

[연구논문]

## The Great Migration and the Emergence of Black Havens in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

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*“How did they get the courage to leave all they ever knew for a place they had never seen, the will to be more than the South said they had a right to be? . . . If they had not gone north, what would New York look like? What would Philadelphia, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, and Oakland look like?” Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns**

One of the leitmotifs that the playwright August Wilson and the novelist Toni Morrison constantly draw upon is the idea of home or a redefinition of it for African American diasporic subjects. The settler-colonization of North America by Euro-Americans, arguably, hinged upon the production and victimization of “racial others” by a myriad of ways, such as the displacement and termination of Native Americans and the forced import of black labor through the Middle

Passage.<sup>1)</sup> For African Americans to find a place to claim as their own, as Wilson's plays and Morrison's novels well show, has not been easy; rather, it often meant exclusion, riots, struggles, imprisonment, loss, and rootless wanderings. As Ira Berlin aptly states, "[t]he entire African American experience can best be read as a series of great migrations or *passages*" (9).<sup>2)</sup>

Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1984) and Morrison's *Paradise* (1997) are set in the Great Migration (1915-1970), or African Americans' exodus from the Deep South to the urban North during the early- and mid-twentieth century.<sup>3)</sup> Both Morrison and Wilson were born during the heyday of the Great Migration. Morrison (Chloe Ardelia Wofford) was born in Lorain, Ohio, in 1931, after her parents migrated from the South. Her father, George Wofford, worked at US Steel, which employed various immigrants and colored workers (Li 2). Wilson (Fredrick August Kittel, Jr.) was born in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, a neighborhood predominantly populated by African Americans seeking jobs in the urban North.

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- 1) According to Phillip Curtin, although various scholars provide different numbers, "a general estimate of fifteen million or more slaves landed in the Americas" from Africa through the Middle Passage (5).
  - 2) Ira Berlin's *The Making of African America* delineates the three great migrations of people of African descent in North America from the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The first two migrations transported peoples of Africa via the Middle Passage, and the last one involved the internal migration of African Americans from the Deep South to the urban North.
  - 3) Stewart E. Tolnay notes that "[t]he 'Great Migration' of African Americans out of southern states and into northern cities was one of the most significant demographic events to occur in the United States during the twentieth century" (210). For detailed insights into the internal migration and mobility of black population during the Great Migration, see his article, "The African American 'Great Migration' and Beyond," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 209-232.

Throughout their works, Morrison and Wilson depict different paths taken by black migrants and the hardships and racism they faced in their new settlements.

Wilson, for example, set nine out of ten plays in his Pittsburgh Cycle in the Hill District of his childhood hometown.<sup>4)</sup> Pittsburgh, the steel city, as the destination for African American migrants takes on another symbolic meaning because iron, “historically, has been the metal associated with the Yoruba god Ogun” in African tradition (Elam, Jr. 85).<sup>5)</sup> As Peter Gottlieb notes, “[I]ong before World War I Pittsburgh had become the center of a heavy manufacturing and mining region that took in the western Pennsylvania coal field, the iron, steel, and coking plants, and a constellation of glass, brick,

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4) Fredrick August Kittel, Jr. was born on April 27, 1946 in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, PA as a fourth child of Frederic August Kittel, a German immigrant, and Daisy Wilson, an African American. Frederic Kittel was hardly a presence at the time of August Wilson's birth, and after Frederic and Daisy got a divorce, August grew up under his mother's care at 1727 Bedford Avenue in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, a district in which most of his plays are set. August Wilson chose his mother's surname, and his racial identity has been predominantly that of African American since. For more biographical details about August Wilson, see Christopher Bigsby, “August Wilson: the ground on which he stood,” *The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 1-27.

5) Wilson employs the symbolism of iron for the Yoruba god Ogun in another play in the Pittsburgh Cycle, *Gem of the Ocean* (2003). Aunt Easter, a psychic, tells the protagonist Citizen Barlow to carry a piece of iron for protection during a healing ritual. Harry J. Elam, Jr. remarks that “Pittsburgh . . . seems the logical place for Ogun, the god of metallurgy” (85). Highlighting the association between the piece of iron and the chains that enclosed the bodies of slaves on *Gem of the Ocean*, a slave ship, Elam, Jr. further notes that the iron “functions not simply as a link to Ogun, but as a material connection to the collective memory of African Americans and a synthesis of their history within a single symbol” (85).

foundry, and electric machinery factories” (39). *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, the fourth play in the Pittsburgh Cycle, especially foregrounds the almost colonial oppression of the Jim Crow regime (1880s -1960s) and the protagonist Herald Loomis’s wandering that leads him to the Hill District of Pittsburgh.

Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which includes many elements of Morrison’s childhood growing up in Lorain, Ohio, also showcases the trajectory of an African American family from the South to an industrial town of the Midwest. *Paradise*, the third volume of The Jazz Trilogy, masterly weaves the impulse towards ceaseless wanderings with the need to settle in one fixed place into a narrative. *Paradise* especially delineates the trajectory of the Great Migration from its peak in the 1950s to its close in the 1970s, shifting the time of narrative back and forth from the heyday of the Great Migration to the present setting of the early 1970s. In the novel, Morrison dramatizes the contrast between the 8-rock founding members of Ruby, Oklahoma, an all-black rural town, and several African American female wanderers whose escapes from domestic violence and traumas have led them to the Convent seventeen miles from Ruby. During the 1950s, the 8-rock members, whose skin is “coal black,” embarked on the Great Migration to flee from the persecutions of the white and other lighter-skinned African Americans, who would also look down on them, and opened a haven for all-black community “in some desolate part of the North American West” (*Paradise* 224).

In this article, I intend to use Seth Holly’s boardinghouse in Wilson’s play and the Convent in Morrison’s novel as the two

emblems of all-black community that began to emerge during the Great Migration against the white oppression embodied by the US juridical system such as the Jim Crow regime. In so doing, I hope to show both the potential and limit of building all-black community, or a black haven, against the white hegemony in the US. While the boarding house and the Convent serve as a temporary shelter for African American wanderers, they ultimately fail to produce a Utopian sanctuary for all-black community. Rather, they become a stage where black migrants' frustration, internal conflicts, rage, and trauma are projected and re-enacted. By reiterating the pathological symptoms of black migrants even in those sequestered, supposedly safe black havens, Morrison and Wilson place the idea of all-black community in question and defer the moment of black migrants' wish-fulfillment. The comparison of Morrison's novel and Wilson's play, therefore, compels us to rethink the definition of home, as well as community, for African American diasporic subjects who had to fight not merely the white oppression but also the internal conflicts and personal trauma within themselves.

## **1. Dream and Disillusionment of Black Migrants and Redefinition of Home**

*Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and *Paradise* delineate possible ways in which African American migrants could navigate the continent of the US, producing their own space, dreaming of an ideal community. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* especially evokes the idea of temporary

home for African Americans in the urban North with Seth Holly's boardinghouse. The boardinghouse becomes an interesting trope in the context of the Great Migration because it is a temporary shelter, lacking the sense of permanent stay in one place. It is an improvised home, which indicates the very "place-less" state of African American diasporic subjects. Wandering farther away from the South, many African Americans, like so many characters in Wilson's play, chose a temporary shelter as their home. The rootless wanderings of African Americans during the Great Migration actually echo the modernist trope of flaneur to an extent. The abjectness of African American wanderers, however, sharply contrasts with the white middle class subject's wanderings under the arcades, absorbing the phantasmagoria of commodities behind show-windows. Even so, Mark A. Sanders argues that we should extend the concept of American Modernism by incorporating African American migrants' experience. As Sanders points out, the American modernist movement has tended to focus solely on the white subject's "epistemological crisis, fragmentation, alienation, and cultural exhaustion" (129). He therefore argues that the experience of African Americans who were harrowed by "dissonance between constitutional guarantees and systematic political oppression" (137) should also be included in the American modernism.

Farah Jasmine Griffin's "*Who Set You Flowin'?*" *The African-American Migration Narrative* thus becomes an apt intervention into the American modernism focused on the white subject. In this work, Griffin explores how the study of twentieth-century black migration can illuminate the urban landscape of the North. According to

Griffin, “[i]n the context of the migration narrative, urban spaces—kitchenettes, workplaces, street corners, prisons, and theaters—are some of the sites where migrants, white powerholders, and the Northern black middle class vie for control” (102). In his play, Wilson also shows that the ghettoization of urban space by black population began to materialize as early as in the 1910s in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. Class conflicts between the black middle class and the black working class ensued, as the landlord Seth and his tenants in the play show. As Peter Gottlieb points out, “boardinghouses to which southern migrants were assigned by the companies that brought them to Pittsburgh frequently had owners or managers who were themselves recent migrants” (72).<sup>6</sup> Seth’s boardinghouse also plays a crucial role as a narrative device in that it is a place where Loomis encounters his long separated wife Martha and the most theatrical self-immolation will be staged, imparting a troubling sense of new departure, further complicating the idea of “sanctuary” or the dream of all-black community. Seth’s boardinghouse further challenges the nature of place as a sense of stasis, or rootedness, and turns it into a more interim, transient construct, especially for African American diasporic subjects.

In *Paradise*, Morrison also delves into the idea of “home,” in particular, and “community,” more generally. Unlike Wilson, who is

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6) Gottlieb further notes that “[t]he residential grouping of southern blacks, coupled with the emergence of new black residential areas in Pittsburgh and its environs, created differences among black neighborhoods of dwellings, occupants, and life-styles. A residential separation among blacks developed in Homestead, ten miles upstream from Pittsburgh on the Monongahela River, where the mills of Carnegie Steel Company’s Homestead Works dominated the valley and the lives of the townfolk” (73).

one of the early proponents of the central role of Africa in African American aesthetics and theatre,<sup>7)</sup> Morrison is more reserved in addressing her view on the black nationalism movement and Pan-Africanism. The black nationalism movement of the 1960s led by such political activists as the Black Panther Party endorsed the idea of all-black community and derived its inspiration from their African heritage and tradition. Pan-Africanism is not necessarily concerned with a radical political ideology but rather refers to “the African-American desire to be re-introduced into the consciousness of Africa” (Temple 3).<sup>8)</sup> As Cynthia Dobbs aptly points out, the contrast between the town historian Patricia (Pat) Best and the Reverend Richard Misner in their opinion about the “place of slavery and of

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7) In an interview, Wilson stated, “All art is political. It serves a purpose. All my plays are political but I try not to make them didactic or polemical. . . . I hope that my art serves the masses of blacks in America who are in desperate need of a solid and sure identity. . . . If blacks recognize the value in that, then we will be on our way to claiming our identity and participating in society as Africans.” See, Jackson R. Bryer and Mary C. Hartig, eds. *Conversation with August Wilson* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2006), 37.

8) Christel N. Temple defines literary Pan-Africanism, a new paradigm for African-centered literary criticism, as follows: (1) The text seeks to regenerate relationships, historical understanding, and future interaction between Africans and the descendants of the Africans dispersed through the European enslavement trade. (2) The writer introduces mutual understanding and nurtures the relationship between Africans and African-Americans. (3) The philosophy and ideals of the narrative parallel tenets of contemporary and/or traditional Pan-African ideology. (4) Texts of this category utilize similar terminology expressive of a return, that consistently demonstrates the usage of the prefix “re-.” (5) The African-American characters are generally non-stereotyped depictions. (6) The author’s social, cultural, political and/or ideological deliberateness is Pan-African, Afrocentric, and/or African-centered. (7) The author usually has spent time among African-American communities in the United States. See *Literary Pan-Africanism: History, Contexts, and Criticism* (Durham: Carolina Academic P, 2005), 4.



Africa in their community [Ruby]'s history" well showcases the complexity of Morrison's thoughts on Pan-Africanism (121).<sup>9)</sup> Morrison's skepticism towards the idea of all-black community was already anticipated by *Beloved*, where she partly attributes Sethe's infanticide to her jealous African American neighbors, who kept silence upon seeing the approach of schoolteacher to Sethe's house.<sup>10)</sup> Morrison also shows an ambiguous attitude towards the idea of "community," per se, and her skepticism, it seems, has to do more with the complexity and internal tension always latent in any given community than with her downright negation of it.<sup>11)</sup>

Morrison's deployment of space into Ruby, Oklahoma and the Convent as the two symbolic places for African Americans renders

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- 9) Noting that "Morrison's domestic designs in her novels are also deeply affected by her characters' interactions with global concerns," Dobbs observes that "whereas *Paradise* focuses intently on the internal exile of African Americans in Oklahoma" Morrison also shows that "global diaspora is also always inevitably a domestic issue" in her novel with the conversation between Richard and Pat on "the role of Africa in the community's longing for home" (120). Dobbs takes a step further and proposes that "we can trace her developing sense of the connection between a fierce longing for a local, regional, and national one – in short, an African American situated identity – and a transnational postcolonial notion of diasporic exile" (120). See Cynthia Dobbs, "Diasporic Designs of House, Home, and Haven in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *MELUS* 36.2 (2011): 109-126.
- 10) "It wasn't white-folks – that much she could tell – so it must be colored ones. And then she knew. Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess" (Morrison, *Beloved* 163).
- 11) Morrison's ambivalence toward the idea of community has been also anticipated by her M.A. thesis, "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's treatment of the alienated" (1955), in which she compares the importance of alienation and personal space captured by Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* and the tragedy of alienation from a community depicted by William Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!*

all-black community a more profoundly complicated and elusive construct. As many critics have pointed out, the project of Ruby to create an exclusively black community eventually fails, echoing the very symptoms and contradictions of the white American exceptionalism. In other words, for Morrison, finding home for African Americans involves not only a fight against racism but also the complexity and conflicts within all-black community. The Convent that rests in a sequestered rural area of Oklahoma, by contrast, may appear to be a more promising home for African American women wanderers, but it is not fully realized as a haven for all African Americans either, in that it remains a highly gendered space and that it is eventually penetrated by nine male members from Ruby. Morrison, nevertheless, presents a glimpse of hope and the blueprint of sanctuary in *Paradise*.

Seen in comparison, Seth's boardinghouse and the Convent in Oklahoma offer an interesting venue to reflect on the ideal home for African American wanderers. As Wilson and Morrison suggest, finding a sanctuary for African Americans inevitably entails exposing the very limit of such attempts. In what follows, then, I will highlight the conceptualization of home and community conveyed by Wilson and Morrison through some close-reading of their texts.

## 2. 'Footloose Wanderers': Black Urbanity and the Jim Crow Regime

Following Amiri Baraka, Samuel A. Hay calls characters in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* "footloose wanderers," most of whom are "displaced ex-slaves who, during the early twentieth century, tried to make sense of their social and cultural problems" (89). The Great Migration, indeed, signals African Americans' transition to selfhood, self-assertion, and empowerment, actively seeking out freedom away from the oppression and confinement of the South. In this context, as C. Patrick Tyndall points out, "the largest metaphor in the play" is Loomis's "search/journey for self" (160) after his unjust imprisonment and forced labor in the prison for seven years, under the common charge of "loitering" in the Jim Crow regime.

In the midst of black migrants' wanderings, Seth's boarding house punctuates a momentary pause. It provides a temporary "home" for Jeremy, Mattie, and Molly, who become fast friends and improvise family for each other. Bertha's homemade biscuits and coffee and fried chicken on Sunday evenings at the boarding house, for instance, slow down the restless movements of the tenants and settle them into a temporary release and ease. The landlord Seth himself shows the emergence of the black middle class in the urban North. Seth established three different sources of income in the Hill District: a contract job with Mr. Olowski, business with Rutherford Selig, and the boarding house. On the other hand, Bynum, one of Seth's tenants, embodies African tradition. Bynum often distinguishes himself as a psychic by connecting other tenants of the boardinghouse with

their family and loved ones.<sup>12)</sup> Contrary to Seth, who is aloof and detached to the individual concerns of tenants, Bynum strives to find roots for them and restore their crumbled identity.

Another character to remember is Selig, a peddler/ part-time people finder, who is the only white character in the play and frequently appears in Wilson's other plays. Selig's ancestry is directly connected with slavery, as his great-grand father "used to bring Nigars across the ocean on ships" (41). As a descendant of a slave trader, Selig in the early twentieth century Pittsburgh makes a living by selling dust-pans and finding lost people for African American migrants who have been separated from their family.

It is after Loomis enters Seth's boardinghouse with his daughter Zonia that tension picks up in the play, as Seth becomes greatly agitated and suspicious, saying that "[s]omething ain't right about that fellow" (32) and that "look like he done killing somebody gambling over a quarter" (20). Although Seth realizes that the woman Loomis is looking for is one of his former tenants, Martha, he chooses not to reveal Martha's whereabouts to Loomis. Seth's characterization of Loomis is telling in that he describes him as "one of them fellows [who] never could stay in one place" (35). Seth's distrust toward Loomis shows that black migrants without a stable source of income often aroused much suspicion.

The trajectory of Loomis, from a former deacon in the Abundant

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12) Pereira points out that "Bynum owes his mythological ancestry to the Ifa tradition – whose presiding deity is Orunmila – in Yoruban cosmology" (65). This kind of Africanist allusion underscores Wilson's endorsement of the role of African tradition and Pan-Africanism in restoring the solidarity and strength of African American community.

Life Church to a convict and then a rootless wanderer, highlights the nefarious persecution of African Americans by the US juridical system during the Jim Crow. Loomis was imprisoned by Joe Turner like so many other African Americans who were falsely accused and arrested.

Loomis: Had a whole mess of men he caught. Just go out hunting regular like you go out hunting possum. He catch you and go home to his wife and family. Ain't thought about you going home to yours. Joe Turner caught me when my little girl was just born. Wasn't nothing but a little baby sucking on her mama's titty when he caught me. Joe Turner caught me in nineteen hundred and one. Kept me seven years until nineteen hundred and eight. Kept everybody seven years. He'd go out hunting and bring back forth men at a time. And keep them seven years. I was walking down this road in this little town outside of Memphis. Come up on these fellows gambling. (72).

The US juridical system was one of the salient reasons why so many African American families were split and forced to nomadic wanderings across the continent. Bynum speculates that the imprisonment of African American males and the exploitation of their labor were ultimately aimed at forestalling the growing awareness of African Americans and their resistance against the white hegemony. Wilson, nonetheless, renders Loomis more than a victim of the US juridical system. Between Bynum, the embodiment of African tradition, and Martha, his wife and a sincere Christian, Loomis cries in total frustration and rage; "Everywhere I go people wanna bind me up. Joe Turner wanna bind me up! Reverend Toliver wanna bind me up. You wanna bind me up. . . . Joe Turner's come and gone and

Herald Loomis ain't' for no binding. I ain't gonna let nobody bind me up!" (91). Loomis, a former deacon himself, resists both the influences of African tradition and Christianity, as his final self-immolation suggests:

Martha: You got to open up your heart and have faith, Herald. This world is just a trial for the next. Jesus offers you salvation.

Loomis: I been wading in the water. I been walking all over the River Jordan. But what it get me, huh? I done been baptized with blood of the lamb and the fire of the Holy Ghost. But what I got, huh? I got salvation?

Martha: You got to be clean, Herald. You got to be washed with the blood of the lamb.

Loomis: Blood make you clean? You clean with blood?

Martha: Jesus bled for you. He's the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Loomis: I don't need nobody to bleed for me! I can bleed for myself.

Martha: You got to be something, Herald. You just can't be alive. Life don't mean nothing unless it got a meaning.

Loomis: What kind of meaning you got? What kind of clean you got, woman? You want blood? Blood make you clean? You clean with blood?

*(Loomis slashes himself across the chest. He rubs the blood over his face and comes to a realization.)*

I'm standing! I'm standing. My legs stood up! I'm standing now! (93)

Kim Pereira argues that whereas the "Christian tradition finds its salvation in the suffering scapegoat figure of Christ the sacrificial lamb . . . Loomis does not need such a figure, for he has done his own suffering" (80). On the other hand, Paul Carter Harrison speculates that the ritual of cleansing with blood is actually a

reenactment of the “Osirian mythos, which invites the death of the body in order to allow for the resurrection of the spirit/body” (qtd. in Pireira 80). I would suggest that the final self-immolation by Loomis is the symbolic gesture of ultimate resistance against oppression and that it also simultaneously reveals the limit of Loomis’s struggles for freedom. After seven years of imprisonment, forced labor, and oppression, Loomis embarked on a quest for Martha, only to deliver Zonia to her hand and realize that he could not suture the old wounds and save what remains of his family. Although Martha found a community for herself in the church, Loomis seems to be more intent on finding his own way to freedom, apart from either Bynum’s binding ritual of African tradition or the Christian church. Loomis’s maneuver, it seems, aims at transcending all the confinements imposed on him by way of outside intervention, and, in this sense, is indeed heroic. On the other hand, it also indicates his further alienation from his family and his African American community. In the words of Loomis, surely, one has to “accept[s] the responsibility for his own presence in the world” (94).

### **3. Sanctuary in the Middle of Nowhere: Ruby, Oklahoma and the Convent**

While Wilson traces the trajectory of African American migrants from the South to the urban North, Morrison follows a group of migrants determined to build an all-black town in the Midwest. The urban North as the destination of the Southern Exodus has been well

demonstrated by historical records, migration narratives, and African American literature. A provincial town in the rural Midwest, by contrast, has been less explored as a possible site for all-black community. As the Tulsa race riot that took place in 1921 well exemplifies, the provincialism of rural towns in the Midwestern states served as a barrier for African American migrants' settlement.<sup>13)</sup> An all-black town in the middle of the rural Midwest thus becomes an even more daring symbol of resistance.

Ruby, Oklahoma is indeed the crowning moment for African American wanderers, who have long been persecuted by the white oppression and the jeers of the lighter-skinned black. Only, Morrison renders Ruby uncannily resembling the mentality of Puritan fathers in the Colonial New England. In Ruby, the dissolute women with unconventional lifestyles become the scapegoat for the increasingly tenuous ideology of the Ruby community. Hence, the invasion of women at the Convent echoes the witch hunt of Salem. Many critics have noted the puzzling first sentence that signals the raid, "They shoot the white girl first" (3) and wondered at its meaning. Though no specific information about the "white girl" is provided by Morrison, some have linked the "whiteness" with the ultimate embodiment of all the resentment and hatred towards the light-colored oppressors. I would suggest that it points to the radical liberalism that the Convent has come to stand for.

Morrison's deployment of fictional space into Ruby, Oklahoma and

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13) The Tulsa race riot that took place on May 31-June 1, 1921 was triggered by rumors that a black man was assaulting a young white woman. See, Frederick Burger, "The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot: A Holocaust America Wanted to Forget" in *The New Crisis* Nov./Dec. 1999: 15-16.



the Convent is an interesting textual move, for it inevitably creates tension between the conservatism of the male members of Ruby and the radical women members of the Convent. As Katrine Dalsgard keenly observes, "Morrison suggests that the price of Ruby's insistence on maintaining a morally superior master narrative may well be the sacrifice of" the excluded (233). In other words, the idea of all-black community represented by Ruby operates on the very same principle that undergirds the white American exceptionalism: the exclusion of others. In *Paradise*, therefore, Morrison introduces a chain of exclusions propelled by American exceptionalism—first by the white American, followed by the lighter-skinned black, and finally the coal-black 8 rock males of Ruby.

Morrison hints earlier in the novel that Ruby, Oklahoma is either a sanctuary or a dystopia (place of nowhere), through the conversation between Gigi (Grace) and a man she encounters on the train, after her return trip from "the black couple of Wish, Arizona" that her (ex)boyfriend Mikey once told her about. It is worth noting that the US juridical system separated Gigi and Mikey. After Mikey was put into the jail and Gigi was "released from the emergency room with the Ace bandage on her wrist" (64), she sends a message to Mikey via the court-appointed lawyer to meet up at "Wish April fifteenth" (64). When Gigi gets there, though, there is "no Mikey, there was no Wish" (64). After making a phone call to her Granddaddy in Alcorn, Mississippi, who informs her that "Everybody dead anyway. King, another one of them Kennedys, Medgar Evers, a nigger name of X" (65), Gigi decides to go back home, gets on the train, and notices the man, who tells her about Ruby, Oklahoma.

Gigi even got comfortable enough to ask him had he ever seen or heard tell of a rock formation that looked like a man and a woman making out. He laughed and said no, but that he once heard about a place where there was a lake in the middle of a wheat field. And that near this lake two trees grew in each other's arms. And if you squeezed in between them in just the right way, well, you would feel an ecstasy no human could invent or duplicate. . . .

"Where is this place?"

"Ruby. Ruby, Oklahoma. Way out in the middle of nowhere." (66)

Deprived of Mikey by the US juridical system, Gigi travels in search of the black couple of Wish, Arizona but instead ends up in Ruby, Oklahoma. What she finds there is the Convent run by Consolata (Connie) and Mother Mary Magna. The Convent, which was originally an "embezzler's folly" (3), is now a refuge for so many outcast girls like Gigi. Consolata provides the girls who end up there with what she could offer: a momentary shelter, no judgment or inquisitive inquiry into their past.

Consolata is one of the most central characters in the novel. Morrison expands the Great Migration from the Deep South to even further down from South America with Consolata. By doing so, Morrison traces the trajectory of African slaves shipped to Latin America—primarily in Brazil and the Caribbean—during the Middle Passage. Consolata was adopted, or as she puts it, "kidnapped," by Mary Magna in 1925, when she was sitting in the street garbage with other children in the neighborhood in Brazil. Mary Magna, one of the six American mission nuns who were working for the hospital nearby, "took her along as a ward to the post to which the difficult nun was now assigned – an asylum/boarding school for Indian girls

in some desolate part of the North American West,” the proper name of which was actually “THE KING SCHOOL FOR NATIVE GIRLS,” but everyone just calls it the Convent (224).

Straight from the hospital, Consolata, in a clean brown dress that reached her ankles, accompanied the nuns to a ship called *Atenas*. After the Panama call they disembarked in New Orleans and from there traveled in an automobile, a train, a bus, another automobile. And the magic that started with the hospital needles piled up and up: toilets that swirled water clear enough to drink; soft white bread already sliced in its wrapper; milk in glass bottles; and all through the day every day the gorgeous language made especially for talking to heaven. Ora pro nobis gratia plena sanctificetur nomen tuum fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo, et in terra sed libera nos a malo a malo. (224)

It is also worth noting here that Mary Magna is a white woman and remained in the Convent with Consolata and other girls until she passed away. With the Mary Magna and Consolata connection, Morrison further highlights that the Convent is a haven in a totally different sense from Ruby. Consolata, while lying in the children's ward at the hospital soon after she was picked up by Mary Magna, finds solace in her “lake-blue eyes, steady, clear but with a hint of panic behind them, a worry that Consolata had never seen” (224). This passage reminds one of *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Although Consolata's affection for Mary Magna is that of a child to a foster parent, from early on in her career, Morrison probes the complicated friendship between the black and the white. Consolata, it seems, takes up and cares for the forlorn women wanderers ended up in the Convent out of the memory of love and care that she received from

Mary Magna.

“I call myself Consolata Sosa. If you want to be here you do what I say. . . . And I will teach you what you are hungry for.”

The women look at each other and then at a person they do not recognize. . . . This sweet, unthreatening old lady who seemed to love each one of them best; 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. What is she talking about, this ideal parent, friend, companion in whose company they were safe from harm? What is she thinking, this perfect landlord who charged nothing and welcomed anybody; . . . this play mother who could be hugged or walked out on, depending on the whim of the child?

“If you have a place,” she continued, “that you should be in and somebody who loves you waiting there, then go. If not stay here and follow me. . . .” (262)

Consolata once engaged in a romantic relationship with Deacon Morgan, a married man and descendant of one of the founding members of Ruby. With the twist of irony, Deacon takes Consolata to the place that the man on the train talked about:

He drives to a burned-out farmhouse that sits on a rise of fallow land. Negotiating bluestem and chickweed, he parks behind the black teeth of a broken chimney. Hand in hand, they fight shrub and bramble until they reach a shallow gully. Consolata spots at once what he wants her to see: two fig trees growing into each other. (230)

Toward the end of the novel, Consolata gets killed during the raid by Steward Morgan, the twin brother of Deacon Morgan. The dream of all-black community insulated from the outside intervention and

oppression turns out to be as phantasmagoric as the two fig trees that once symbolized the eternal ecstasy of lovers' pleasures. The promise of an eternal sanctuary shatters with the bullet that pierces through Consolata's forehead.

Right before the raid, Consolata performs a ritual called "corporeal template" (115). As Cynthia Dobbs points out, "Consolata sees the body as the space for a self-claiming—a site for decolonization, regendering, and regeneration," for "[t]he racialized and gendered body is historically a contested location for battles of domination and control" (114). Another ritual, "Loud dreaming" evokes "Candomble, a religion from her native Brazil that combines Catholicism with African spirit worship" (Romero 417). It is a ritual in which "traumatized individuals are encouraged to participate collectively in healing themselves through confronting and narrating their pasts" (Romero 417). In the series of rituals, Consolata confronts the memories of trauma, oppression, and wounds, and liberates both the body and the mind from the menace of the oppressive past.

Consolata's teaching and her healing rituals continue to guide the girls even after they go back to their former lives. Although the Convent is physically ruined by the male members of Ruby, in the final scene, Morrison depicts yet another "paradise," where Consolata is seen with Piedade.

In ocean hush a woman black as firewood is singing. Next to her is a younger woman whose head rests on the singing woman's lap. Ruined fingers troll the tea brown hair. All the colors of seashells – wheat, roses, pearl – fuse in the younger woman's face. Her emerald eyes adore the black face framed in cerulean blue. Around them on the beach, sea trash gleams.

Discarded bottle caps sparkle near a broken sandal. A small dead radio plays the quiet surf.

There is nothing to beat this solace which is what Piedade's song is about, although the words evoke memories neither one has ever had: of reaching age in the company of the other; of speech shared and divided bread smoking from the fire; the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home – the ease of coming back to love begun. (318)

The imagery of paradise bears the remains of the wounds from Consolata's former life. Amidst the ruins and hints of wounds present on the beach, one can nonetheless get the sense of "home." In this final scene, Morrison implies that a sanctuary can be found in the midst of lived experience of loss, scars, and wounds with comfort and love that transcend the boundaries of race or gender.

#### 4. Conclusion

In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, Wilson does not fully articulate the possibility of home or sanctuary by abruptly ending the play with Loomis's self-immolation. In *Paradise*, Morrison more critically examines all-black community through Ruby and presents a glimpse of hope with the Convent. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, though, Wilson seems to suggest that nomadic migration can also become "home" in a radical sense, in that it is free of oppression. Seth's boarding house, in the meanwhile, conveys a temporary sense of home for its residents who are always on the move during the Great Migration. In *Paradise*, Morrison takes a step further and points to a

sanctuary that transcends the confinements of race and gender. The solidarity of women and their reconciliation with their traumatic past further point to the optimism of Morrison albeit her acute critique of American exceptionalism and the inner conflicts of all-black community.

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## Abstract

# **The Great Migration and the Emergence of Black Havens in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and Toni Morrison's *Paradise***

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In this article, I situate August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and Toni Morrison's *Paradise* in the Great Migration (1915-1970) during the early- and mid-twentieth century. In so doing, I intend to show both the potential and limit of building all-black community against the white oppression in the US. Specifically, Seth Holly's boardinghouse in Wilson's play and the Convent in Morrison's novel serve as a temporary shelter for African American wanderers but fail to produce a Utopian sanctuary for all-black community. Nonetheless, they become a stage where black migrants' frustration, internal conflicts, rage, and trauma are projected and re-enacted. By reiterating the pathological symptoms of black migrants even in those sequestered, supposedly safe black havens, the two authors put the idea of all-black community in question and defer the moment of black migrants' wish-fulfillment through which they dramatically expose the traumatized mentality of black migrants and their rootless wanderings.

## Key Words

August Wilson, Toni Morrison, Great Migration, Production of Black Space, Trauma of black migrants, Jim Crow