chilled by her husband's threat" as well as the generation gap it deepens, Dovey can only look down and wonder "what visible shape his loss would take now" (87).8

She appears even more significantly moved, however, by that which normally remains invisible to the naked eye. Convinced that Steward's personal losses occur in direct proportion to his gains in property and power, she summons a young

White male values promoting physical beauty and romantic love reduce America's Connies to "I-give" women uncomfortable with their bodies and perpetually driven to hope for a perfect home away from home. As it affirms that home lies within, however, and always has at least two sides to it, Morrison's Paradise provides young women with protection from trashy daydreams and, thus, from predatory males.

friend with whom she can talk over her troubles. If Arnold Friend arrives at Connie's house in a garish gold jalopy, "a trembling highway of persimmon-colored wings" announces the entrance of Dovey's Friend (91). The first image connotes noisy, costly, steel-hard mechanization while the second emphasizes the quietly inexpensive, the warmly, delicately natural. Both events, however, suggest flight or freedom to the restricted females observing them, Connie behind her screened door and Dovey in her garden rocking chair. The man walking "straight and quickly" through the yard of the tiny foreclosed house that Dovey, like Connie, does not own appears, like Arnold, to know exactly where he is going, though he graciously stops to chat, raising a hand and smiling his greeting without moving his lips. His other connections to Arnold Friend include distinctively shaggy hair and a deceptively muscular appearance. Her friend's forearms, for example, "smoothly muscled, made [Dovey] reconsider the impression she got from his face: that he was underfed" (91).

Like Oates, Morrison continues to emphasize the supernatural power of this male visitation. Arnold Friend ominously claims to already know "[Connie's] name and all about [her], lots of things"; he dominates their conversation by using, among other intimidating techniques, the romantic clichés of the songs she listens to in order to manipulate her (788). Her gentle, unassuming friend, however, takes Dovey seriously enough to "sit on his heels before her" while she talks "nonsense" to him: "Things she didn't know were on her mind. Pleasures, worries, things unrelated to the world's serious issues." Although she feels herself "babbling," her partner appears "to be listening earnestly, carefully to every word" (92). As Connie begins to notice uneasily that Arnold "wasn't a kid, he was much older—thirty maybe more," that is twice her own age, she notes the equally shockingly disjointed appearance of his unpleasant associate. Dovey, on the other hand, supposes her friend to be at least twenty years her junior, making his age also about thirty and a reason she keeps his singular visits to herself. Unlike the two-against-one combo Arnold and Ellie bring to bear on Connie, Dovey's Friend seems "hers alone."9 She knows better than to attempt to control his visits, but remains content that "he had and would come by there—for a chat, a bite, cool water on a parched afternoon." Fearing only that someone else would come with him, claim him, or call his name, she need not worry. Dovey divines that, so long as she does not ask who he is or in any way attempt to pin him down, her friend will do her bidding. Only conversations with her sister Soane equal Dovey's pleasure in his company.
Far different from the devilishly threatening, mind- and body-numbing qualities of Arnold F(r)iend, the visits by Dovey's Friend turn out to be a comforting form of personal epiphany and physical release. The orange-red color of the butterfly sign announcing his initial appearance, as well as his erratic monthly calls, suggest that Morrison names her friend to play comically on the euphemism with which many coy mistresses have been known to identify their menstrual cycles. Of menopausal age, Dovey Morgan shares in the greatest of her husband's losses when both learn in 1964 after Steward turns forty that "neither could ever have children." But while her adolescent culture tempts Oates's Connie to drown her disappointments in hard-driving music and look fearfully out on life through the tiny holes in a screened door, Dovey rocks in her garden even as she remains grounded. The unexpected visits of her friend serve to console her at the same time they encourage her to debate both sides of unanswerable questions that block her sleep. Her kind of feminine "nonsense" actually involves the most serious of human issues: "aside from giving up his wealth, can a rich man be a good one?" (93).

Dovey and company confirm Morrison's twin-centered approach to art and life. She almost never limits her audience to a single perception of a character or attitude. Despite his considerable loss of taste, for example, Steward, as Soane predicts before his wedding to Dovey, retains the good sense to thoroughly enjoy the sight of his wife's body in any kind of casing—and when she remains in the Ruby house to anticipate her friend's visit, sleep for him at the ranch becomes impossible without the fragrance of her hair. Dovey can be viewed, like the connotations of her name, as gentle, peaceable, and conciliatory; on the other hand, she can be hawk-like in her helpfulness. Though she stops Ruby's reputed wild-child on the street to wipe what she believes to be "make-up from Billie Delia's rosy lips," Dovey does so "with a smile and no hateful lecture." Unaware that Billie has refrained from sex long after her best friend Arnette (who, contrary to popular opinion, remains no virgin) because Billie cannot choose between the Poole brothers, Apollo and Brood, Dovey apologizes nonetheless "when her handkerchief came away clean" (151). "Furious" at Steward for "bolting the house as though it were a bank too," shushing him when he disrespects Roger Best's racially mixed wife Delia, this middle-aged female looks forward to the light her boyfriend helps her shed during her fairly frequent desires to examine both sides of an issue (90).

We might initially assess as weak her inability to make up her mind about such things as "who or which side was right" in the heated Oven debate. She herself acknowledges that, in discussions with others, she tends "to agree with whomever she listens to" (87). We might also question her lack of discretion. Dovey, alone of all the Ruby matriarchs, allows local historian Pat Best the Morgan bible "for weeks." Protective of their family secrets, the rest "narrowed their eyes before smiling and offering to freshen [Pat's] coffee" (187-88). It is Dovey, however, who single-mindedly pleads for others' open-mindedness in order to save Pat's mother from unnecessarily dying in childbirth. Described by Steward as "the dung we leaving behind," beautiful Delia of the light-brown hair and sunlit skin finds her plight ignored by Ruby's eight-rock New Fathers when the midwives cannot deliver a child that comes with legs folded underneath and too soon. Then accommodating Dovey Morgan turns tough as she determinedly goes begging to every house within walking distance. Although the help she eventually acquires for Delia arrives too late, the crying woman will not give up even as head- upon head-of- household refuses transportation to the hospital (197-98). At the end of the novel, the tables are turned when Steward has to wait on Dovey to come round, which he expects her to do since she exhibits a noticeable coolness towards her beloved sister over who caused a split between their husbands. The other half that Morrison creates for Ruby's Dovey could indicate the sporadic but welcomed men/menses of a middle-aged woman, the son she yearns for but never has, and/or the masculine part of herself. In contrast
to the impossibly ideal home with him, however, that Arnold Friend holds out to seduce young Connie, the paradise Dovey’s man Friend provides, whatever he represents, remains imperfect and found only inside her.

Morrison signals even more clearly an inverted kinship between Oates’s sinister character and Consolata Sosa’s cowboy. Familiarly called by her younger intimates the abbreviated name Oates assigns to a fifteen-year-old girl, sixty-year-old Connie takes back the full name that represents her reborn self when the blinded and grieving servant decides to get off her cot to do something useful or die lying on it. As her formal name change indicates, she will make herself at home by providing stiff consolation to four psychologically damaged women if they act upon her Sosa/say-so. Consolata comes to the place known locally as “the Convent,” built originally as a sexual playpen for an embezzler on the run, when Sister Mary Magna snatches her at nine years old from the debris and excrement in which she sits on a Portuguese street. Having fallen in love with the Gypsy child’s sea-green eyes, “smoky, sundown skin,” “tea-colored hair,” or, more likely, docility, the headstrong nun takes her along as a ward when Mary Magna assumes her new post at the asylum/boarding school in “some desolate part of the American West,” where “stilled Arapaho girls . . . sat and learned to forget” (223-24, 4).10 For thirty years, Consolata works hard at the mansion turned convent near the all-black town of Ruby, Oklahoma to “become and remain Mary Magna’s pride, one of her singular accomplishments in a life-time of teaching, nurturing and tending in places with names the nun’s own parents had never heard of and could not repeat until their daughter pronounced them.” In so doing, Consolata learns to forget the sights and sounds of her physical past and embody the nun’s consolation for her own sacrificial life until this middle-aged Connie meets “the living man” (224-25).

Morrison echoes Oates in proposing two reasons why Connie so willingly gives herself over to a destructive affair with a demigod she creates, in this case adultery with one of Ruby’s upright Morgan twins: distorted love and the sounds of “Sha sha sha.” Oates’s Connie grows up without adult attention, diminished by malls, movies, and machines. Lifted from a fever induced by street garbage, Consolata goes straight from the hospital that inoculates her into a magical world of “toilets that swirled water clear enough to drink; soft white bread already sliced in its wrapper; milk in glass bottles; and all through the day every day the gorgeous [Latin] language made especially for talking to heaven,” spoken by a “beautiful framed face” whose lake-blue eyes contained a worry worth dying for. Drawn daily to refresh the sight of concern in an adult’s face, Consolata “slept in the pantry, scrubbed tile, fed chickens, prayed, peeled, gardened, canned and laundered.” She learns patience by watching the coffee brew, helps annihilate traces of beauty embraced by the raucous embezzler but rejected by the pious nuns (such as marble statues of naked lovers and alabaster vagina ashtrays), cultivates the stinging hot peppers made famous by the convent, and takes classes with the Indian girls, though she forms no attachments to them. In short, Mary Magna’s steady blue-eyed gaze teaches Morrison’s Connie to dedicate herself not to dangerous sex but to the Mariae Virginia “of the bleeding heart and bottomless love.”11 If Oates’s teenager finds solace from empty adult values through the vapid promises of popular erotic culture, for thirty years Consolata “offered her body and her soul to God’s Son and His Mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself.” However, “thirty years of surrender to the living God cracked like a pullet’s egg when she met the living man” (224-25).

Even the oppressively romantic love she absorbs from Mary Magna’s “cool blue light” cannot completely erase Connie’s childhood memories of a scalding sun and dark-skinned men, “dancing with women in the streets to music beating like an infuriated heart, torsos still, hips making small circles above legs moving so rapidly it was fruitless to decipher how such ease was possible.” When she comes upon recollections of these sights and sounds in the hamlet of Ruby, Oklahoma, a yearning
for her home in the loud, glittering city overcomes the remembered stench of street
garbage. Instead of Oates's pop radio lyrics luring Connie away from her people,
Morrison uses nonverbal language to invoke Connie's site of memory and describe
her lovemaking with Deacon Morgan: "Sha sha sha." As she waits for Mary Magna
to emerge from the pharmacy carrying the aluminum chloride with which she makes
deodorant and the bolts of antiseptic cotton that serve as pads for the wayward
girls' menstrual periods, along with the needles that keep their fingers busy, Connie
spots "a lean young man astride one horse, leading another." Her gaze riveted to his
wide flat hat, sweat-soaked shirt, and the rocking of his hips in the saddle, she feels
the "wing of a feathered thing, undead, flutter[ing] in her stomach" when she sees
his profile. "Sha sha sha" (226).

Connie does not see the cowboy again for "two months of time made unstable
by a feathered thing fighting for wingspread"—and made tolerable by fervent prayer
and painstaking attention to chores calculated to help her despise a former life devoid
of God. Morrison's scathing indictment of anaconda Catholic love continues as
Deacon comes purportedly for the convent's hot peppers, and Connie completely
loses her mind. Ten years older than his twenty-nine, she had lost her virginity long
ago to "the dirty pokings her ninth year subjected her to." But the sight of his
eyes "like the beginning of the world" and the "sha sha sha" his presence stirs in her
memory lead her to "let the feathers unfold and come unstuck from the walls of a
stone-cold womb" (227-29). Unlike Oates's Connie, Consolata actually leaves in her
lover's truck, enjoying without speaking its contained roar and solid presence con-
joined with anticipation. Like her younger namesake, she does not know or care
where they are going, succumbing to the man's flesh as completely as she had previ-
ously bowed to the Virgin's spirit. She will ultimately reclaim herself, however, when
she recalls where she has been.

Taking us beyond a mere heart-stopping glimpse of the "vast sunlit reaches of
the land behind . . . and on all sides of [Arnold Friend]" (795), Morrison goes into
detail about Connie's affair with "the living man," depicting their sex in terms of
transubstantiation. While her hypnotically pulsating music draws Oates's Connie to
"a single face that is not even a face, but an idea, a feeling," Consolata's religion of
repression literally starves her for his spirit made flesh (785).12 Deprived of physical
contact for most of her life, entering a stage where female sexual desire often
becomes enhanced, she welcomes forbidden danger and the sensation of prenatal
dark. Like changing bread and wine into body and blood, their lovemaking "leaned
toward language, gestured its affiliation, but in fact was un-memorable, -controllable
or -translatable." They part "as though, having been arrested, they were each facing
prison sentences without parole" and make plans to "do it do it do it in daylight" (229).
He takes her to a burned-out farmhouse, where an ash figure in the shape of a cow-
boy demands "quick exit from his premises," so they "do it" again in a gully near
"two fig trees growing into each other" (234, 230). Ecstasy ends when Connie pro-
poses a perfect convent hideaway and bites his lip. Like Pauline and Sula, she forgets
"lust and simple caring for" (The Bluest Eye 122) when she discovers "possession or
at least the desire for it" (Sula 131). Deacon rationalizes what later turns into his
personal shame in terms of a "ravenous ground-fucking woman," 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 that tried to trap a man, close
him up in a cellar room with liquor to enfeeble him so they could do carnal things,
unnatural things in the dark" (279-80). Consolata comes to realize, however, as she
virtually crawls back to the chapel and bends "the knees she had been so happy to
open": "Dear Lord, I didn't want to eat him. I just wanted to go home" (240).

The woman's merciful stab at the birth of self-knowledge results partly from
prayer, partly from the pain of losing the living man who believes her "bent on eating
him like a meal," and partly from Deacon's wife's coming to her for a potion to

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abort Soane's supposed unborn child, and Consolata's confronting the images which show what it means to share him. Fifteen-year-old Connie falls for a living lover she creates out of an idea, a feeling; forty-year-old Connie errs by making a god out of a living man. But the elder Connie's mistake will ultimately enlighten her and her lover: "Romance stretched to the breaking point broke, exposing a simple mindless transfer. From Christ, to whom one gave total surrender and then swallowed the idea of His flesh, to a living man. Shame. Shame without blame." As she tries to explain her fault to Mary Magna in terms of Sha sha sha, "meaning, he and I are the same," the nun attempts to console her with, "Sh sh sh... Never speak of him again" (240-41).13

Going beyond "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?", Paradise grounds Connie's precarious present between a past and a future, extending her conflict into and farther on than middle age. Thus, Consolata must silently bear the burden of her guilt as she pays dearly for her "gobble-gobble love." When Mary Magna leads her from the chapel back into the schoolroom, "a sunshot seared her right eye, announcing the beginning of her bat vision, and she began to see best in the dark. Consolata had been spoken to" (240-41). It takes two other women, a midwife and the wife of her partner in adultery, to refresh her point of view. Morrison continues in the traditions of Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton to connect the absence of physical sight with the presence of understanding, to balance material loss against spiritual gain, and to suggest that nobody locates insight alone or without pain. Lone duPre comes just in time to save Connie from losing everything, including the traces of her original language, the ability to bear light, and embarrassment, to the patient care of ailing Mary Magna, after the fifty-year-old surrogate daughter has learned to manage anything that does not require paper. Connie finally passes out as a result of her "change" and too-great repression. She awakes to find herself sitting in a red garden chair, attended to by a small, "disheveled woman in thong slippers," who has stopped by for a few of the convent's hot peppers.14 Lone leaves Connie with a natural remedy for an easier menopause and information that makes her uneasy: "Consolata complained that she did not believe in magic; that the church and everything holy forbade its claims to knowingness and its practice. Lone wasn't aggressive. She simply said, 'Sometimes folks need more' " (244).

The more arrives as Connie is able to mitigate the sin of sex with Soane Morgan's husband by saving the youngest of Soane's sons. When Easter and Scout Morgan, and another typically clueless teenage boy also drowsy after too much beer, drive home the distance from a nearby rodeo forbidden by their fathers, Scout flips the truck. Stuck inside, he trickles blood at his temple. While the other boys howl helplessly and kick the tires, Lone, rushing to the scene with Connie, tells her companion to "step in": "I'm too old now. Can't do it anymore, but you can... Go inside him. Wake him up" (245). Unselfishly making way for the younger woman's "gifts" in order to save the boy, Lone offers Connie what Sarah Orne Jewett calls the "gift of sympathy." And this time it works. Although Scout dies later in Vietnam, along with his brother, a loss his mother shares with his savior, Connie's merciful action causes Soane to bring the other woman a basket of sugar cookies, put her former rival in her prayers forever, and inform her newfound friend that "he was lucky to have us both" (245-46).

Scout's father, however, believes that Connie has seduced Soane away from her husband; that she has in fact "weaseled her way into Soane's affections and, he suspected, [has] plied her with evil potions to make her less loving than she used to be and it was not the eternal grieving for their sons that froze her but the mess she was swallowing still, given to her by the woman whose very name she herself had made into a joke and a travesty of what a woman should be" (280). Nevertheless, the two women trade Soane's basket steadfastly back and forth for years, Connie placing on top the herbal tonic that soothes Soane when she fears suffocation from the loss of
her children. Upon Mary Magna's death, however, Connie comes to feel orphaned more surely at fifty-five than she ever was at nine. She turns for consolation to the dark convent basement with its shelves of “prisoner wine” and fends off the four damaged young women who seek from her their form of sanctuary, her very passivity and detachment the reason the girls fight over her attention. Allowing her formerly productive garden to go to seed, Consolata gives way to despair—until An old Friend in the form of a new cowboy comes home.

Like unmarried Arnette's prematurely delivered baby, revolting mightily against its mother's violent attempts to "bash the life out of her life" and named Che by Gigi for his temporary triumph, Connie must rescue herself from breaking into pieces or drowning in her Mother's food. Abandoned by Mary Magna, afraid of "dying alone, ungrieved in unholy ground," she longs for the "good death." When she starts to miss "Him," however, she meets herself. As she sinks once more into the now-faded, red garden chair, "a man approached. Medium height, light step . . ., he wore a cowboy hat that hid his features . . ., shiny black work shoes," and "sunglasses—the mirror type that glitter." Sitting down easily on her kitchen steps instead of emulating Arnold Friend's perverse stance outside the door, the cowboy's reply to Connie's "Who is that?" inverts Arnold's imperious challenge to Oates's Connie: "Come on, girl. You know me." Maintaining her denial to be "not important" because he merely travels here, his words "licked her cheek" despite the ten yards between them. As Connie becomes intrigued by the cowboy's origin from "far country" and increasingly comfortable with his words, she begins to "slide toward his language like honey oozing from a comb." Offering to ask the girls to fetch him a drink, she feels an unbearable lightness of being, as though she "could move, if she wanted to, without standing up." It is he who changes place, however, suddenly beside her without having shifted, his smile provoking her laughter as his comment, "I don't want see your girls. I want see you" encourages her reciprocation: "you have your glasses much more me" (250-52).

Connie considers the unexpected way he flits over to her from the steps "comical" and how he looks down at her "flirtatious, full of secret fun." Inspiring her in the playfully serious manner in which Sir Philip Sidney argues poesy should function rather than imposing upon her Arnold Friend's rendition of romantically cliched recitations, this cowboy delights as he instructs. As a result, she finds him reassuringly helpful rather than overbearingly intimidating. He exhibits the notable footwear first seen on Arnold, presented this time as shiny work shoes instead of greasy boots, and sports Arnold's type of glasses. Regarded in another light, he appears in dress similar to Consolata's shiny nun's shoes and aviator sunglasses and dons a green vest suggestive of the blouse worn by Oates's Connie. In other words, as Morrison depicts primal knowledge in J&ZZ, "his clothes" are "all mixed up with hers" (182). The cowboy's resemblance to Consolata becomes unmistakable when he removes his tall hat not six inches from her face: "Fresh tea-colored hair came tumbling down, cascading over his shoulders and down his back. He took off his glasses then and winked, a slow seductive movement of a lid. His eyes, she saw, were as round and green as new apples" (250-52). Like all of Morrison's survivors, male and female alike, Consolata must embrace her self as she learns not to take herself so seriously; she must look kindly on her own sins if she is to provide tragicomic consolation to others and go on living well. She has to understand, in the untranslatable language of Sha sha sha, that "loud dreaming" and laughter can be more serious, more complicated, than quietly repressed tears.

The self-awareness that Connie acquires when she confronts her alpha-male twin allows her to become straight-backed Consolata Sosa, who gets up out of her red chair to set the table, place the food, and take off her apron. Sweeping the faces of the women staring up at her with the "aristocratic gaze of the blind," she tells...
them: “If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for” (262). The cowboy in her has shown Connie how to use her feminine weapons of food, talk, and grace to save herself and her girls. Like the blind old servant with the life returned to her eyes, the young women, no longer haunted, come to act toward outsiders as though they are “calmly themselves” (266). As she dances furiously with the other newly made holy women in “hot sweet rain,” Connie is now “fully housed by the god who sought her out in the garden,” that is to say, she locates her home by connecting her halves (283).

Morrison always acknowledges reality, however, as she affirms possibility. While the convent women may no longer be haunted, they continue to be hunted. Projecting “the fangs and the tail . . . somewhere else. Out yonder all slithery in a house full of women,” the riled-up Ruby manifestations of Arnold Friend “shoot the white girl first” because “with the rest they can take their time” (276, 3). Hearing footsteps too heavy for a female, slipping on a dress in the blue color Morrison associates with freedom, Connie cradles the shot woman and starts to “step in.” As she bellows “No!” to the men now inside the convent, who take aim against the women they have forced outside, she lifts her gaze to something high above their heads: “You’re back, she says, and smiles.” Deacon Morgan wishes he wore the mirrored sunglasses folded in his pocket. Without them, he has to see in Connie’s eyes “what has been drained from them and from himself as well” (289). He cannot, however, stop his brother’s hand, and the bullet enters Connie’s forehead. Though the god she made out of a living cowboy is rendered impotent, Connie’s real cowboy never dies. The image of Consolata returns in Morrison’s coda, her emerald eyes adoring not Mary Magna but a singing woman “black as firewood,” her face framed in “cerulean blue,” her name merging the pious Pieta with a hip daddy. This Connie takes her solace neither from Arnold Friend’s reflective glasses nor his banal clichés but from Piedade’s voice that speaks of the “unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home” (318).

Paradise explains to disconsolate Connies of all ages, races, and classes about the foreigner’s home. Oates introduces a conversation regarding the damage done to Connie as Arnold Friend entices her into the vast sunlit reaches of certain destructive American cultural values. Because none of her family “bothers” with spirituality, a daughter becomes vulnerable to idealized physical beauty, romantic escapism, predatory men, and a home outside herself. Continuing this discussion, Morrison inverts the situation by exposing her Connie to too much of the opposite influence. Consolata must learn that faith is not enough. She must not separate spirit from flesh, God from his gifts. She must not unbalance a perfectly imperfect world. A final imaginary friend in Paradise suggests that these commandments quite likely reflect Morrison’s own beliefs. Richard Misner maintains an ongoing relationship with a companion he simply calls “Him.”

While she tells critic Nellie McKay in 1983 that she “Always!” loves all of her characters, Morrison adds that identifying with any one of them “would not be a good position to take” (405). She claims in a 1998 interview with Zia Jaffrey, however, to identify with Paradise’s much younger, fictional and male minister (4). Accustomed to obstacles, “adept at disagreement . . ., [Misner] loved God so much it hurt, although that same love sometimes made him laugh out loud. And he deeply respected his colleagues” (159). Despite this, the middle of the novel finds Reverend Misner deeply angry at the mishandling of his anger toward Reverends Cary and Pulliam and on the verge of abandoning Ruby. Although three ministers attend to the town, Misner alone incorporates Morrison’s vision of the modern double-voiced griot, the dedicated outlander who, like the writer and her ideal reader, seeks enlightenment in order to locate consolation. Associated with apocalyptic passivity, Pastor Simon Cary carries on at the Church of the Holy Redeemer, accepting outbursts over Oven words as a prediction of “Last Days” (102). Personally “soothing
and jovial,” he and his wife, Lily, remain “treasured for their duets.” Pastor Cary deals with human difficulties such as the supposed feminine “malice, set roaming” at the marriage between Arnette and a Morgan nephew, with a smiling nod and a reassuring pat on the shoulder while folks ask the “Precious Lord [to] take [their] hand” and wait patiently for Armageddon (155-56). His self-righteously submissive method of carrying on indicates that he prevails by encouraging an imprudent martyrdom. Reverend Senior “Take No Prisoners” Pulliam opts for a much more proactive approach to pain (143). Viewing the Oven problem as evidence of “Evil Times,” he stands behind New Zion’s pulpit and tries to scare people to death into being good (102). Dark, wiry, elegant, narrow-eyed, “white-haired and impression,” he loathes “backtalk” from anybody, but especially the young, and defines such conversation as anything contrary to his party line: Old Testament literalism and puritanical hellfire-and-damnation (85). He dampens wedding bliss by delivering a sermon on love as “divine only and difficult always” (141). He blasts the guests at the ceremony: “you can only earn—by practice and careful contemplation—the right to express [love] and you have to learn how to accept it,” in essence to be “pure and holy” and place sinners in the hands of Pulliam’s angry God (141-42).

Misner responds to these Old Testament pull-iam/em-downers and what he views as Pulliam’s personal affront by “holding holding holding” up his comforting New Testament cross (147). So furious he cannot speak, he lets his cross do the talking while Arnette and K. D. stand separately, each uncomfortably humiliated under it, comprehending his implications no more than they take in the weight of Pulliam’s “long Methodist education” (142). On his knees afterward, Misner seeks to understand, and so subdue, his ravenous appetite for vengeance. Contemplation leads this ministering revolutionary, who likes a “tight fire,” to merely do “what he was accustomed to doing: [ask] Him to come along as he struck out, late and agitated, for the wedding reception. Being in His company quieted anger” (161).

Morrison lets us know through her own imaginary disciple that we will never get it right and that, without insight into ourselves and the gift of sympathy for others, our young people will perpetually be caught in the middle.

The God Misner and Morrison name “Him” is love. He is not His own love, however; He enables human love.19 And since love means “unmotivated respect” for oneself and others, God is not only “interested in you; He is you” (147). While Reverends Cary and Pulliam advocate too much fixed Old Testament theology approached in opposite ways, Reverend Misner carries the complete text around with Him. He also opts to stay in Ruby. Thus, the “Him” in Paradise becomes Morrison’s ultimate fictional friend, the other part of herself. She confronts the transnational phenomenon of difference alongside belonging by creating comforting imaginary characters and curating The Foreigner’s Home. She answers Oates’s call that Connie stay away from Arnold Friend’s easy promises of paradise. While temporary solace can be found in shared speech, divided bread, and “reaching age in the company of the other,” Connie must find hospitable hosts to help her shoulder the ongoing work of being part of this woman’s paradise (318). The host Toni Morrison has in mind remains at once always on the move and at home.

1. Morrison finally named her exhibit, which was on display at the Louvre November 6-29, 2006, The Foreigner’s Home. Acknowledging her signature multiple meanings and crossings (The Foreigner’s Home/The Foreigner is Home), the Toni Morrison Society bridged the Atlantic to host an accompanying scholars’ roundtable discussion in Paris on November 18, 2006, titled “International Perspectives on Toni Morrison.”

2. Dalsgård and Jones address Paradise as Morrison’s re-vision of the American Puritans’ imagined “city upon a hill.” The novel frames a question that Morrison claims has continually intrigued her and that served as the seed for her book: “Why paradise necessitates exclusion” (Murline 71).
3. The practice of literary borrowing, or what contemporary country singer and songwriter Willie Nelson refers to as “stealing each other’s songs,” is common to writers current and canonical. It remains especially prevalent, however, among African American writers coming out of the call-and-response structure of the black church. Although in the first scholarly article on Toni Morrison, Bischoff compares Morrison to a “great” canonical author, Henry James, and critics have long attributed aspects of her style to forces off her “home street,” she insists that the major influences on her work directly involve black culture, a community that incorporates “a multiplicity of intersecting traditions.” McKay maintains that “all of black life in Western culture shares in this, and sometimes I want my work to capture the vast imagination of black people. That is, I want my books to reflect the traditions.” McKay maintains that “all of black life in Western culture shares in this, and sometimes I want my work to capture the vast imagination of black people. That is, I want my books to reflect the traditions.” McKay maintains that “all of black life in Western culture shares in this, and sometimes I...
formation of modern masculine identity make the townspeople distrust one another and deny the communal bonds responsible for their ancestors' achievements.

9. Delighting, like Morrison, in playfully telling name games, Oates selects appellations for her dynamic duo that suggest An old Friend (Satan) and his hElliesh companion.

10. Hunt connects the strain of double consciousness and the Ruby founders' disassociation from the natural world, represented in Paradise by African communal space and Arapaho values, with the New Fathers' sense of restlessness and lack of freedom. I would argue that this contributes to their stiff-necked hubris as well.

11. Morrison claims that Western culture imposes pernicious white male views about physical beauty, romantic love, ownership, and sexual repression onto others. She calls this destructive perspective the "master narrative" or the "blue-eyed gaze" (The Bluest Eye 29). Mary Magna's incorporation of the white male gaze combines a comic riff on Ralph Ellison's concept of "optic white" in Invisible Man and Morrison's own sick white rat, the failed experiment called "Doctor Foster" in Song of Solomon. In Paradise, Mavis decides to remain at the convent "because of Mother." Drawn by Connie to "a bed shape far too small for a sick woman—almost a child's bed—and a variety of tables and chairs in the rim of black that surrounded it," startled by an authoritative voice that commands, "Don't stare, child," Mavis articulates what Connie comes to understand: "The whiteness at the center was blinding" (46).

12. The word church derives from the Greek kyrios (ruler) or kyros (supreme power), suggesting "a swelling, to be strong, hero." Morrison, as usual, locates supreme irony in the gap between the ideal and its practice, especially when women allow men to practice that ideal upon women.

13. Consolata's "Sha sha sha" suggests an acronym for s/he/all, or the androgyny embraced by Morrison's griots. Mary Magna's dismissive "Sh" leaves out the "a[ll]," which permits the binary opposition of she/he and precludes the healing that comes with articulating trauma.

14. Morrison typically uses the color red to indicate dangerous knowledge.

15. Standing ten feet away from Connie, Arnold Friend claims he knows all about her.

16. By locating Ruby's men in a patriarchal ordered community, Morrison contests the notion that black male violence stems from the failure of fathers to fulfill conventional patriarchal roles. She defines black masculinity as a discursive construct, influenced by hegemonic American ideologies of manhood. Slavery and subsequent racism have stripped African American men of the paternal authority transmitted from fathers to sons so central to Western concepts of masculinity. Instead, the men of Ruby pass on the unresolved trauma of a dehumanizing shame. They repress the shame and self-hatred, most damaging to people who aspire to conventional manhood, and project them onto a humiliated and excluded Other. Morrison identifies the town that manifests this maleness as merely repressed trauma, an African American riff on Hamlet's 'rub.' She implies that patriarchy aggravates the dysfunctions which render violence an indication of male willpower and "critiques any ideology that prescribes particular, fixed, and ahistorical forms of masculine identity as the solution to the problems of African American men or as a singular 'true' expression of black manhood." Morrison suggests that black men may acquire alternative masculinities through connections with women, who discover the self as a fluid construct transcending "all ideologically constructed binary oppositions." Since attempts to institute patriarchy exacerbate African American sociopolitical problems, an "unresolved traumatic African American heritage must be confronted and worked through, in ways incompatible with patriarchal forms of identity," if black people are to escape the cycles of violence (Reed 527-39).

17. Oates may have actually taken the title of her story from the Old Testament. Judges 19:17 reads: "And the old man lifted up his eyes and saw the wayfarer in the open square of the city, and the old man said, 'Where are you going? and whence do you come?' "

18. The feminist writer who elects to use a masculine pseudonym and identifies most in Paradise with a fictional male figure would certainly empathize with female characters whose attraction to gender fluidity embodies itself in the form of imaginary male counterparts.

19. The subject of Morrison's subsequent novel, Love (2003), certainly supports this supposition.

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