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“Something Begins its Presencing”: Negotiating Third-Space Identities and Healing in

Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* and *Love*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

To my husband and best friend, who continually motivated and inspired me throughout this arduous process. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* deconstructs the pathology of patriarchy and its oppressive nature, which limits language and knowledge. Patriarchal language silences female voice as they unknowingly adopt male definitions of gender and femininity. As long as the women are denied access to a language that allows them to define themselves, their existence is marked by a perennial state of self-destruction and stasis. As the women, specifically Consolata, begin to reject patriarchal limitations, they gain agency and with it an access to words and ideas that allow them to identify and articulate their own definition of self.

Morrison’s *Love* illustrates the individual’s need to negotiate a language apart from the patriarchal narrative in order to heal. *Love* critiques the extreme and excessive ways in which people allow themselves to be taken over, not only by emotions, but also by social constructions of gender, race, and class. Morrison’s *Love* interrogates the same patriarchal narrative that renders characters ignorant of their own condition in *Paradise*; however, she approaches this critique from a different direction. While *Paradise* analyzes the damaging effects of an institutionalized patriarchal ideology adopted and enforced by an entire community by contrasting it with a community of women who reject this system

of belief, *Love* illustrates the still pervasive vestiges of the organized patriarchal ideology apparent in *Ruby*. While the Convent women create a community that rejects racist, classist, institutionalized views of gender, the women in *Love* do not have a clearly defined group of oppressors to unite against. There is an unconscious battle against fragmented notions of male control, which surfaces as fights against one another. The patriarch removed, Christine and Heed battle one another.

Within a framework of Bhabha's Third Space, Butler's gender continuum, and bell hook's analysis of patriarchy and female relationships, I argue that Morrison's *Paradise* and *Love* demonstrate the crippling effects of racist, sexist, classist discourses and the need to access a new, liberatory language in order to heal the pathological wounds of patriarchy.

Introduction

In her 1993 Nobel Lecture, Toni Morrison offers insight into the powerful effects of the (mis)use of language that ensues because of a tyrannical patriarchal ideology – a theme that emerges throughout each of her novels. Morrison begins her Nobel Lecture with a parable about young people who are determined to denigrate the wisdom of the blind woman who lives alone on the outskirts of town. The young visitors challenge the woman to tell them if the bird they bring to her is dead or alive. After a prolonged silence, she tells them, “I don’t know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands” (Morrison, *Nobel Lecture* 11). The woman chides her visitors for “parading their power and her helplessness” as they are responsible for sacrificing the bird’s life in order to test the woman’s power (12). As the woman speaks to her visitors, she “shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised” (12). Fascinated by the possibilities of meaning of the bird in this parable, Morrison states that she ultimately “read[s] the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer” (12). Morrison explains the old woman’s preoccupation:

[she] is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as

agency – as an act with consequences. So the question the children put to her, “Is it living or dead?,” is not unreal because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperiled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. (13)

For Morrison, “oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge” (16).

In the novels *Paradise* and *Love*, Morrison deconstructs the pathology of patriarchy and its oppressive nature, which limits language and knowledge. Patriarchy controls and manipulates the language with which female characters define themselves. Because the women do not have a safe space to explore different facets of their own identities, nor do they have the language to articulate new narratives, their existence is marked by a perennial state of self-destruction and stasis. Those female characters that passively comply with the dominant male discourse remain silenced, while those who belie patriarchal principles are denigrated and ostracized for their “iniquity.” All are wounded and broken by the systematic nature of a patriarchal ideology that does not accommodate a balanced vision of female wholeness. As the women begin to resist patriarchal constraints, they gain agency and with it an access to words and ideas that allow them to identify and articulate a new, creative narrative and definition of self.

While Morrison clearly stated in her 1998 interview with Zia Jaffrey that she does not agree with labeling *Paradise* a “feminist novel,” as she “[doesn’t] write ‘ist’ novels,” I would argue that Morrison does employ a *feminist methodology* to challenge patriarchal rule. Morrison seeks to “expand articulation, rather than to close it, to open doors,

sometimes, not even closing the book -- leaving the endings open for reinterpretation, revisitation, a little ambiguity” (Jaffrey). Although Morrison refuses to limit her work to a “feminist tract,” her epistemological commitments do not preclude a feminist methodology within her writing. Although Morrison “subscribe[s] [neither] to patriarchy” nor “matriarchy,” she values “equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things” (Jaffrey). This inclusive approach allows Morrison’s work to embrace feminist methods that examine the generative potential of a space free from the constraints of both patriarchal and matriarchal rule.

Judith Butler’s theory that hegemonic power constructs gender and sexuality provides insight into patriarchal constraints Morrison’s characters experience. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that “the body is figured as a surface and the scene of cultural inscription;” the body “is always under siege, suffering destruction by the very terms of history” (177). Defining history as “the creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body,” Butler observes, “corporeal destruction is necessary to produce the speaking subject and its significations” (177). The body is then “described through the language of surface and force, weakened through a ‘single drama’ of domination, inscription, and creation” (177). Bodies are marked by a socially constructed discourse that “establishes the boundaries of the body” in order to normalize “appropriate limits, postures and modes of exchange that define what it is that constitutes bodies” (178). Citing Mary Douglas, Butler explains that the process of defining bodies occurs through “exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created” (177).

The body that is “without,” is Othered and pushed to the margins. Because all social systems “are vulnerable at their margins [...] any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment” (180). Negation of bodies according to “their sex, sexuality, and/ or color” leads to their “‘expulsion’ followed by a ‘repulsion’ that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/ race/ sexuality axes of differentiation” (180). The female protagonists in Morrison’s *Paradise* and *Love* undergo this same “consolidat[ion] [of] identities,” or Othering, through experiences of “exclusion and domination” (182). While Morrison’s characters are Othered by a discourse that defines both racial and gender “norms,” their liminal position apart from the “ideal” creates a space where they have the opportunity to explore and construct their own identities. Although this space can potentially encourage self-expression and self-definition – and ultimate healing – because Morrison’s characters pose a threat to the hegemonic ideal, their physical safety is compromised in this marginal space.

Mae G. Henderson elucidates the ways in which social environment and language intersect to shape an individual’s consciousness. In “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition,” Henderson uses Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of “dialogism and consciousness” to examine how discourse defines (and marginalizes) the individual in relation to the group. Because a “social group speaks in its own ‘social dialect’...its own unique language” comprised of “shared values, perspectives, ideology, and norms,” these “social dialects become the ‘languages’ of heteroglossia” which “[intersect] with each other in many different ways” (Henderson 121). As language is “an expression of social identity,” Henderson argues that

“subjectivity (subjecthood) is constituted as a social entity through the ‘role of [the] word as medium of consciousness.’ Consciousness, then, like language, is shaped by the social environment” (121). Thus the individual’s self-perception reflects the “‘the outer word’” and “links the psyche, language, and social interaction” (121). Henderson argues that “multiple voices” express the “complex subjectivity” of the black woman writer who “speaks familiarly in the discourse of the other(s),” and also maintains a dialogue “with the hegemonic dominant and subdominant or ‘ambiguously (non)hegemonic’ discourses” (122). The “black woman’s relationship to power and discourse” in the novel is exemplified through the female protagonist’s “development from voicelessness to voice, from silence to tongues” (125). However, this progression cannot occur without the initial silencing of female voice, or “intervention by the other(s)—who speak for and about black women” (125). This forced silence “[allows] others to inscribe, or write, and ascribe to, or read, them” (125).

While Henderson’s essay explores the oppressive potential of language in Morrison’s *Sula*, her analysis also applies to Morrison’s *Paradise* and *Love*. In each of these novels the “male gaze...constitutes female subjectivity” and the Othered “black woman...is used to constitute (black) male subjectivity” (127). Both the communal (patriarchal) narrative apparent in *Paradise* and the individual patriarchal ideology in *Love* “[represent] a culture constituted in relation to the black woman as Other” (127). This “racial discourse” defines female protagonists solely on terms of “her sexuality” and silences female voice in order to sustain “‘the production’ of a patriarchal narrative” (128, 130). Morrison’s female characters internalize this racialized, gendered view of

womanhood and are unaware of suppressed facets of their identity. This internalized discourse renders female characters broken and functions only as an incommunicable, indistinct pain. However, when “the initial expression of a marginal presence” separates from “conventional semantics and/or phonetics,” Morrison’s female characters transform “soundlessness...into utterance, unity into diversity, formlessness into form, chaos into art, silence into tongues, and glossolalia into heteroglossia” (133). Such a transformation unites the fragmented self and affords female protagonists the voice to articulate their identities.

Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial theory of hybridity and Third Space elucidates the process which marginalized characters undergo in order express their “presence.” In *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha recognizes the impact Toni Morrison has had on his analysis of “narrative and historical temporality” (Bhabha ix). Because Bhabha specifically addresses the space of the Other, his post-colonial theories provide insight into Morrison’s novels. Bhabha observes, “it is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2). Examining how it is that “subjects [are] formed ‘in-between’, or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference (usually intoned as race/ class/ gender, etc.),” allows Bhabha’s work to embrace “a kind of fluidity, a movement back and forth, not making a claim to any specific or essential way of being” (3). Because identity is socially constructed within a “binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed – Black/ White, Self/ Other,” it is Bhabha’s rejection of dichotomies

that leads to his theory of hybridity (Bhabha 3). Bhabha's "Third Space," allows for a "production of meaning" wherein "[the 'subject of a proposition and the subject of enunciation' are] mobilized;" "both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious" introduces "an ambivalence in the act of interpretation" (36). The Third Space, "though unrepresentable in itself," "constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 37). In his theory of the Third Space, Bhabha defines the space that Morrison's characters must negotiate in order to free themselves from oppressive constructions of female identity.

Paradise provides the most comprehensive, unbroken resolution to her exploration of abuses of patriarchal power. Continuing to confront the pathology of patriarchy, Morrison illustrates the damaging effects of binary thought through the inner workings of her characters and challenges the "dead or alive" binary that the visitors in the parable demand of the blind woman. Morrison's characters reside on a continuum marked initially by stasis, and later, by flux and fluidity. Each of her characters must move along this spectrum of self-knowledge in order to carve out a space in-between opposing ideologies for the individual, and restore fractured identities. In each of these novels, female protagonists experience either direct or indirect oppression, which limits their access to language, and thus their ability to define and articulate an identity separate from male rule. Within a framework of Bhabha's Third Space and Butler's gender

continuum, I argue that Morrison's *Paradise* and *Love* demonstrate the crippling effect of patriarchal discourses/ ideologies, and the need to access a liberatory language in order to heal the pathological wounds of patriarchy.

In "Moving Beyond the Boundaries of Self, Community, and the Other in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Paradise*," Geta LeSeur explores a similar idea of rejecting binary oppositions in order to create a space for the individual. LeSeur cites Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity in her reading of *Paradise*. For Bhabha, "the binary oppressed/ oppressor, us/ them, self/ other relationships that seem to mark colonial discourse are paralyzing" (4). As the oppressed attempt to "reclaim their identity, there is a danger of their trying to trace an essentialist identity through some sort of shared history separate from contemporary experience" (4). "Identity," Bhabha argues, is "not a monolithic construction, but instead a fluid, experiential construct" (4). "Homogenization of identity" rooted only in an "assumed historical connection" produces a paralysis in which "identities become fixed and rigidified and lose their potential to develop" (LeSeur 4). In *Paradise*, the men of Ruby construct and maintain an exclusionist community based on a "historical connection" (LeSeur 4) to their founding fathers and a belief that they are acting according to God's will. The people of Ruby are impoverished descendants of ex-slaves looking for a place to establish a new life. Rejected for their "coal black" skin by both whites and lighter skinned blacks, they are physically threatened and confronted with "disbelievable words" from "men like them in all ways but one" (Morrison, *Paradise* 160, 189). The "Disallowing" was a private event for the Ruby community, which generated the founding of the all-black town. After this "Disallowing," they are

“bound by the enormity of what had happened to them” (189). Following “the signs God gave to guide them,” the group sets out to establish an all-black town that allows them to “exist in that very exclusion” they experienced from others (14). Ruby’s founding, a defensive response to the “Disallowing,” is based in opposition to the exclusion they experienced; they maintain a static focus on past wrongs and past trauma. In an inversion of isolationist white communities, the all-black town of Ruby, Oklahoma is founded on a binary conception of Christian morality.¹ In order to maintain moral superiority, Ruby’s residents strictly adhere to isolationist and exclusionist practices, wherein residents of Ruby “deprive” themselves of “Television...Disco...Policemen...Picture shows, filthy music...Wickedness in the streets, theft in the night, murder in the morning. Liquor for lunch and dope for dinner” (274). The residents of Ruby are “suffused with gratitude for having refused and escaped the sordid, the cruel, the ungodly, all of the up-to-date evils disguised as pleasure,” that exist in a world outside of Ruby (274-275).

Ruby residents define femininity and sexuality according to the “Old Fathers...the fathers’ law, the law of continuance and multiplication,” that maintains racial purity through geographic isolation that allows Ruby residents to “multiply in peace” (279). In “Hybridizing the ‘City upon a Hill’ in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*,” Ana María Fraile-

¹ In “Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*: Black Cultural Citizenship in the American Empire,” Holly Flint reads *Paradise* as a critique of American Imperialism. According to Flint, Ruby’s formation “mimics the exceptionalism of (white) U.S. narratives because Ruby’s attempts at self-narration are enacted from a position of accommodation within an imperial political paradigm” (605). Mimicking the United States’ narrative of “manifest destiny that justifies the position of the United States as a world power,” allows Ruby residents to “erase any evidence that Ruby was under the control of a more powerful imperial narrative—a discursive move more evocative of a colonizer-colonized context than a regional-national one” (605). However, because “U.S. imperialism denies the legitimacy of black cultural citizenship on the national level and then convinces the residents of Ruby to build their own practices of citizenship upon the same narrative forms that undermine their legitimacy,” the residents of Ruby are forced to “commit an act of violence that will, despite its antithetical motive, cause their own fall” (605).

Marcos argues that Ruby's foundational narratives create "an exclusionist hegemonic community based on racial purity and patriarchal authority, where the elite is made up of those black men of pure ancestry who are the guardians of a myth of origins directed to maintaining the status quo" (4). For Ruby residents, inclusion dictates that one's lineage must be free of "racial tampering" (Morrison, *Paradise* 197). Ruby patriarchs are descendants of field slave women that may not have been subjected to sexual exploitation and the Ruby patriarchs are "proud that none of their women had ever worked in a white-man's kitchen or nursed a white child" (99). By limiting female sexuality to its reproductive function within marriage, Ruby patriarchs are able to ensure the racial purity of the town. In Ruby, the ideal woman is not only the chaste, delicate mother, but also a strong, hard-working provider. As descendants of one of Ruby's founding families, the Morgan brothers are invested in the future of Ruby; they define ideal femininity through their "pastel-colored and eternal" memory of nineteen ladies they saw posing for portraits on a porch (109-10). Delicate and nonthreatening, the ladies were dressed in "white," "lemon yellow" and "salmon" fabrics that accented "tiny waists... not much bigger than [the ladies'] necks" (109). The Ruby patriarchs combine this idealized image of the fragile, uncorrupted virgin, with a model of "elegant black women at useful tasks" (111). This representation of the workingwoman is integral to Ruby's narrative, as it allows Ruby men to maintain the structure and order of the town. The women maintain "orderly cupboards minus surfeit or miserliness," keep "linen laundered and ironed to perfection," and prepare "good meat seasoned and ready for roasting," while the men tend to larger social issues (111). The Ruby patriarchs combine these two conflicting images of

femininity to create an ideal womanhood based on reproduction, desirability, morality, and household maintenance.

Ruby's struggle to maintain the founding father's ideals creates a division between the older and younger generations within the town. Determined to blame the town's division on the evils of a world outside Ruby, the older generation faults the Convent; "Something's going on out there," and Ruby residents "don't like any of it" (276). Labeling the Convent women "bitches" and "witches," the people of Ruby target the Convent because of the absence of male rule, the drinking and "inappropriate" display of female affection that the Convent women exhibit when "kissing on themselves," and rumors that the Convent women have "babies hid away" (276). Citing the arrival of "those heifers" as the moment of Ruby's ruination, the residents of Ruby criticize the Convent women for their lack of religion: "These here sluts out there by themselves never step foot in church and I bet you a dollar to a fat nickel they ain't thinking about one either. They don't need men and they don't need God" (276). The Convent women are charged with "meddling" in Ruby and "drawing folks out there like flies to shit" such that "everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into [Ruby] homes, [Ruby] families" (276). Ruby residents "hate a nasty woman" and denounce the Convent women for "openly flirting" with Ruby men (275). Ruby residents label the Convent women's nonverbal, sensual expression as an unnatural "power," and the source of "the ruination that was upon them" (275). Ruby's rejection of female expression Others the Convent women and defines them as a "new and obscene breed of female" that "[sullies] [the Morgan brothers'] personal history with their streetwalkers'

clothes and whores' appetites; mocking and desecrating the vision that carried...[the Morgan brothers] through a war, that imbued their marriages and strengthened their efforts to build a town where the vision could flourish" (279). Cast as "bodacious Black Eves," the Convent women live a narrative that identifies the women as a threat to Ruby's definitions of femininity and sexuality (18). With fixed, static identities, the Ruby men illustrate the oppressive, degenerative nature of constructing communal identities rooted in a specific interpretation of the past that allows them to define themselves as morally and racially "pure."

Unlike the static existence of Ruby, the Convent offers the potential for growth that can be achieved when identity is not fixed or limited by connections to the past. Seventeen miles away from Ruby, the Convent is home to "bodacious black Eves" (18): Consolata, who is "rescued" from her sexually abusive father; a housewife, Mavis, accused of letting her twins suffocate in a hot car; Gigi, a girl seeking a (fictional) landmark where a man from her past promised to meet her; Seneca, a physically and sexually abused orphan; and Pallas, a runaway girl escaping her wealthy, emotionally unavailable parents. Because the women reside in a space un-policed by men, they are seen as posing a threat to the rigid, patriarchal 8-Rock ideology. However, the women of the Convent are not impervious to a categorical system of belief – each woman arrives at the Convent scarred by an imposed narrative that labels her a fallen woman. Because language constructs identity, patriarchal rule allows (Ruby) men to construct and define female identity.

The residents of both Ruby and the Convent face a static existence until they step outside these toxic, oppositional constructions of gender, race, and spirituality. Drawing from her reading of Bhabha's Third Space, LeSeur notes that "identity is not fixed, but fluid; not rooted, but constantly in flux, defined from moment to moment in relation to the cultural influences that are playing upon it" (5). For Bhabha, "displacement creates a necessary ambiguity that opens a space for interpretation [...] Within this Third Space that exists between the binaries of us and them, there is a moment where meaning does not exist, as such, but is subject to interpretation between the speaker and the listener" (LeSeur 5). The Convent acts as a safe haven where displaced persons are welcomed and free to explore an alternative existence wherein "identity is not purely one thing or the other, but instead contains both and is something entirely different at the same time" (LeSeur 5). Within the Convent, the long-term resident Connie ultimately negotiates an identity and definition of self apart from the rigid ideals of Ruby and Catholic doctrine; this negotiation transforms Connie into the spiritual leader, Consolata Sosa, who makes reconciliation and new beginnings possible for the Convent women.

Morrison's text advocates the erasure of categorical constraints as a means to reach transcendent wholeness and peace. The Convent women become the ultimate threat to the men of Ruby when they embrace Morrison's vision of a holistic reconciliation of the fractured self and are rewarded with the "unambivalent bliss" of paradise, while Ruby remains in a state of habitual stasis (Morrison, *Paradise* 318). As the women "[claim], out of their abuse, the power to name and identify themselves" (Duvall 142-3), the men attack the Convent and kill them in an attempt to keep them eternally silenced. The

oppositional us/them stance allows Ruby's patriarchs to justify killing the Convent women in order to protect *their* women from the evil world outside of Ruby. Although the Convent women are in fact murdered by Ruby men, Morrison's ambiguous ending suggests that the Convent women – no longer limited to the physical realm – live on forever. After embracing a fluid concept of identity, Consolata gains access to language that allows her to propagate healing and guidance to broken individuals; because she achieves a fluid understanding of identity prior to her physical death, she posthumously transcends boundaries of time and space and acts as an eternal healer and guide.

While Consolata's negotiation requires a balancing of religion(s), spirituality, gender, sexuality, and race, the characters in Morrison's *Love* characters in Morrison's *Love* negotiate fewer dichotomous constraints on identity formation. *Love* critiques the extreme and excessive ways in which people allow themselves to be taken over, not only by emotions, but also by social constructions of gender, race, and class. Because the women in the Convent successfully transcend the imposed limitations of rigid ideologies, it is interesting that in *Love* Morrison returns to a fragmented, broken space within female relationships.² Morrison's *Love* interrogates the same patriarchal narrative that renders characters ignorant and unaware of a language that allows them to articulate and define themselves; however, she approaches this critique from a different direction. While *Paradise* analyzes the damaging effects of an institutionalized patriarchal ideology

² *Love* returns to an exploration of female friendship, a relationship model left broken in Morrison's *Sula*. *Love* incorporates elements of the healing process within the Convent which allows childhood friends, Heed and Christine, to reconcile what was left unresolved between Nel and Sula. In *Rewriting Black Identities: Transition and Exchange in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, Rebecca Ferguson notes that the exchanges that occur between Nel and Sula in Morrison's second novel "are self-consciously purposeful and constructive, interrogative or argumentative," wherein Morrison "allow[s] voices to be sounded apart from, yet still in relation to one another" (21). A similar dynamic resurfaces in *Love* when Heed and Christine reach an understanding of themselves as individuals and friends.

adopted and enforced by an entire community by contrasting it with a community of women who reject this system of belief, *Love* illustrates the still pervasive vestiges of the organized patriarchal ideology apparent in Ruby. *Love* takes place in the coastal town of Silk in the 1920s and spans through the 1990s. The characters in *Love* exist in a time and place imbedded with implicit notions of acceptable gendered behavior. While the Convent women create a community that rejects categorical ideas of gender, the women in *Love* do not have a clearly defined group of oppressors to unite against. There is an unconscious battle against fragmented notions of male control, which surfaces as fights against one another. The patriarch removed, Christine and Heed fight amongst themselves, each trying to prove that she is Cosey's sweet child.

In *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*, bell hooks argues, “many individuals from oppressed groups learn to suppress ideas, especially those deemed oppositional, as a survival strategy” (161). hooks observes that the practice of censoring or guarding speech that originated from slavery “continued long after slavery ended,” and because “racial oppression remained a social norm, black people still found it necessary to check freedom of expression, to engage in self-censorship” (161). Elders, then, punish the youth “to teach us our place, to keep us in line [...] so that we would not be destroyed;” but what is destroyed through such efforts of protection, is the “capacity for creative expression” (hooks, *Talking Back* 162). Recalling an instance from her youth, hooks relates how a child accompanying her grandmother on a shopping trip was directed to sit still while her grandmother shopped. The child “was not allowed to talk, laugh, or play, and certainly not to move around. She only spoke when given permission,” and was

praised by both black and white people for her “‘good’ behavior” (162). hooks questions what this learned silence and fear of speech would do to the child’s “wildly creative spaces inside herself” (162). Toni Morrison’s novel, *Love*, elucidates hooks’ question and proposes a possible answer.

Love explores the pervasive, divisive nature of patriarchal ideals within the context of female friendship. While religious and gendered language functions as a tool of restraint in *Paradise*, hotel owner and prominent patriarch, Bill Cosey, personifies the power and omnipotence of God in *Love*. Cosey is not only central to the town, but to the thoughts and imagination of those around him. The women around Cosey seem to have a “What Would Cosey Do (WWCD)?” method of thought. As the influential and powerful owner of a successful coastal resort, he provides jobs and financial security to his family and friends by hiring them to work in his hotel. Cosey assumes the role of their superior and ultimately controls their future success. Simultaneously a husband, father, grandfather, and boss, Cosey’s disarming power enables him to easily influence the women around him – during his life and posthumously. For Bhabha, “the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions,” as “the borders between home and the world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9). As patriarchal ideals govern the Cosey house and hotel, the women are unable to directly confront or oppose the decisions and (often questionable) behavior of the man of the house; Cosey’s women, then, turn against one another. Male rule, however charming

and passive, is shown to eradicate the potential for female bonds and to stunt spiritual and emotional growth.

This destructive power is seen most tragically in the fractured relationship between Cosey's granddaughter, Christine, and his second wife and child-bride, Heed. As children, Heed and Christine are best friends who "[share] stomachache laughter, a secret language, and [know] as they [sleep] together that one's dreaming [is] the same as the other one's" (Morrison, *Love* 132). As a young, wealthy child of Cosey lineage, Christine is determined to maintain her friendship with Heed, despite her bourgeois mother's objection to her daughter befriendng a child of degenerate, lower-class parents. This precarious status, one that comes with a little bit of wealth and a lot of acting *properly*, is threatened by Christine's friendship with someone of lower class.³ Christine "[fights] for [Heed], defie[s] her mother to protect her, to give her clothes: dresses, shorts, a bathing suit, sandals; to picnic alone on the beach," until the day Christine's fifty-two-year-old grandfather, Bill Cosey, decides to marry the twelve-year-old Heed (132). Christine recalls how the marriage severed the intense bond of friendship she had with Heed: "One day we built castles on the beach; next day he sat her in his lap. One day we were playing house under a quilt; next day she slept in his bed. One day we played jacks; the next she was fucking my grandfather [...] One day this house was mine; next day she owned it" (131-132). As an adult, Christine acknowledges that Heed's marriage to Cosey "changed her life" (133). Feeling abandoned by her "best and only friend," Christine feels that Heed has "[left] the squealing splash in [Christine's] bathtub," and "[traded] the stories

³ However, as soon as Heed marries Cosey, Christine adopts her mother's bourgeois view. This is apparent in her disparaging comments about Heed and Christine's insistence that, as a blood relative to Cosey, she has sole claim to Cosey's inheritance.

made up and whispered beneath sheets in [Christine's] bed for a dark room at the end of the hall reeking of liquor and an old man's business, doing things no one would describe but were so terrible no one could ignore them" (132). However, both Heed and Christine lack the language to question Cosey's reign, and the insight to locate Cosey as the source of their strife. Their understanding of their own identities is perverted due to undercurrents of the institutionalized, organized patriarchy examined in Morrison's *Paradise*. Unable to articulate the source of their pain, Heed and Christine strike out against one another – as it is *safer* to fight against one another, than to fight the silencing patriarchal rule that renders them broken women.

While hooks' analysis of naming specifically addresses her role as a writer and the "cult of personality" (a focus on the individual and not the ideas the individual puts forth), that "has the power to subsume ideas, to make the person, the personality into the product and not the work itself," her discussion can be applied to a similar absence of voice and lack of narratological power that liminal characters experience in literature (162-163). The female protagonists in *Love* exemplify hooks' theory that "cults of personality [...] encourage a fragmentation of self that threatens one's capacity to be whole" (165). hooks' analysis of naming and projection of constructed identities offers insight into Heed and Christine's situation. According to hooks, the process of naming acts as a tool for "self-recovery;" because "naming is a source of empowerment," and "an important gesture in the process of creation [,] a primacy is given to naming as a gesture that deeply shapes and influences the social construction of a self" (hooks, *Talking Back* 166). In a misguided attempt to empower themselves through naming, Heed and

Christine participate in a life-long battle over their place in Cosey's will. Each woman claims the moniker "Sweet Cosey Child," as a way to create a meaningful identity (Morrison, *Love* 88). With only informal "doodles on a 1958 menu outlining his whiskey-driven desires" the public is left to interpret Cosey's last desires (88). Leaving "the Monarch Street house and 'whatever nickels are left' to 'my sweet Cosey child,'" propagates further division between Heed and Christine, as each set out to prove that she is the "my sweet Cosey child," of Cosey's will and the sole heir of Cosey's house and remaining fortune (88). Being the only biological "child" left in the Cosey line, Christine feels that "her claim of blood was equal to Heed's claim as widow" (88). However, Heed frequently called her husband, "Papa," and the courts *name* her "the sweet Cosey child of a drunken man's vocabulary" (89). This fight over Cosey's intended meaning does not award the women with the kind of power in naming that hooks' describes; instead, their misguided naming "deeply shapes and influences the social construction of a self" in relation to male defined identity (hooks, *Talking Back* 166).

The intense bond between Heed and Christine is revealed through Idagay, a secret language the girls create as children. Cosey's marriage to Heed destroys the young friendship as the girls experience a loss of language as they are forced to act and speak a foreign, "adult" language when they are still children. Without access to language of self-expression, the girls are defined by (an)other – Cosey. Heed and Christine must negotiate between the self and the other – apart from Cosey – in order to heal their fractured relationship and themselves. Healing occurs when Heed and Christine no longer allow themselves to be defined by their relationship to Bill Cosey. Negotiation and acceptance

of the past awards Heed and Christine the power to (re)claim their identity and experience a productive growth wherein they define themselves both individually and in relation to one another.⁴

Love illustrates the individual's need to negotiate a language apart from the patriarchal narrative in order to heal. Although Heed and Christine individually do not reconcile as many opposing ideologies as Consolata, their (re)union (re)establishes a female friendship which allows them to articulate an identity apart from patriarchal constructions of female identity, and experience a healing, similar to that which occurs at the Convent in *Paradise*. I intend to explore Consolata's successful negotiation of an institutionalized patriarchal ideology, which allows her to become a spiritual healer and guide; without a healer and guide, the women in *Love* cannot heal in the same way that the Convent women do in *Paradise*. I will examine the ways in which the healing spaces differ when patriarchy is localized and when it is dispersed. Because the Convent women achieve transcendent eternal peace, reading *Paradise* and *Love* together suggests that the pervasive vestiges of patriarchal belief are in fact more damaging than the institutionalized patriarchy. While the Ruby men eliminated the physical presence of the Convent women, they were unable to extinguish the spirits of the Convent women. Despite the violence done against them, the women's spirits will out-live their murderers and continue to provide spiritual healing and guidance to those in need. There is no such triumph in *Love*, only a partial reconciliation of the fractured friendship.

⁴ Rebecca Ferguson makes an observation similar to hooks's in *Rewriting Black Identities: Transition and Exchange in the Novels of Toni Morrison*. Ferguson notes that the exchange between Heed and Christine is "productive in so far as they are creative, allowing [...] for the self to be 'made' and 'remade' in relation or in response to the voices of others" (Ferguson 21-22).

“Eve is Mary’s mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve”: The Union of Mind and Body in

Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*

Arguably Morrison’s most developed character in *Paradise*, Consolata allows the reader to track the dominant ideologies that limit her self-definition and her negotiation of these methods of thought that ultimately (re)unite her with a language which provide her with self-awareness and knowledge and heals her wounds from an oppressive, patriarchal rule. As the most complex and fully developed character in *Paradise*, Consolata’s journey and ultimate self-acceptance serve as one model for healing.

During Consolata’s formative years, she experienced violent male domination followed by strict Catholic domination. The Sisters Devoted to Indian and Colored People rescue nine-year-old Consolata from her sexually abusive father and the “shit-strewn streets” of Brazil (Morrison, *Paradise* 223). Consolata accompanies the nuns as a ward at Christ the King School for (*Wicked, Wayward*) Native Girls. The school is specifically designed to convert the girls to Catholicism. The nuns provide an intervention/ education of “God and language” that was otherwise unavailable to the native girls (227). The nuns require their wards to reject the lives they knew and “alter their diets, their clothes, their minds” in order to experience “the privilege of knowing the one and only God and a chance, thereby, for redemption” (227). While Consolata’s presence at the school was founded on efforts to rescue her from a dangerous situation outside of Consolata’s control, and not a result of the “waywardness” which supposedly

accounted for the other girls' presence, she still witnesses the nuns' imposed ideals on the girls (227). Mary Magna, a sister who later becomes a mother in the Convent, rescues Consolata and treats her with nurturance and radiating warmth. Neither a nun nor an "insubordinate" girl, Consolata remains in an undefined space and emulates Mary Magna in her attempt to define herself within the Convent. As a way to maintain Mary Magna's pride in her, Consolata adopts her idol's Catholic practices – and the language of Catholicism – as her own. Daily exposure to "the gorgeous language made especially for talking to Heaven" (224-225) affords Consolata the language she needs to communicate with Mary Magna and Mary Magna's God. Speaking God's words limits Consolata's thoughts and speech, as everything revolves around God's Kingdom. When Consolata "offer[s] her body and her soul to God's Son and His Mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself," (225) her language reflects a domination of the mind. Adopting a religious/ pious tone, Consolata's words repeatedly focus on His sacrifice. Her speech reveals the absence of the individual, and utter devotion to Him:

To her of the bleeding heart and bottomless love. To her quae sine tactu pudoris. To the beata viscera Mariae Virginis. To her whose way was narrow but scented with the sweetness of thyme. To Him whose love was so perfectly available it dumbfounded wise men and the damned. He who had become human so we could know Him touch Him see Him in the littlest ways. Become human so His suffering would mirror ours, that His death throes, His doubt, despair, His failure, would speak for and absorb throughout earthtime what we were vulnerable to. (225)

Without italics to separate Consolata's words from the Catholic verse, Consolata fully embraces a Catholic doctrine. However, Consolata never fully fits into the world Mary Magna offers her – a space where “body is nothing” and “spirit everything” (263). Magna offers Consolata an identity focused on emulating Mary, on rejecting the body and looking toward heaven; she learns to fear Eve and all her bodily associations. However, Consolata idolizes Mary Magna and the worship of idols is not a Christian practice. An unspoken substitution of the sacred Mary, for Mary-the-person, offers Consolata a space in Mary Magna's world and also demonstrates a spirituality that never quite fits Catholicism.⁵

For Consolata, Convent life with the nuns requires abandoning the physical for an all-consuming Catholic faith; and Consolata's unconditional affection and reverence for Mary Magna facilitates that exchange. Upon arrival at the Convent, Consolata sees beauty in the same marble figures that Mary Magna labels offensive.⁶ In an act symbolic of her compliant rejection of the physical world, a dutiful Consolata eliminates the corporeal beauty of the house per Mary Magna's directive; smashing “offending marble figures” and burning books with pictures of “naked lovers,” Consolata cultivates her relationship with Catholicism (225). Identifying as Catholic allows Consolata to position herself closer to Mary Magna than the girls with whom she “attended classes...but formed no attachments” (225). Aside from Mary Magna, Consolata lacks any significant human attachments. Because of her relative isolation, Consolata cannot develop an

⁵ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Magna is defined as “a mother goddess, a fertility deity, *esp.* Cybele. Also (in extended use): a woman of a strongly maternal or erotic disposition.” Consolata's fitting substitution for the Virgin Mary further illustrates a spirituality not in complete accord with Catholicism.

⁶ Prior to the nun's arrival, the Convent was home to an embezzler who designed the house for lavish parties where his guests partook in “food, sex, and toys” for days at a time (Morrison, *Paradise* 71).

understanding of the physical.

Entrenched in an exclusively female space and ruled by strict Catholic doctrine, Consolata can only come to see the sexual, corporeal elements of herself through her affair with Deacon Morgan, a leader of the neighboring town of Ruby. A thirty-nine year-old Consolata first sees Deacon when she accompanies Mary Magna to a pharmacy in Ruby. The words “Sha sha sha” precede Deacon’s physical description. The inarticulate “Sha sha sha” also appears amidst Consolata’s account of Deacon’s actions. Consolata is taken by the physical characteristics of this “lean young man,” whose hips “[rock] in the saddle, back and forth, back and forth” (226). Her body responds as “wing[s] of a feathered thing, undead, [flutter] in her stomach” and she struggles to catch her breath (226).⁷ For the first time since her arrival at the Convent, Consolata experiences a physical attraction to a man. God’s language does not include words to express desires of the flesh. As a result of her strict Catholic indoctrination, Consolata does not possess the language to explain or recognize her reaction to Deacon; instead, she produces indistinct sounds that lack the focus of His word. For the next two months, Consolata’s feelings for Deacon cause her physical discomfort, as her body is “made unstable by a feathered thing fighting for wingspread” (227). Fearful of these alien feelings of the flesh, Consolata spends time in “fervent prayer” – a familiar language that maintains clear focus on God (227). Consolata ensures distance from Deacon by mismanaging her chores in order to

⁷ In “Pure Black: Class, Color, and Intra-racial Politics in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*,” Candice Jenkins argues that Deacon reminds Consolata of Brazil and the New World; in Deacon, Consolata sees a familiar “complex history worn by other “black” bodies in the New World” (285). He serves as a connection to a place she knew thirty years ago, and “the currents of memory that Consolata navigates, a kind of amorphous but insistent internal chorus [Sha sha sha] leads her directly into Deacon’s arms” (286). While Jenkins’ analysis is fitting, it is only one aspect of Consolata’s attraction to Deacon. While Deacon does remind Consolata of her youth in Brazil, I argue that their primary connection takes root and resides on a physical level.

remain at the Convent; but he eventually seeks her out, and when he does, “she [loses] her mind. Completely” (228). Deacon compliments Consolata’s physical beauty and asks her if she is aware of how attractive she is; Consolata tells him “[she’s] looking now” (231). Consolata defines herself physically through her experience with Deacon; with him, she is able to see and enjoy the body that Catholicism forces her to reject.

Engagement in a sexual relationship with a married man does not comply with Mary Magna’s values and necessitates Consolata’s spiritual break from the rigid tenets of Catholicism. To continue in a relationship of the flesh, Consolata abandons her life of religious devotion and “let[s] the feathers unfold and come unstuck from the walls of [her] stone-cold womb” (229). Because she is unable to align her actions with Catholicism, Consolata moves to the opposite end of the spectrum and affixes herself to the world of the flesh. While Consolata’s Catholic practice of prayer invokes language and ritual (things that can be spoken and known), her relationship with Deacon serves as an inversion of the Catholic communion. Deacon and Consolata come together outside Consolata’s system of dictated religion and the Ruby project for racial purity, and as a result, their bond is not something that can be defined with familiar words. As Deacon comes to Consolata in the night, he “[takes] her hand in his” (228). They drive for what seems like hours with “no words passing between them” (228). The physical union of their bodies requires no system of language. In the truck, Deacon “would have taken her in his arms except she was already there” (229). Utterances during sex “leaned toward language, gestured its affiliation, but in fact [were] un-memorable, -controllable or -

translatable” (229).⁸ There is unspoken communication rooted in the physical. The only “translatable” words appear as Deacon arranges for their next meeting on “Friday. Noon,” as he leaves Consolata embracing her body “in a harness of pleasure” (229). The lack of verbal communication between the two lovers indicates the destructive, degenerative nature of substituting repressive religion with physical pleasure. Because Consolata’s physical relationship with a man who embodies the patriarchal ideals of womanhood, she remains in a subordinate position that renders her silent.

Overcome by the sexual, Consolata neglects the spiritual world for the gendered patriarchal ideology Deacon encompasses. As a member of one of the founding families of Ruby, Deacon has strong ties to the town’s past and an investment in Ruby’s future. Although he does have an affair with a woman outside Ruby, he does not completely abandon Ruby’s patriarchal tenets. Once consumed by the Convent, Consolata becomes inattentive and ambivalent to its state of affairs, as she is solely occupied with Deacon. Claiming ownership of Consolata when he realizes she has not been with a man since she was raped as a nine-year-old child, Deacon says, “you’re all mine” (231). Consolata surrenders (her)self to Deacon’s gaze, which feels “like the beginning of the world” (228). Sandra Lee Bartky’s “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” offers some insight into Consolata’s behavior. Bartky’s article explores the construction of “the feminine body-subject” which produces “a ‘practiced and subjected’ body...on which an inferior status has been inscribed” (33). Bartky argues that in a patriarchal culture, the woman “stand[s] perpetually before his gaze and under his

⁸ Consolata does not experience the same unspoken physical bond with other men. When Deacon’s twin brother, Steward, picks Consolata up on the side of the road, the silence she experienced with him was uncomfortable and “barren, a muteness lined with acid” (Morison 235).

judgment” (34). It is this same dynamic that Consolata encounters with Deacon; her view of herself is constructed through Deacon’s eyes. When, without warning, Deacon skips a Friday meeting, he leaves Consolata’s weakened heart “clogged with awfulness” as she “[watches] the world of living things [dribble] away with his absence” (Morrison, *Paradise* 234). As the visits become more infrequent, Consolata experiences physical pain in Deacon’s absence. Once “the regularity of their meetings [had] soothed her hunger to a blunt blade. Now irregularity knifed it” (236). Rendering Consolata powerless to him, Deacon maintains control of the relationship as he determines when, where, and how often they meet. Desperate to keep Deacon in her life, Consolata suggests her “house” (the Convent) as a safe meeting place. But Deacon, ruled by the patriarchal ideology of Ruby, cannot allow himself to meet with Consolata on *her* terms, in *her* space. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler’s analysis of the damaging effects of female objectification provides insight into Consolata’s gendered identity. Butler argues that the body “appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines the cultural meaning for itself” (12). Both the men of Ruby and religious language have inscribed the female body with a rhetoric of inferiority, which provides them the power to maintain control. It is this male control that affirms Deacon’s control within his relationship with Consolata. Butler notes the limitations of “a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures,” as this serves to perpetuate constraining views of gender (13). For Consolata, surrender to the sensual comes with its own set of oppressive restrictions and constraints.

Abandoning one binary for another, Consolata's hunger for a spiritual connection within a relationship founded on a strictly sexual level precipitates the demise of that relationship. This intense desire for balance between the physical and the spiritual leads Consolata to invite Deacon into a space where she knew no relationship apart from Mary Magna or the Virgin Mary. The notion of uniting body, mind, and spirit in this space causes Consolata to bite Deacon's lip during a passionate kiss. Licking and "hum[m]ing over the blood," leaves Consolata filled with shame as she transfers total surrender to Christ to a living man (Morrison, *Paradise* 240). In a desperate prayer to the Divine Being, Consolata explains her behavior: "Dear Lord, I didn't want to eat him. I just wanted to go home" (240).⁹ *Home* can then be seen as the peace that results from an acceptance of the relationship between body and the spirit. Feeling a misguided connection to Deacon – "He and I are the same" (241) – Consolata's physical and spiritual hunger to feel at "home" pushes Deacon away. She cannot live in a purely physically or sexually driven space and achieve spiritual fulfillment.¹⁰ As "the poison spread[s]," Deacon's repulsion and abandonment leave Consolata feeling empty and guilt-ridden; "Consolata [has] lost him. Completely. Forever" (239). Left with only "the scraps of her gobble-gobble love," Consolata was both the casualty of Deacon's consuming male power and the attacker responsible for his wounded flesh (240).

⁹ In "Hybridizing the 'City Upon a Hill' in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," Ana María Fraile-Marcos notes Consolata's action as an appropriation of "the language and symbolism of the Eucharist...as if in an act of communion." Fraile-Marcos argues that Consolata interacts with Deacon "through the prism of Catholic faith and rituals" (Fraile-Marcos 25). While there are clear connections to Christ's blood sacrifice, this can also be read as a passionate, physical hunger for Deacon. Living in a world of binaries, Consolata's physical half overpowers her.

¹⁰ The two remaining girls at the Convent note the damaging effects of Consolata's all-consuming relationship of the flesh and consider this "serious instruction about the limits and possibilities of love and imprisonment, and [take] the lesson with them for the balance of their lives" (Morrison, *Paradise* 238).

Unable to maintain a psychologically fulfilling relationship with Deacon or a spiritually fulfilling relationship with Mary Magna's God, Consolata must create a bridge between the two realms. Lone DuPres, an "in-between" character and Ruby's resident wise-woman, introduces Consolata to a space that erases the boundaries of time and space and merges the physical and spiritual worlds. The Convent becomes an alternative space – that which poses a threat to Ruby's patriarchy –because it provides a place apart from the rigid structure of the town where Lone can act as a spiritual mentor to Consolata. In "Re-Imagining Agency: Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," Magali Cornier Michael interprets the Convent as a site of unity and accommodation that counters the binary oppositions of the town of Ruby. The Convent women "[act] collaboratively on the basis of particular, temporary, intersecting subject positions connected to a common history of oppression in order to resist and/ or move beyond specific forms of injustices perpetuated by an explosive racist and sexist American culture" (Michael 646). The Convent "validates" each woman and allows them to construct an identity apart from their subjugated past (Michael 650), while providing a space that "recognizes the interconnections of physical and psychic pain or imbalances" and encouraging "experiments in ways to face up to and move past these pains or imbalances" (Michael 653). While Michael recognizes that the Convent acts as a nurturing space due to the women's rejection of binary oppositions, this healing space cannot surface until Consolata embraces elements of herself, male/female, spiritual/ physical, past/ future, that she can teach nurturance and growth to the women in the Convent.

Free from Ruby's rule, the Convent becomes a sanctuary where Lone can

illuminate a path to individual and collective healing. Lone's alternative spirituality allows Consolata to negotiate her fractured identity and become a spiritual guide to the women in the Convent. Sensing an accident, Lone takes Consolata miles away from the Convent to the site of Scout Morgan's car accident. As Scout remains dangerously close to death, Consolata follows Lone's directive to "step in" and save him from an otherwise fatal car accident (Morrison, *Paradise* 245). Unable to ignore thirty years of Catholic doctrine that would label "stepping in" as evil, Consolata renames this act "seeing in" (247). "Stepping in" connotes an active violation of God's law while "seeing in" suggests a passive use of His gift. Consolata's use of language to reclaim an alternative spirituality signifies the early stages of her negotiation between the physical and the metaphysical. As Lone helps Consolata channel her abilities, she tells Consolata not to fear her gift. Lone tells her it is often necessary to deviate from strict Catholicism because "sometimes folks need more" (244). Consolata maintains, "[her] faith, faith is all [she] needs" (244). However, her behavior belies her language, indicating that "faith" is not all she needs. Had Consolata found a sense of peace and wholeness in the religious doctrine Mary Magna practiced, she would not have become so desperately consumed by her relationship with Deacon. Lone teaches Consolata to see God everywhere, and in different forms: "earth, air, water. Don't separate God from his elements. He created it all. You stuck on dividing Him from His works. Don't unbalance His world" (244). Lone's insight challenges Consolata's view that the corporeal and spiritual are at odds with one another, presenting Consolata an alternative existence that unites the two realms.

Because Consolata's religious habits are so deeply entrenched she cannot blindly accept the kind of freeing spirituality that Lone suggests. She does not believe that "ordinary folk" have any business interfering with otherwise "natural consequences" (244). However, when Lone told her to "step in[side]" Scout's body, she unhesitatingly did so and "concentrated as though the lungs in need were her own" (245). After saving Scout's life, Consolata's disparate thoughts continue, as she is "half exhilarated by and half ashamed of what she has done" (245).¹¹ After further reflection, Consolata's guilt settles in. She begins to see saving Scout "like devilment. Like evil craft. Something it would mortify her to tell Mary Magna, Jesus or the Virgin" (246). Because of Consolata's binary conception of religion, she is unable to fully embrace Lone's understanding of God's elements. For Consolata, there cannot be a "grey area" in her faith; and Catholicism provides no space for questions or any mingling of different forms of religion with the supernatural. However in subsequent years, as Consolata uses her power to prolong Mary Magna's life, she recognizes her ability is a gift of "insight," – Consolata's adjustment of Lone's expression, "seeing in." Conceding that her newly realized gift is "something God made free to anyone who wanted to develop it" (247), allows Consolata to embrace an unfamiliar spirituality without fully rejecting Mary Magna's influence. This acceptance shapes the early stages of Consolata's esoteric framework through which she can understand and accept her ability as a gift instead of an

¹¹ Following Mary Magna's death, Consolata begins to recognize that "she [has] been spoken to," but does not wholly accept her spiritual "gift." She maintains that this new spiritual insight renders her "half blessed, half cursed" (Morrison, *Paradise* 248).

evil practice.¹²

Unable to fully acknowledge and accept the space she has begun to create for herself, Consolata falls into a deep depression following Mother Mary Magna's death. Still existing in a world of binaries/ dichotomies, Consolata has lost both parts of herself – Mary Magna (her spiritual half), and Deacon (her physical half). She has nowhere to turn and no knowledge of how to heal her broken halves; “her rope to the world had slid from her fingers” (247). Consolata's paralysis is mirrored in the Convent, as the women suffer a similar stasis. Prior to Consolata's transformation, the Convent affords the women a safe place of acceptance apart from patriarchal rule; however the internalization of a hegemonic ideology/discourse where “other(s)...speak for and about” the women, prevents growth (Henderson 125). Although the women are freed (for a time) from persecution, their development in the Convent asymptotically approaches healing; without examining the binary narratives of gender, race, and spirituality, they cannot heal. This developmental paralysis is marked in the novel by the women's inability to mark the passage of time. While Mavis and Pallas leave and return to the Convent, Gigi intends to stay for only a few weeks and is surprised when Mavis tells her that four years have passed since her arrival. Following Mary Magna's death, Consolata hopes to die in her sleep each night and awakes each morning to the painful disappointment of still being alive. As “a woman in love with the cemetery,” Consolata is “repelled by her sluglike

¹² In *African Spiritual Traditions in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, K. Zauditu-Seltheassie connects Consolata's “symbolic sight” with her “*nyama* or vital energy,” which provides access to the “spiritual life” as opposed to the “dogma-filled life prescribed by Mother Mary Magna” (133). Zauditu-Seltheassie notes, “movement from one space or another...can occur during spirit possession or other spiritually charged states where one accesses other realms of existence” (133). This analysis erases the European constructions of time and space and moves “beyond the delineation of a three-dimensional structure” (133). It is this move beyond traditional understandings of time and space that allows Consolata to teach others to heal. Prior to her transformation, Consolata is bound by European constructions of time and space.

existence,” and passes her days drinking wine in the cellar (221-222). Unable to understand a life without Mary Magna’s mothering, Consolata feels that she is “already in a space tight enough for a coffin, already devoted to the dark” and struggles to understand why her life did not end with Mary Magna’s death (222). However, prayer-like conversations with Mary Magna reveal Consolata’s ability to move beyond binaries in the celestial sphere, as she conflates Mary Magna with Him/ God’s Son.

While Lone opens up the channel for spiritual fulfillment, Consolata does not fully embrace this undefined space until she is confronted with a “male” visitor. The man whose “words licked her cheek,” claims to know Consolata (252); and while she does not recognize her visitor, there is an immediate convergence of body and spirit as Consolata simultaneously understands his words on a cognitive level and on a sensual level. After only a few moments in the presence of this visitor, this convergence continues as Consolata begins to “slide toward his language” and her body responds to union by producing a feeling of weightlessness that makes her feel “as though she could move, if she wanted to, without standing up” (252). The visitor induces a sense of wholeness that neither conventional Christianity, nor physical pleasure afforded Consolata. The man’s eyes are “full of secret fun” as he exposes Consolata to a fluid concept of femininity and masculinity, as he reveals “fresh, tea-colored hair” that “cascad[es] over his shoulders and down his back” and eyes “as round and green as apples” (252). This male visitor shares the same eyes and hair as Consolata. After encountering an androgynous version of herself, she assumes her position in a fluid space not determined by gendered or religious dichotomies. What were once divided notions of gender, sexuality, and faith,

cohere to produce a confident, whole Consolata. She dismisses the rigidity of a binary mode of thought and sees an unbroken image of herself fluidly moving along a spectrum that does not divide body and spirit.

Judith Butler exposes the problems that arise through the “generally shared conception of ‘women,’” as not all women are the same and cannot be categorized as such; instead, constructions of gender should be replaced with a more fluid concept of male/ female and masculine/ feminine (7). Morrison seems to embrace Butler’s vision of gender as a continuum when she allows Consolata to move outside the limitations of the socially constructed definition of gender, and adopt more masculine traits. While she stops wearing sunglasses and begins to dress herself up in shiny nun shoes and dresses given to her by Soane Morgan (Deacon Morgan’s wife), Consolata’s physical attributes and demeanor take on traits once categorized as masculine. With an “aristocratic gaze of the blind” that looks beyond the physical presence of the girls to something deeper, Consolata still possesses “the features of dear Connie, but they are sculpted somehow – higher cheekbones, stronger chin” (Morrison, *Paradise* 262); her thicker eyebrows and pearly white teeth are either unnoticed or do not appear until her visitor draws such features out of her. Consolata becomes more assertive and direct, making the women question her sudden change from their unconditionally loving “granny goose,” that was a “sweet, unthreatening old lady...who never criticized, who shared everything but needed little or no care; required no emotional investment; who listened; who locked no doors and accepted each as she was” (262). No longer allowing herself to be typecast as the “Granny Goose Connie,” Consolata reintroduces herself as the assertive, androgynous

leader and healer, “Consolata Sosa” (262). Reconciliation between the body, mind, and spirit affords Consolata the power to speak freely.

Consolata’s created space also offers a possibility to move beyond boundaries of time in the physical world. Her awakening awards her with a more youthful appearance, as her hair has lost all traces of gray and her skin is now “as smooth as a peach” (262). Consolata has found her source of power in a space unbound by culturally imposed constructions of gender, and invites the broken women to embark on a journey that will provide them with an opportunity to transcend space and time and reunite them with people who “could want to meet [them]” (262). Promising to “teach [them] what [they] are hungry for” (262), Consolata is now able to transform the Convent from a place of stasis to a site of healing.¹³

In *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*, bell hooks notes the psychologically damaging effects of “forces of domination” that “[wound]... hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits” (11). hooks examines the capacity for the maternal figure/ “other mother” to create and encourage a healthy, generative self-perception and lifestyle in young girls. Identifying the importance of a space that allows one to “[be] in touch with [one’s] healing powers,” and “know how to ‘draw up the powers from the deep,’” hooks contends that within this space it becomes possible to identify the sources of pain and begin to heal (13). By the end of the novel, Consolata is able to provide the healing space hooks presents. However, she exceeds hooks’ model of a maternal figure, as she

¹³ Zauditu-Seltheassie notes Consolata’s recovery of speech as indicative of her return to “a memory of self before the cultural impositions perpetuated by Mary Magna” (134). Embracing this language gives her the “insight and mastery” necessary to “preside more efficaciously over the rituals of transformation” (134-135).

develops into a balanced, androgynous character that becomes more than a mother figure to the women. Consolata would not be able to heal if she only considered herself mother to the girls, as this would merely serve as another categorical limitation. Consolata is unable to find peace with Mary Magna's inherently patriarchal faith; neither is she satisfied with her purely sensual relationship with Deacon, nor with the Convent's strictly female space. Instead, Consolata embraces her sensuality from her experience with Deacon, and an unbound spirituality that Lone suggests; she unites the two to create a regenerative, spiritual site of healing.

Free from Western religious constraints, Consolata incorporates facets of African spiritualism into the healing process.¹⁴ In *African Spiritual Traditions in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, K.G Zauditu-Seltheassie examines the nature of "female spiritual traditions" and the ways in which "African women have redefined, restored, reclaimed, and recovered identity through a symbiotic relationship between themselves and the land" (119). According to Zauditu-Seltheassie, the presence of twinning/ doubling in African spiritual systems presents "the world as a balanced whole where opposition is seen as one of the twinned elements" and "core meaning resides in the interstices

¹⁴ Therese E. Higgins's *Religiosity, Cosmology, and Folklore*, examines the parallels between the communities illustrated in Morrison's fiction and the African notion of community. Drawing from the Akan, Lele in Zaire, Abaluya of Kenya, Lovedu of Zimbabwe, Fon of Benin, and the Tutsis and Hutus of Rwanda, Higgins examines the shared duty of the individual to "live well for the good of the whole" (77). An interconnectedness of religion and African tradition can be seen through the Biblical and mythic qualities of the "tribe" of the "original 158" and the founding of Haven (and later Ruby). Higgins provides a clear context for the reasons why "community [becomes] everything to these people, for together they would stand or together they would fall" (121-122). The framework of African tradition values the "community over individuality [and] is of sacred origin" (123). Unlike the static qualities of Ruby that cripple the community, the women in the Convent find unity and connection through a blend of religion and mysticism. Higgins notes Consolata's pagan influence through Carminha Levy's definition of the Black Madonna – "Mother Earth, the Female Principle, our Primordial Mother, symbol of Wisdom and integration and resolution of the opposites" (133). Lone DuPres provides the ancestral connection and teaches Consolata to connect to her spiritual self (137). Consolata then leads the women through a healing experience where the women confront their past and share in each other's painful stories (136).

between the complementary opposites” as a way to provide alternative insights and frameworks necessary in order to conceptualize reality (121). It is the “spaces in-between the usual binaries” which serve as a “space of exchange and mediation, healing and regeneration” (Zauditu-Seltheassie 123). Consolata draws on this “in-between” space to teach the girls to heal.

Embodying more healing power than an earthly mother, Consolata becomes maternal and paternal, earthly and otherworldly. As an autonomous, self-governing subject capable of creating her own narrative, Consolata redefines herself as a spiritual leader and healer. After the Convent cellar is scrubbed clean, and lighted candles surround this space, Consolata directs the girls to lie in the position of their choice on the cellar floor. She then outlines each body and instructed them to “remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight” (Morrison, *Paradise* 263). Consolata communicates her spiritual journey to a Third Space which afforded her the language to define herself. If the girls open themselves to the experience Consolata offers, they too will arrive at a peace that affords them the language to express themselves and create new narratives.

The girls silently listen as Consolata details her experiences that reinforced a binary mode of thought. She tells them how Mary Magna taught her that her “body is nothing [her spirit] everything” so that by the time she meets a man “[her] flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him” (263). After losing Deacon, she transfers that bodily love to her Mother; so much so, that after Mary Magna dies, so does Consolata’s spirit:

After she is dead I can not get past that. My bones on hers the only good thing. Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the

only true thing. So I wondering where is the spirit lost in this? It is true,
like bones. It is good, like bones. One sweet, one bitter. Where is it lost?
(263)

Once Consolata gives the girls insight into her personal struggle, she guides the girls through a reconciliation process. Consolata instructs them never to separate body and spirit, “Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary’s mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve” (263). Viewing the relationship between Eve and Mary as part of a continuum erases divisions and fosters a generative image of the two women. LeSeur argues that “the binarism that traditionally separates good and evil is broken down when Eve, oft blamed for the loss of paradise, and Mary, the symbol of goodness and purity, are shown to exist as part of the same whole, not as separate beings” (18). Dividing elements that are not intended to separate stifles growth and ensures an inability to reach paradise.

Within the Third Space of the Convent, Consolata takes on an active, creative position in her narrative. “In words clearer than her introductory speech,” Consolata describes her journey through a mystical realm (Morrison, *Paradise* 263). In a colorfully vivid description, Consolata tells the girls of a fluid (Third) space where the boundaries of mundane existence are flouted; a space that unites elements that are “normally” understood to be divided. Here, “sidewalks [meet] the sea,” plum-colored fish “[swim] alongside children,” “fruit [...] taste[s] the way sapphires look,” carnations are “tall as trees,” “boys [use] rubies for dice,” and in the golden cathedrals, “gods and goddesses sat in the pews with the congregation” (263). She also tells the girls of her spiritual

companion, Piedade, who only appears after Consolata embraces her identity within a Third Space. Consolata celebrates Piedade's powerful "voice [which] made proud women weep in the streets [,] coins [fall] from the fingers of artists and policemen, and the country's greatest chefs [beg] ... to eat their food" (284-285). With "songs that could still a wave, make it pause in its curl listening to language it had not heard since the sea opened" Piedade's voice creates a space for others to "remember their lives in her songs" (285). Piedade's use of language unites otherwise divided elements. Consolata appropriates her companion's words to inspire the Convent girls to begin reconciling the fractured pieces of their own identities.

No longer silenced by a narrative constructed for and about them, the girls access a language that affords them freedom to explore and articulate previously suppressed facets of their identities. The girls' "loud dreaming" of "half-tales and the never-dreamed" allows them to confront the oppressive "male voices saying saying forever saying push their own down their throats" (264). Located in a Third Space where rigid notions of past/ present, male/ female, and mundane/ otherworldly coalesce, the girls generate speech that allows them to continue "saying, saying until there is no breath to scream or contradict" (264). Challenging oppressive narratives generates "life, real and intense" in each of the women (264). "No longer haunted," the girls transform from Othered subjects of a narrative constructed for them, to active agents of their own stories (266). Consolata's speech does not directly heal the women; instead, it presents a process wherein the girls are able to gain self-awareness and language to heal themselves. Even after the initiation, each woman is drawn to her silhouette on the cellar floor, as it

becomes a physical manifestation of the inner struggle that haunted each of the girls. The drawings are a means to articulate and move beyond internalized pain, and signify a new beginning.¹⁵ The girls are able to analyze and express themselves spiritually by connecting physical pain and spiritual awareness. This allows each of the Convent women an opportunity to contest her marginalized role as a broken or fallen woman; a position which deprived them of an opportunity to grow and develop as individuals.

The destructive patriarchal rhetoric of Ruby ultimately surfaces at the end of the novel when Deacon and the Ruby men physically eliminate the female “threat” that resides in the Convent. Supported by *their* God, the men assert ultimate control over the women of the convent when they take the women’s lives. The Convent women achieve an ultimate sense of peace and safety until it is disrupted by the Ruby men’s armed invasion. The Ruby patriarchs “take aim” for the Convent with “God at their side,” and massacre the women (18).¹⁶ As the men enter the Convent, they see the “devil’s bedroom, bathroom, and his nasty playpen;” the patriarchs “[fondle] their weapons, feeling suddenly so young and good they are reminded that guns are more than decoration, intimidation or comfort. They are meant” (17, 285). The Ruby men charge through the Convent and shoot the women. Assumed to be dead, the women have transcended the limits of time in the physical and spiritual world. Fusion of mind and

¹⁵ According to La Vinia Delois Jennings, the Candomblé vision of paradise is not the static European notion, but instead an open, changing paradise where one is endowed with the power “to improve the lives of people during their brief passage through aiê (the mortal realm)” (175). In this context, Consolata begins to experience paradise as she teaches the girls how to heal and she reaches the ultimate paradise as she and Piedade embark on the unending quest to help those in need within the mortal realm. For more on Morrison’s evocation of non-Judeo Christian forms of spirituality, see La Vinia Delois Jennings’s *Toni Morrison’s Ideal of Africa*.

¹⁶ Lone recalls the buzzards swarming above the town. Like the bird of Morrison’s Nobel Lecture, the buzzards signify the Ruby men’s (ab)use of power. The men, like the visitors in Morrison’s lecture, sacrifice living things in order to maintain a position of power over others.

body is most powerfully illustrated as the women appear to their loved ones at the end of the novel. To experience paradise, and the women of the Convent ultimately do, each woman embraces herself as ever changing, always moving. Consolata's acceptance moves her to a space of healing and regeneration. This "in-between" supernatural space transcends space and time, allowing Consolata, and her mystical companion, Piedade, the opportunity to tend "to the endless work they were created to do down here in paradise" (318). Consolata's role as healer is not fixed. She and Piedade will continue to move through time and space to help the "lost and saved" understand the beauty and peace, which comes with the erasure of binary constructions of gender and space, and allows one to experience paradise (318).

“Trying to find a place when the streets don’t go there”: Gaining Self-Knowledge and
Voice in Toni Morrison’s *Love*

There are arguably three generations of people affected by cycles of patriarchal belief in *Love*: Dark Cosey is the first generation to practice an oppressive rule; Bill Cosey inherits his father’s oppressive language and views; Heed and Christine are then oppressed by the cycle of patriarchal rule when Heed marries Cosey. While Junior is a more contemporary figure who does not directly witness Cosey’s power, she still suffers the same schism. Generational cycles of patriarchy silence individual narratives and self-definition. A rejection of these imposed/ gendered patriarchal constructions of female identity required in order to define oneself and heal from (patriarchal) wounds.

The pervasive vestiges of an organized patriarchal ideology examined in *Paradise*, emanate from Bill Cosey as he appears at the center of *Love*. Raised by a man who valued social status and personal financial gain above community welfare, Bill Cosey adopts a paternalistic role in Silk’s development and embraces the town his father rejected. Daniel Robert Cosey, re-named “Dark” by the black community, bought and maintained a position of power by “[keeping] his evil gray eye on everybody” (Morrison, *Love* 68). As a police informant who acquired his wealth by betraying his community, Dark evoked fear and resentment in those around him. Cosey detested his father’s greed and after Dark’s death; he used his inheritance “on things Dark cursed: good times, good clothes, good food, good music, [and] dancing till the sun came up in a hotel made for it

all” (68). While Cosey defines himself against Dark, he does replicate Dark’s dominance and abuse of power.

Despite Bill Cosey’s charm and hospitable nature that “smoothed over every crack or stumble, from an overheard argument among staff or a silly, overbearing wife,” his ownership of a successful coastal resort placed him in a position of power (147). Although Bill Cosey did not evoke the same sense of fear that Dark did, his ability to provide hotel jobs and financial security to his family and friends yielded him a role of superior and, ultimately, allowed him to control their future success. Simultaneously a husband, father, grandfather, and boss, Cosey’s disarming power enables him to easily influence the women around him – during his life and posthumously. Unable to directly confront or oppose the decisions and (sometimes questionable) behavior of the man of the house, Cosey’s granddaughter and child-bride turn against one another. Years after Cosey’s death, The Cosey name “still lifted eyelids,” and, as the widow of a “onetime owner of many houses, a hotel resort, two boats, and a bankful of gossiped-about, legendary cash, [who] always fascinated people,” Heed believes she is referenced in his will as the recipient of “the Monarch Street house and ‘whatever nickels are left’” as “[his] sweet Cosey child,” (88). Morrison suggests that male rule, however charming, eradicates the potential for female bonds and prevents spiritual and emotional growth.

L exemplifies this stasis through her narrative. Once a cook and mediator of disputes between the women in Cosey’s hotel, after her death L straddles the spiritual and temporal worlds. While her “in-between” position could potentially offer more insight into both worlds and afford her the potential to fill the role of a Consolata-figure (healer/

teacher), L is so engrossed in Mr. Cosey's legacy that she fails to offer any spiritual guidance or insight. She resides primarily in the temporal world and the realm of memory. L's stasis is a result of her obsession with Cosey and the hotel. L even relates her birth back to Cosey and constructs her life's timeline around him: "...going from womb water straight into rain marked me. It's noteworthy, I suppose, that the first time I saw Mr. Cosey, he was standing in the sea, holding Julia, his wife, in his arms. I was five; he was twenty-four and I'd never seen anything like that" (64). L's fluid position between two worlds allows her to embrace the role of healer and teacher; however, the only way L believes she can save Heed and Christine's friendship is through Cosey's murder. L then poisons Cosey; however, Cosey's death only further divides Heed and Christine.

The patriarchal politics of the hotel do not allow for a balance of power between Cosey and the women. In *Sisters of the Yam*, bell hooks notes that patriarchal politics provide black men power over black women; wherein it becomes "socially acceptable" for men "to lie and deceive to maintain power over women" (14). As a result of the inherent dishonesty within the patriarchal structure, hooks argues that women often withhold truth to "subvert male power," which results in increased dishonesty and unhealthy communication within relationships (hooks 14). "Dissimulation" praises illusion over truth and fosters a dysfunctional dynamic where black children are "socialized to feel comfortable, at ease, only in situations where lying is taking place. They are being taught to exist in a state of denial" (hooks 15). Additionally, a patriarchal structure "encourages us to deny what we genuinely feel and experience, we lose our capacity to know who we really are and what we need and desire" (hooks 15). Morrison

exemplifies this rift in the disrupted communication between Heed and Christine. As childhood friends, before they were taught to deny their genuine emotions, Heed and Christine “laughed till they hiccuped under the sheets” (Morrison, *Love* 95). The innocent girls create a space for themselves, separate from the complexities of adult life – a playhouse that they named after a free-spirited woman, whom men called after with the phrase, “Hey, Celestial.” Invention of a secret language called “Idagay,” allowed them to secretly communicate their true thoughts in front of adults. Idagay “was for intimacy, gossip, telling jokes on grown-ups” (188). Aside from their private language, “‘Hey, Celestial’ was their most private code” (188).

The union of truth and language in a space free from patriarchal constraints nurtures an intimacy between Heed and Cosey, which Cosey quickly destroys from the moment he interacts with the eleven year old Heed on the beach. Heed and Christine, venture “to the shade and privacy of Celestial Palace: a keeled-over row- boat long abandoned to sea grass” (190). Celestial Palace is a space free of adults where the girls feel a sense of creative empowerment as they cleaned, *named*, and furnished this space with “a blanket, a driftwood table, two broken saucers, and emergency food” (190). Heed returns to the hotel for the forgotten jacks, while Christine stays at the palace with their food. In a moment of child-like innocence, Heed “shakes her hips” to the hotel music when she unexpectedly bumps into Cosey (190). Both embarrassed and awestruck in the presence of “the handsome giant who owns the hotel and who nobody sasses,” Cosey’s powerful rule affects/ forges a silence that Heed maintains/ endures until the end of the novel (190). Heed is unable to speak when asked a direct question and Cosey asserts his

dominance when he “speaks again,” asking if Heed is part of the Johnson family (191). Heed affirms that she is a Johnson and that her name is “Heed, sir [...] Heed the Night” (191). Cosey smugly agrees that he should, indeed, *heed the night* (197). Cosey then “touches her chin, and then—casually, still smiling—her nipple, or rather the place under her swimsuit where a nipple will be if the circled dot on her chest ever changes” (191). As Cosey leaves “the spot on [Heed’s] chest [that] she didn’t know she had,” “burning, tingling,” she runs to tell Christine what just happened (191). However, Heed’s ability to communicate to Christine is thwarted when she sees Christine’s vomit-covered bathing suit. No longer honing the creative empowerment that Celestial Palace once inspired, Christine’s “face is hard, flat. She looks sick, disgusted, and doesn’t meet Heed’s eyes” (191). Christine cannot find the words to tell Heed what caused her to vomit. Heed, too, struggles to find the words to tell her friend what happened, and feels that her own silence “has spoiled it all” (191). The girls, silent, go on with the picnic. Heed lies to Christine about not being able to find the jacks and this “first lie [...] is born because Heed thinks Christine knows what happened and it made her vomit” (191). Heed has the childlike tendency to internalize conflicts and blame herself regardless of the circumstance; “the old man saw it right away so all he had to do was touch her and it moved as he knew it would because the wrong was already there, waiting for a thumb to bring it to life” (192). Heed believes that her “hip-wiggling” instigated Cosey’s inappropriate touch, and that the silence between Heed and Christine is a result of Heed’s “wrong thing” that shows (192). However, Christine’s inability to speak is a result of Cosey as well. Heed is not aware that Christine went to meet Heed and looked up to her

bedroom window only to see “her grandfather is standing there, in her bedroom window, his trousers open, his wrist moving with the same speed L used to beat egg whites into unbelievable creaminess” (192). Ashamed, Christine vomits and her Cosey-induced-ignominy abrogates communication between Christine and Heed until the end of the novel. As Christine goes to bed that night, Cosey’s “shadow had booked the room” and the “old man’s solitary pleasure lurked there. Like a guest with a long-held reservation arriving in your room at last, a guest you knew would stay” (192). Heed and Christine’s speech was silenced by “this particular shame” that “could not tolerate speech—not even in the language they had invented for secrets” (192).

In *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks observes, “sexuality has always provided gendered metaphors for colonization [...] as men of the dominating group sexually violate the bodies of the women who are among the dominated” (hooks, *Yearning* 57). Historically, men “shared the political belief that revolutionary struggle was really about the erect phallus, the ability of men to establish political dominance that could correspond to sexual dominance” (hooks, *Yearning* 58). According to hooks, both white men and black men “have equated freedom with manhood and, and manhood with the right of men to have indiscriminate access to the bodies of women [...] and] have been socialized to condone patriarchal affirmation of rape as an acceptable way to maintain male domination” (59). While Cosey’s initial interaction with Heed is not a penetrative “rape,” he is aware of his status as “the handsome giant who owns the hotel and who nobody sasses,” and uses that position of power to his advantage as he violates Heed (Morrison, *Love* 190).

With his divisive, domineering, male power, he not only silences the women around him, but also disrupts the generative, creative childhood language, friendship, and communication between the girls. Their private language of intimate truths becomes a language of deceit for the remainder of Cosey's life and after his death. Cosey's intrusion perverts the exchange/ communication between the two girls. It is not until Heed marries Cosey that class further divides Heed and Christine. Viewing Heed's family as a "nest of beach rats who bathed in a barrel and slept in their clothes," Christine condemns Heed's pre-marital economic status and perverts their sacred language, Idagay, in order to "draw friendly blood" (89, 188). In Idagay, Christine calls Heed a slave after Heed's family sells her to Cosey for "two hundred dollars" and "a pocketbook for [Heed's] Mama" (193). Although the eleven-year-old bride sees her marriage as "a chance [...] to get out, to learn how to sleep in a real bed," Heed pays for these accommodations through the loss of her dignity and her friendship with Christine (127). Those closest to Cosey are unable to accept that a man of Cosey's standing married a girl from a family that lacked "morals of any kind whatsoever" (145). Heed's identity is continually conflated with "what her daddy did" and "what her daddy is;" her identity is constructed through her father's unethical decision to exchange his daughter for money (146). Although Vida, a hotel employee, acknowledges that Heed's youth and upbringing prevent her from "know[ing] about morals, restraint," and that Heed should be credited for "never [running] around on Cosey," and "can't [be] blame[d] her for what her daddy did," Heed is still Othered due to her family lineage; Cosey's people maintain that "the seed don't fall far from the pod" (146). Patriarchal language names Heed "a deceitful bitch who has

to control people;” the understanding of who has “control” is misplaced (146). Because Heed quickly shifts from a child to a child-bride, she has no understanding of self apart from her position as Cosey’s wife. However, no one can challenge Cosey’s behavior, “he was the Big Man who, with no one to stop him, could get away with it and anything else he wanted” and Christine’s mother “chose to send her away rather than confront [Cosey’s obvious rejection of Christine]” (133). Instead, they direct their frustration at Heed. Both Christine and her mother meet Heed’s entrance into their family with “relentless criticism of the young bride,” as they ridicule her “speech, hygiene, table manners, and thousands of things Heed didn’t know” (76). Heed fights for her position as a member of Cosey’s family and only when Cosey was around did everyone “[back] off” (127). Denied the language and space to articulate feelings of mistreatment and rejection, Heed and Christine slowly begin to lose touch with one another as their created language dissolves.

Heed and Christine experience a psychological and emotional separation that is intensified by their language barrier – silence. Because Heed and Christine were more like sisters than friends, and Cosey acts like a father to Christine after the death of his son, the “intimacy” between Cosey and Heed reads as incestuous and the distinction between husband and father figure blurs. On their wedding night, Cosey and Heed escape to the sea where they undress and submerge themselves in water. There is no penetration, blood, or physical discomfort as he holds his child-bride in his arms while “stroking, nursing, [and] bathing her” in a paternal, calming nature (77). Because Cosey refrains from sex with Heed until she begins menstruation, he does not use his body to penetrate his new bride. However, he does allow the ocean to infiltrate her as he “[stands] behind

her, [places] his hands behind her knees, [and opens] her legs to the surf” (78).

Throughout the novel, L describes the ocean as male and often associates Cosey with the ocean. On their wedding night, then, Cosey *does* penetrate Heed. Cosey infiltrates the mind and body of his child-bride and ensures her isolation from others.

Her ultimate dependence on Cosey positions him at the center of Heed’s world. Heed is flooded with conflicting views of Cosey. He is simultaneously a husband who “opens her legs to the surf,” a father figure who gently “[strokes], [nurses] [and] [bathes]” his confused child, a provider who gives Heed an opportunity to escape the “fire ants” that were her family and allows her “to learn how to sleep in a real bed,” (78, 127) and a lover who regards Heed as his “long-legged angel with candle eyes and a smile he couldn’t help but join” (148). Assuming the role of the paternal rescuer, Cosey justifies his marriage by “saving” Heed from her degenerate parents, and later, saving her from the immediate threats of the other women, and allows her a sense of security in his presence; she feels “safe with him no matter what he muttered in his sleep” (Morrison 79). However, the man who saves Heed from her family and robbed her of her friend does not remain faithful to her and renders her broken and alone. She feels hurt by the loss of her friend, and hopeful about her newfound economic security, without a means to articulate either. In “Uncovering ‘the Beloved’ in the Warring and Lawless Women in Toni Morrison’s *Love*,” J. Brooks Bouson argues that Cosey’s centrality in Heed and Christine’s lives “points to the staying power of patriarchy in the lives of the women” (371). Heed is not capable of negotiating the complex, multilayered elements of her relationship with Cosey, nor is she able to assume an identity apart from Cosey’s wife.

Unlike the women at the Convent, Heed does not have access to a safe, communal space wherein she can explore and communicate the cause of her pain and isolation. As a result, she remains inextricably bound to Cosey's life and legacy. Unlike Christine, who has a means of making a place for herself but finds herself drawn to define herself in relation to Cosey, Heed *has* to assert herself as the "Sweet Cosey Child" or she will have nothing. Bousoon argues that Heed and Christine's bond formed before they could make distinctions between race and class. Bousoon examines the ways in which the characters attempt to hide the beloved part of themselves as a result of the "exclusionary politics of class and caste in the African American community" (359). A damaging, self-destructive behavior develops due to such exclusion and it is only years later when Heed and Christine are confronted with death, that they are able to set aside these ruling politics and recover the beloved within.

As language dissolves, Heed and Christine experience a physical separation that their young minds cannot reconcile. When Cosey and Heed leave for their honeymoon, "Christine gazes into the darkness huddling the porch steps where a sunlit child is rigid with fear and the grief of abandonment" (Morrison, *Love* 170). Heed looks at Christine with a "blend of wild eyes, grin, and confusion," hoping Christine will help her understand what it means for Heed to leave and what she can expect on her honeymoon (170). In desperate need to (re)connect with her friend, to return to a place and time when neither child had to deny their feelings, Heed physically reaches out to Christine before she leaves with Cosey on their honeymoon. With her fingers pressed hard against the car window, Heed is unable to verbally communicate her desire for Christine to join her on

her honeymoon. Unaware of marital dynamics – especially those between a man and his child-bride – the girls lack the language to articulate their need for one another’s support and companionship.

Audre Lorde’s “Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving,” provides insight into Heed and Christine’s lack of self-definition. Lorde argues, “if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others – for their use and our detriment” (45). Lorde notes that by coming together as “self-actualized individuals,” and challenging power relationships based on a dominant/ subordinate model, a space emerges where individuals can continue to develop their strengths without having to “[fight] for control over one another” (46). As Heed and Christine grow older, their bond becomes one of hate, fostered by their desire to be a part of Cosey’s legacy. Lacking the language to articulate her pain, each woman’s silence “draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or reconciliation, of challenge of annihilation” (Lorde 41). Heed and Christine enact Lorde’s observation at Cosey’s funeral as they each stand on opposite sides of his casket with “faces as different as honey from soot, [that] looked identical” (Morrison, *Love* 34). Their hatred “burns off everything but itself, so whatever your grievance is, your face looks just like your enemy’s” (34). Inability to see beyond Cosey, and their own hatred, robs both of the women of an effective use of language and communication and forces them to attack one another instead of challenging the power Cosey has over them.

In *Rewriting Black Identities: Transition and Exchange in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, Rebecca Ferguson explains that the denial of one’s connections to others

creates the illusion of self-definition (17). Without acknowledgement or interaction with the community, “individuals are seen to have at best an insecure sense of their own place and meaning” (Ferguson 17). Ferguson argues that *Love* “has more to do with the roots and effects” of the individual’s separation from the community, and with “the long shadow of slavery, than with purely personal and interfamilial strife” (17). Following Ferguson’s reading of *Love*, the “roots” of communal separation can be traced back to Dark’s manipulative, controlling power, which resurface in Cosey’s mistreatment of Heed and Christine.

Cosey’s patriarchal domination over those around him is clear in his actions: he blames Heed for never producing a child for him, begins an extramarital affair with Celestial “a few years into the marriage,” spans his child-bride for her misbehavior “the way you would any other brat” (126), approves of his son’s wife because she is a proper woman who is “impressed with the hotel”—and by extension Cosey himself—and “show[s] signs of understanding what superior men require (105, 102), and sends his granddaughter away for fighting with his wife and reminding him of his father.

Even after his death, Cosey maintains his position of power over the women he left behind, as they battle over how he defined them. Heed and Christine feud over their rights to Cosey’s will. Christine defines herself as “the last, the only, blood relative of William Cosey” (Morrison, *Love* 95). For twenty years she has lived to “[take] care of *his* house and *his* widow” (95, emphasis mine)¹⁷. Outraged by the notion that she has been

¹⁷ In “Ethical Effects of Nachträglichkeit in Morrison’s *Love*,” Jean Wyatt notes the fragmented, unclear sense of time in *Love*. According to Wyatt, “Heed and Christine remain in the ‘too early’ phase for most of ...the length of the fifty years represented in the main body of the text” (197). As a result, “Heed and Christine lack the conceptual tools that would enable them to understand their situation. From the time that

supplanted, Christine continues to center her life on Cosey. Christine's life continues to revolve around Cosey. In an attempt to define herself, Christine relentlessly seeks to obtain Cosey's inheritance; however, this only perpetuates Cosey's hold over her.

It is not until Heed and Christine accept and embrace their interconnectedness that they can begin to piece together fragments of the past in order to obtain a clearer understanding of themselves. As the two women meet in the attic of the hotel at the end of the novel, "the eyes of each are enslaved by the other's;" the "guilt, rage, fatigue, despair" of childhood wounds surface as a "hatred so pure, so solemn, it feels beautiful, almost holy" (177). As Junior pulls the rug out from under Heed's feet, Junior runs away with the will. In the absence of Cosey's will, Heed and Christine are freed from the last divisive piece of Cosey's life and legacy, and Heed and Christine unite. In the attic, the ocean – which L connects to Cosey throughout the novel – "has no scent or roar," allowing the women space to negotiate their understanding of the effects of Cosey's marriage to Heed (184). The ocean, like Cosey, has lost its power to silence the women. In the absence of Cosey's divisive male power, Christine covers Heed's feet and gives her medicine to ease the pain of splintered bones. As the two begin to speak freely for the first time since childhood, their words possess "the vigor of a felon pardoned after twenty-one years on hold [-] Sudden, raw, stripped to its underwear," (184). The women are enabled to re-establish their friendship and define themselves independent from their relation to Cosey.

Heed is jolted untimely into the world of sexuality and marriage up until the present, when the women are in their sixties, she and Christine occupy a world of patriarchal meanings that precludes their understanding what the loss of their friendship means to them; they can see each other only as rivals" (197). For twenty-five years since Cosey's death, the women fight over "which one of them is the 'sweet Cosey- child' that Bill Cosey's makeshift will designates as heir to his property" (197).

As they set aside their power-struggle and regain speech, language generates a bridge between the past and the present, and (re)generates language that allows Heed and Christine to clearly communicate the traumatic events that silenced them as children. This understanding reignites a physical intimacy and emotional bond between Heed and Christine: “It’s like we started out being sold, got free of it, then sold ourselves to the highest bidder. / Who you mean “we”? Black people? Women? You mean me and you? / I don’t know what I mean. / Christine touches Heed’s ankle. The unswollen one” (185). Heed and Christine recognize their experience as a form of patriarchal slavery; their relation to Cosey enslaved both women. Christine’s assessment marks a return to the past wherein blacks were “sold,” then “freed;” Christine’s third mention of sale, refers to their powerless position as objects of sale within an ongoing patriarchal rule. Christine’s sympathetic touch to Heed’s ankle – once shackled by Cosey – suggests they are no longer enslaved by the past. In the absence of a healer/ guide, Heed and Christine act as their own healers as they validate themselves (as opposed to looking to Cosey for validation). As “the future [disintegrates] along with the past” (184), Heed and Christine melt into the present and (re) connect through (re)discovered language. Heed and Christine realize that they both traded their bodies (on some level) to men in exchange for economic security; Heed just did so at an age where she was unable to fully comprehend the consequences of such an arrangement.¹⁸ Heed reveals that Cosey was good to her for the first few years: “Mind you, at eleven [she] thought a box of candied popcorn was

¹⁸ After Christine left Cosey’s house she became involved with men that offered her money and material luxuries in exchange for sex. Heed’s exchange, however, was not her own – she was the object of an exchange from her parents to Cosey. As a child, any individual claim to her future/ narrative was taken from her; and with it, they took away her access to a language that previously afforded her the words to communicate her narrative of a blossoming childhood friendship.

good treatment” (186). But when Cosey’s treatment of Heed worsened, Heed looked to May and Christine to explain the complexity of her position as a powerless child-bride – but Cosey’s domineering presence silenced any possibility of communication. Heed could not afford to blame Cosey for the loss of her identity and her childhood friendship, because of the economic security he afforded her as an uneducated, illiterate bride; but Christine could, and did.

In order to redefine their friendship, Heed and Christine must return to their invented childhood language. This return to language is the “real leap” which, “consists in introducing invention into existence”; the women reintroduce their language into their relationship, utilizing invented communication to produce real change (Bhabha 7). Bhabha notes, “. . .it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence. . .there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration” required to achieve the “breaking of the time-barrier of a culturally collective ‘present’” (Bhabha 9). For Bhabha:

the intervention of the ‘beyond’ that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into the private and public spheres. (Bhabha 9)

According to Bhabha, the “unhomely moment creeps up” as one begins to look upon the “measure of your own dwelling in a state of ‘incredulous terror (9). Christine appropriates L’s words as she admits that they were just little girls “trying to find a place when the streets don’t go there” (Morrison, *Love* 189). The older woman’s words allow Christine and Heed to bridge the divided relationship in a way that L could not. This understanding creates a Third Space for the women, apart from the limitations of *man-*made streets, where two separate bodies can unite through as a result of effective speech.

Heed and Christine’s search for “Big Daddy,” who was simultaneously “everywhere...and nowhere,” made it impossible for the women to “liv[e] [their] lives hand in hand,” (189). The women’s reclamation of voice fosters a dialogue that permits Heed to tell Christine what she needs: “Hold my...my hand” (194). As Heed finally finds the words to express her need to connect with Christine, their bodies intertwine; while “one is lying on her back, left arm akimbo; the other has wrapped the right arm of the dead one around her own neck and is snoring into the other’s shoulder” (195). Heed dies only moments after she regains speech; but their reconnection allows Christine to live peacefully. Each leaves the Hotel with a part of the other. The strength of their reunion transcends the bounds of the physical world as Christine continues to communicate with Heed after Heed’s physical death. The women’s union re-makes and intensifies the dynamic within their childhood playhouse and heightens the intimacy and meaning of their relationship to a *celestial* level.

While this is a less fractured ending than *Sula*, Heed and Christine do not achieve the same eternal peace achieved in the Convent. Unlike the women in the Convent who

eternally reside in a Third Space, in-between the worldly and the ephemeral, Heed only appears to the reader as a silent, unresponsive listener to Christine's continued dialogue. In the novel's closing scene, Christine seeks Heed's advice regarding what she should do with Junior. Heed's response is unheard by or unavailable to the reader; if Heed does exist as a spiritual companion to her childhood friend, her presence and influence is limited only to Christine. Theirs is a bond so intense that they can communicate beyond the grave in a language so sacred that the reader is not invited to share in this realm of their relationship. Heed's limited presence after her death suggests that the wounds suffered from Cosey's enslavement do not allow Heed and Christine to experience a healthy sense of self apart from each other. Cosey's oppression may be seen as more damaging than the harm the Ruby men inflict on the Convent women. As the Convent women, and Consolata specifically, embrace a fluid concept of religion, spirituality, and gender, they are afforded a language and self-awareness that allows them to return, within the space of the novel, to eternally guide many. However, *Love* is not about spiritual awakening, but regaining self-definition and bonds of female friendship outside of the limitations of patriarchy.

Morrison does not allow the reader to dismiss Heed and Christine's battle against patriarchal rule as a thing of the past. Through Morrison's representation of Junior, a contemporary nineties woman suffering a schism similar to Heed and Christine, Morrison insists that patriarchal rule is not a thing of the past. Junior, like Heed and Christine, is also challenged by the limitations of a patriarchal ideology. Born in "the Settlement," a place like Ruby but more degenerate and lower class; a place that "heaved with loyalty

and license, [where] the only crime was departure,” Junior eagerly attends school as a way to escape her family and Settlement life (55). Rejected by her peers because of her poverty, the ten year old Junior “behave[s] as though the rejection was her victory,” until she befriends classmate Peter Paul (56). The two enter into a friendship of equality – not a sexual relationship, but one where each shares facets of their lives and experiences. The only true friendship Junior knows is severed when Junior’s uncles, who “[alternate] between brutality and coma,” discover Junior has given Peter Paul a cottonmouth snake; they are enraged that something from the Settlement has been displaced (57). Junior refuses to return the snake and attempts to run away, but her uncles forcefully stop her by running over her foot with their truck. Her failed attempt to escape the patriarchal hold of the Settlement forces Junior to stay at the Settlement until she regains mobility. Robbed of her voice, Junior silently watches as her “toes swell, redden, turn blue, then black, then marble, then merge” (59). One year later, Junior successfully escapes the Settlement, but the damage has been done. Her uncles have severed the ties of Junior’s innocent, creative childhood friendship much like Cosey breaks the bond between Heed and Christine. Denied a means to define or empower herself apart from male dominance, Junior can no longer connect to men on the same emotional level of which she connected with Peter Paul. Male imposition of essentialist, classist notions of community distorts Junior’s understanding of healthy, balanced relationships and drives her to fulfill this void with her body or sex.

To regain power over the patriarchal system that silenced her, Junior begins to communicate with her body. Her silence leads to a heightened awareness of the body. To

compensate for her lack of voice, Junior adopts a language of the body to communicate with those around her. After running away from the Settlement, Junior steals a G.I. Joe doll from a dollar store, is subsequently taken into custody, and transferred to a shelter. Without her voice, Junior's body conveys her resistance as she bites the woman who took her doll. Refusing to speak her name, Junior is remanded to a juvenile correctional facility. Time in the correctional facility heightens Junior's sensitivity to the physical presence of others. As she "awake[s] to the 'there' of other people's bodies," she sharpens her ability to read the body language of others (118). Her insight into the language of the body surfaces in her relationships, as it is her only means of communicating after being silenced by men in positions of authority.

While the eleven-year-old Junior initially chooses to use her body to protect and defend herself, by the time Junior leaves the correctional facility, she is aware of the powerful potential of female sexuality. In her essay, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Audre Lorde describes erotic power as a resource that "lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (53). In an attempt to subvert this female power, patriarchy teaches us to "suspect" the power of the erotic (Lorde 53). The erotic is vilified, devalued, and abused within western society" (Lorde 53). However, Lorde argues that the inherent power of the erotic lies in its capacity to bridge "the physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us" (54). Junior does not have access to Lorde's view of the erotic, as Junior's understanding is shaped by male constructions of sexual desire. As a result, Junior's (ab)use of the erotic as sexual

leverage undermines her efforts to construct an agent-position for herself. Instead, Junior just continues to fluctuate between dominator and dominated.

Morrison offers a less desirable alternative to Heed and Christine's generative reconciliation through Junior. Hired by the elderly, illiterate Heed under the guise of composing a "memoir," Junior enters the Cosey family drama during the heat of the women's battle over Cosey's will. Neither Heed nor Junior received a consistent/ formal education, and neither has access to the language needed to compose Heed's narrative.¹⁹ As a child, Junior runs away from "the Settlement" when her uncles abuse her for befriending a child of significantly higher economic status. Again, patriarchs delimit the space for female growth; as a result of her uncle's intrusion, Junior is unable to obtain another honest friendship and, as she gets older, she seeks out relationships grounded in sexual satisfaction. Unable to negotiate between the emotional and the physical, Junior remains in a habitual stasis. Junior's self-interest does not allow her to share her life with anyone with whom she can relate. For example, when Junior arrives at the Cosey house, she meets a neighborhood boy, Romen, who helps the Cosey women with household upkeep. Avoiding any emotional connection, Junior pursues a primarily sexual relationship with Romen. Junior's emotional alienation ultimately destroys any possibility for a generative, responsive connection to others.²⁰ Junior is presented as a manipulative, conniving woman, forced to use her sexuality to get what she wants. Sex

¹⁹ Junior is actually hired to help Heed obtain Cosey's will from the hotel attic.

²⁰ Ferguson parallels Junior to Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, as both lack the "potential for a creative and responsive sense of her creative place in the world" (19).

does not generate anything for Junior – except more sex.²¹ Junior’s inability to negotiate her sexuality and her relationship between self and other ultimately renders her psychologically and emotionally static. By the close of the novel, Romen is appalled by the greed and self-interest that allowed Junior to leave a wounded, elderly Heed at the hotel. Junior’s emotional/ psychological alienation manifests itself when Romen confines her to L’s old room and she is left physically isolated from the world around her.

Aware of her sexuality, and commanding it, Junior set her sights on Heed’s errand boy, Romen. Noticing his “nice neck,” Junior remembers commanding the boys of Campus A with her gaze, as she looked “through the wire fence, daring them. Them looking back at [her], promising [her]” (Morrison, *Love* 61). Junior recalls the efficacy of her body language and how it spawned the guards’ jealousy, as she greedily looked at the boys “like fans, watching those damp sweats rise” (62). Using her body to invert the structure of male/female power, Junior does not allow Romen to make the first move: “not only [does] she want him, she demand[s] him;” or rather, she demands sex *of* him (113). She actively seeks and requires sexual fulfillment in an attempt to gain control of her life. This simple inversion of active/ passive constructions of gender dynamics, wherein Junior assumes the role of the aggressor, undermines her attempt to harness the power of the erotic. She merely becomes the predator as she selects Romen as her victim and acts upon her desires of the flesh. While Junior does actively define herself based on her physical relations with men, this limits her potential for individual growth. Because her narrative is strictly sexual, her self-knowledge is constrained by her association with

²¹ While Morrison provides Junior with power/ agency through her manipulative, conniving characteristics, Junior ultimately lacks agency as she is forced to use her use body in an attempt to obtain her goals.

men.

Junior allows Romen to explore her physically, but maintains emotional restraint. However, Romen feels a deeper connection to Junior and hopes for a better understanding of her thoughts and emotions, as he wants to “memorize the thirty-eight ways she could smile and what each one meant...to figure out her sci-fi eyes: the lids, the lashes, irises so shiny black she could be an alien” (114-115). In an unconscious attempt to maintain their relationship on a purely physical level, Junior’s “plan ... was to make it everywhere. To map the country with grapple and heat” (115). Having sex in public places – a way to ensure the absence of intimacy that could arise in a private space – provides Junior and Romen with a “chorus of each other to back them up, make it real, help them turn down the trumpet screech in both their own ears” (115). Sex in public spaces diminishes the potential for an emotional experience and heightens the carnal element of sex. Junior communicates with others through her body and does not leave room for any verbal expression of the self. As an “empowered” woman of the nineties, Junior’s inability to harness the power of the erotic renders her powerless. Only using her hypersexuality as a tool, Junior becomes sexually aggressive, driven by self-interest.

When Junior relinquishes her sexual power, Romen assumes the position of power within their relationship. Romen “[is] the one in charge. He [can] beat her up if he want[s] to and she [will] still go down” (155). Romen labels Junior’s changed behavior, “funny,” as Junior begins to act “like a gorgeous pet. Feed it or whip it—it lap[s] you anyway” (155). Junior’s sex with Romen becomes more violent, and Junior “[does]n’t just like it. She prefer[s] it” (153). For Junior, this increased violence, and the

victim/victimizer dynamic that ensues, maintains the emotional distance in their relationship” (153). To maintain emotional distance, Romen becomes the “cold” and “unsmiling” dominator, as he “watch[es] himself inflict and suffer pain above scream level where a fresh kind of joy lay” (153). In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins argues that this “combination of dominance and affection produces the pet, the individual who is subordinate and whose survival depends on the whims of the more powerful” (156). African-American women, then, “simultaneously embody the coexistence of the victim and the pet, with survival often linked to the ability to be appropriately subordinate” (Collins 156). Junior’s sexuality is initially used to award her a dominant position within her relationship to Romen. However, Junior’s dichotomous views of black female sexuality – that both embrace the female erotic and commodify the black woman’s body – separate Junior from her control over her body and render her inferior. Junior’s conflicting views of female sexuality challenge Junior’s agency of her body, as she shifts between positions of master and pet, dominator and dominated. Instead of hunting her man, she becomes his prey.

The “closer” Junior positions herself to her Good Man, the more she is exposed to the damaging consequences of Cosey’s rule, and a patriarchal ideology that does not allow her to maintain a position of power. Unable to maintain her dominant role as the aggressor within a space still ruled by Cosey and the remnants of a past patriarchal structure wherein the male is the active aggressor, Junior inverts the passive/ aggressive gender dynamic, as she becomes the victim and Romen becomes the predator. Junior’s

relationship with Cosey is grounded in *his* house, a space polluted with undercurrents of patriarchal belief; the closer she gets to Cosey, the more degenerative her relationship to Romen becomes.

Junior also fluctuates between positions of dominant and subordinate with regard to the spirit of Cosey. When Junior first sees Cosey's portrait, (another male ruled by binary oppositions) she "[knows] she [is] home" (Morrison, *Love* 60). Situating herself in a subordinate position, Junior relishes Cosey's gaze – "being looked at by the Good Man delight[s] her" (116). Consumed by the Man of the House, she dreams of sex with Cosey. In an act of submission and sacrifice, Junior fantasizes about undressing herself *under* the gaze of Cosey's imposing portrait. Junior is soon "flooded by his company," and pleases Cosey's spirit the only way she knows – sexually (119). At the culmination of Junior's fantasy, the narrative's sexually suggestive language details Cosey's climax as an unmistakable "happiness," and "*relief* at having her there" (119, emphasis mine). Removing her clothes, Junior "[handles] his things and [enjoys] herself in front of him" (119). Junior's masturbation affords her a sense of *physical* conquest over Cosey's spirit. Junior "[laughs], knowing as she [does] that he [does] too" (119) – she has *had* Cosey in a way the other women have not. However, the experience with Cosey still relegates her to a position of subordination, as she attempts to use her body to unite with still the most important man of the house. Junior's reliance on a purely sexual, physical connection puts Cosey in the dominant position. Cosey is able to limit Junior's potential growth from the grave.

Participating in the patriarchal system of power, Junior gives her power to Cosey and seeks his guidance with regard to her level of involvement in the battle over his will. Before Junior accompanies Heed to the Hotel to obtain the will, she seeks Cosey's approval. Unable to find him, she goes to his study and puts on his tie in an effort to bring him to her. However, Junior's Good Man does not present himself when Junior summons him for reasons apart from the sexual: "there was no trace of aftershave; no 'Hey, sweet thing' whispered in her ear" (130). Junior interprets Cosey's nonappearance as his tacit endorsement of her decision to find his will and manipulate the contents of the will for her financial gain. Cosey's pervasive absence *speaks* to Junior and motivates her to alter his will. Junior does not harness this same pervasive power or control; she cannot speak as a live person, but Cosey can command influence after death.

In the hotel, Junior meditates about her life and connects her experiences to Cosey's life. Like Heed and Christine, Junior does not see herself as independent from her Good Man. Inserting herself into Cosey's life, Junior denies Heed's adoration of Cosey and notes Christine's hatred of him, in order to create a place for herself in Cosey's world. Finding a clear connection in Heed's age at the time of her marriage to Cosey and the age when she herself ran away, Junior believes Cosey would have protected her from the threat of dangerous men. She believes Cosey would have "taken care of [her] because [he] understand[s] [her] and everything and won't let anybody get [her]" (156). Creating a supernatural connection to Cosey, Junior believes he summoned her to him. She conceives that Cosey "go[es] wherever [he] want[s]" and "feel[s] [Cosey] all over the place" (157). Junior assumes responsibility for protecting herself and Cosey –

as they are united as one in her mind – and will not allow Heed or Christine to threaten her place in Cosey’s house.²² She no longer sees herself as an individual; Cosey’s needs are her needs. Junior can only claim agency through her affiliation to men; it is through Cosey’s absent complacency that Junior *actively* makes a decision to take the will. Junior’s obsession with Cosey ultimately ruptures the bond between Junior and Romen and leaves Junior isolated and alone.

L suggests Junior’s connection to Cosey as she notes the similarities between Junior and Celestial (Cosey’s true love). In “Toni Morrison’s *Love* and the Trickster Paradigm,” Susana Vega-González argues that Junior and Celestial “embody the spiritual connection between this world and the other world” (277). Both women share marks of deformities and both “share their active sexuality” (283). While Vega-González reads Junior as “Morrison’s new trickster,” a representation of “the embodiment of transgression and indeterminacy,” I argue that Junior remains static due to her inability to actualize a relationship that blends the emotional and the physical. Junior’s attempts to verbally communicate with Cosey fail, as he only responds to her when she is sexually charged. Junior’s “active sexuality” does not always invert the gendered power structure; as Cosey dominates Junior’s thoughts and actions, she is unable to transcend limitations of dynamics between men and women.

Unable to find a space for herself apart from men (first her uncles, then Cosey, and to some extent, Romen), Junior cannot negotiate a space between the emotional and the physical – even in an honest, safe space where Romen attempts to incorporate

²² Seeking a paternal protector and sexual partner, Junior’s relationship to Cosey mirrors the “incestuous” relationship between Heed and Cosey.

emotion into their relationship. After violent sex in Heed's bathtub, Romen "feel[s] strong and melted at the same time" (Morrison, *Love* 179). As Romen begins to feel as though he could maintain an emotional connection to Junior, he examines Junior's hoof-like foot with its "mangled toes" and lifts it to his tongue (179). However, as Junior's body relaxes, she withdraws emotionally and looks at Romen with "dead," "sci-fi" eyes (179). Junior is no longer able to speak with her body. Junior begins to experience "a kind of inside slide, that made her feel giddy and pretty at the same time," which introduces a vulnerability that Junior does not know how to express (196). Junior is both pleased and frightened by this new sensation of "jittery brightness," but her emotional connection comes too late; Romen does not approve of Junior's abandonment of Heed (196). Sacrificing Heed's safety in order to secure her future, and Cosey's past, costs Junior her relationship with Romen. As they were beginning to erase boundaries and create a new space for themselves where they were "wide open and whole," Romen leaves Junior alone as he leaves for the hotel (196). When Romen assumes the dominant position within their relationship, he no longer accepts a purely sexual bond. Unable to continue participating in a relationship that ignores any emotional bond, Junior is ultimately left physically isolated in L's bedroom. Morrison suggests that Junior begins to feel something, when "something" begins to "[drain] from her" (203). Yet, neither Junior nor the narrator articulates what that "something" is (203). From this point, Junior can no longer speak and Roman is left to glean her emotional state from her facial expression. Even as Romen locks her in L's old room, Junior does not verbally protest.

Through Heed, Christine, and Junior, Morrison illustrates the damaging effects of the separation and alienation of the individual. *Love* critiques the system that hierarchizes gender, race, and class to establish power. While Heed and Christine are able to return to one another and, in so doing, transcend the imposed limitations of patriarchy, Junior does not form the same type of intimate bond with another and cannot define herself outside of rigidly gendered norms. Junior is left isolated and alone; her Good Man “vanishe[s] from his painting altogether,” and Romen abandons Junior after witnessing her lack of compassion for Heed (196). Because Junior remains so disconnected from her emotions, and so focused on Cosey, she cannot create a space that values mind and body as one. Junior is left alone, locked in L’s old room, while Heed and Christine transcend limitations of the temporal, regain the “mix of surrender and mutiny” and are awarded with a timeless, limitless communication beyond the grave (199).

Conclusion

As hooks argues, “the libratory voice ... is characterized by opposition, by resistance. It demands that paradigms shift--that we learn to talk-- to listen--to hear in a new way” (hooks, *Talking Back* 18). Morrison exemplifies the need for the paradigm shift that hooks calls for in *Paradise* and *Love*. Patriarchal constraints limit the ability for female protagonists to embrace an identity and self-knowledge; it is not until these characters reject patriarchy, that they are able to re-invent themselves and experience Homi Bhabha’s Third Space that allows them to live a self-defined narrative. Bhabha argues:

being in the ‘beyond’, then, is to inhabit an intervening space...but to dwell ‘in the beyond’ is also...to be a part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to redescribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then, the intervening space ‘beyond’, becomes a space of intervention in the here and now. (Bhabha 7)

Bhabha’s post-colonial theory “demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present” (7). The female characters in *Paradise* and *Love* battle against male power and rule to create a new, generative space that requires them to tell their stories in their own words. They “[cannot] merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent”; they must “[renew] the past, refigur[e] it as a contingent ‘in-

between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living" (Bhabha 7).

Morrison's text advocates a future for these women, whether it be a transcendent, eternal healing that the Convent women advocate, or the reconnection of female friendship apart from divisive male rule. Morrison's novels illustrate Bhabha's "iterative of 'time' of the future as a *becoming 'once again open,'*" as her marginalized characters embrace "a mode of performative agency that Judith Butler has elaborated for the representation of lesbian sexuality: 'a specificity...to be established, not *outside* or *beyond* that reinscription or reiteration, but in the very modality and effects of that reinscription" (Bhabha 219).

The ending of *Paradise* suggests that there is a way to achieve transcendent peace and exist in a space that is no longer governed by male dominance. Although the Convent women are physically murdered, they are able to posthumously guide others to reconcile dichotomous thinking and exist in a third space. While a reader might dismiss Heed and Christine's battle as something leftover from a previous generation's battle against the pathology of patriarchy, Morrison's inclusion of a contemporary character, Junior, and her struggle and suffering brought on by the same schism, forces the reader to accept that the wounds from patriarchal rule are not a thing of the past. While Junior's wounds remain unresolved, Heed and Christine regain speech and reignite their childhood friendship. In both novels, Morrison confronts a language of oppression and illustrates the necessity of marginalized characters to confront their oppressors by gaining narratological control and with it, a clear understanding of self.

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