

## Pushing Back the Limits of Death: Immortal Characters in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

Sameer Abd AL-Hussein Hassan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Education Directorate of Thi-Qar. Ministry of Education, Iraq

\*Corresponding Author: Sameer Abd AL-Hussein Hassan

Email: [sameerabdhassan@utq.edu.iq](mailto:sameerabdhassan@utq.edu.iq)

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### Abstract

Much of what Toni Morrison writes in her fiction concerns death and immortality. Both death and immortality are central concerns for Morrison and undergo their fullest exploration in her trilogy. In fact, by taking the afterlife as a peaceful place or even a solution to earthly suffering, Morrison seeks to transcend the fear of death that she considers a step towards eternal life. The purpose of this article is to give a way in to Morrison's representation of death and immortality in *Paradise*, by addressing the questions: How are both themes represented in *Paradise*? What does it mean for protagonists to live on (survive) after death? What is the conviction that guides protagonists through facing death without the dread that is often associated with it? What is the value of the relationship of the living to dead characters? These are the major questions in this article. Our way into these questions is taken from the standpoint of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, especially his reflections on death and immortality. This article treats Schopenhauer's metaphysics as a framework to account for the condition in which Morrison's protagonists are as far removed as possible from the anxiety of death and as close to live in peace as possible within immortality.

**Keywords:** Limits of Death, Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, Characters

### Introduction

Thinking about death often causes nausea; writing about death might likewise be the same as pointing to the futility of the writing itself. Death marks the boundary between what humans can perceive and what they can only hope for. Why is this? Because the idea of death is so imperative that, in the very face of it, any discourse is short-lived, destined to fade and open out on to precariousness. Indeed, as Todd May (2009) argues, "Even in escaping it, however, it is with us. It is with us because we are trying to escape it" (7). Both its meaning and omnipresence, therefore, are always winding us up into anxiety, whether we reflect upon it or remain silent; in either way, we succumb to a state of nausea that would not lend itself easily to theoretical knowledge.

This being so, death is the most scandalous fact about human beings (Beauvoir, 1965). Death is presented as an event from which each man cannot escape or even hope to avoid. It is the only event that is necessitated or made inevitable by our nature. Like birth, death is a unique event in the life of an individual. We are born, therefore we die; we die therefore we are born. Hence – and this might be an attractive feature of it – death is often referred to as "the great equalizer" (Moodie, 2010). After all, it is the only equality guaranteed in life. Philip Roth (1996)

could not then be blamed for having attested, “That’s about the only good thing you can say for death – it gets the sons of bitches, too” (124). Such is the fate of all men, no matter who they are, or how they live or where they happen to be. That is what makes death the most scandalous fact about us.

Seen from this perspective, albeit concise, death becomes a topos over which debates have raged since time immemorial. And, more to the point, the issue of death so conceived has long been subject to all the limitations of human knowledge. There is no communicable primary experience of death. Only those who actually die would have the direct experience of death. Hence, direct access to the question of death is closed off to us. One could only approach the topic of death from different traditions and rework it through different interpretations. The abundance of differing interpretations not only testifies to its inaccessibility but also to its richness, too. It would appear, therefore, that the wide horizon of diverse traditions leaves much space for thinking about death. Toni Morrison is no exception. She marks out her own space for dealing with death; one which lies close to the heart of her literary universe.

This article is intended to reflect on death in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*. Most of the material in this article has been given by me in my PhD’s research proposal in English Literature at Kharazmi University, Tehran campus. The purpose of the article is to understand, from a philosophical standpoint, Morrison’s way of thinking of death and its associated immortality. Indeed, both themes lurk in several of Toni Morrison’s novels. Sometimes when one reads Morrison’s fiction - and more often when one reads her memoirs and interviews - the impression which one could get is of an esoteric thinker, most concerned with existential themes like death and immortality. To be sure, that impression is reinforced when we notice that Morrison employs immortality as a faithful component of her writings in its most expressive form and explores it with subtlety and acuteness.

In most of Morrison’s writings, immortal protagonists are ubiquitous; and to that extent, readers might feel on occasion the sublimation of death – a feeling which is strongly voiced through her eternal protagonists. In fact, by taking the afterlife as a peaceful place or even a solution to earthly suffering, Morrison seeks to transcend the fear of death that she considers a step towards eternal life. The purpose of this article is to give a way in to Morrison’s representation of death and immortality in *Paradise*, by addressing the questions: How are both themes represented in *Paradise*? What does it mean for protagonists to live on (survive) after death? What is the conviction that guides protagonists through facing death without the dread that is often associated with it? What is the value of the relationship of the living to dead characters? These are the major questions in this article. Our way into these questions is examined from the standpoint of Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy, especially his reflections on death and immortality. This article treats Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of the world as a theoretical framework to account for the condition in which Morrison’s protagonists are as far removed as possible from the anxiety of death and as close to live in peace as possible within immortality.

### **Schopenhauer’s Metaphysics of Death**

In the history of Western philosophy, Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy constitutes a singular event. He is the last of the great metaphysicians in the classical sense, and the first to break with the German tradition on death and immortality (Magee, 2002). Referring to Schopenhauer’s philosophy of death and immortality may seem strange and unfamiliar on first encounter. Although in no sense a religious believer, Schopenhauer (1970) shows a profound

respect for the idea of immortality. After all, can a controversial figure like Schopenhauer, indeed a declared atheist, introduce himself as a furious advocate of immortality? For him, no appeal to faith whatsoever can do justice to the question of immortality – or, in other words, provide philosophical proof that immortality exists. For him, only metaphysics can do such a hard business.

How, then, does Schopenhauer postulate the immortality of the subject? Schopenhauer comprehends immortality in a way that has not lost any of its radicalism to this day. What we want to highlight here is Schopenhauer's proof of immortality on a basis consistent with his masterwork, *The World as Will and Representation*, that Thomas Mann (1947) once described as "a symphony in four movements" (394). It is in this book that Schopenhauer develops a philosophical thought that breaks away from all the paradigms created by the German tradition on death and immortality (Magee, 2022).

Schopenhauer's discussion of immortality consists of a critique of some attempts to answer it, alongside an account of why, in fact, we should suppose that immortality does exist. The key to his argument can be found in a chapter, entitled, "On Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our True Nature." For Schopenhauer, the immortality of the soul is a question that has always moved human beings deeply. Here, as Arthur Schopenhauer comments,

From the time of Socrates down to our own time, we find that a principal subject of the interminable disputations of philosophers is that *ens rationis*, called soul. We see most of them assert its immortality, which means its metaphysical nature; yet we see others, supported by facts that incontestable show the intellect's complete dependence on bodily organs, unweariedly maintain the opposite. By all and above all, that soul was taken to be absolutely simple; for precisely from this were its metaphysical nature, its immateriality, and its immortality demonstrated" (*World V. II*, 270)

The sense, in which Schopenhauer solves the enigma of death and, by extension, defends his notion of immortality rests on his first move to distinguish between the World as will and the World as representations. In his analysis, "the world is my representation" (*World V. I*, 14). This means that human beings can never know the world as it really is, but only as it appears to them, as a subject, through their cognitive faculties. With the help of the imagination, however, man cannot recognize the world "in itself" or the thing "in itself".

Most notably, Schopenhauer's philosophy is based heavily on Immanuel Kant. According to Kant, there is a domain called, the "thing in itself" that humans can never understand because of their inadequate categories of knowledge. All we can recognize instead are the phenomena or appearances. Schopenhauer claims to have found the Kantian thing in itself, to which Schopenhauer now gives the name Will. The plausibility of this claim is evident from a consideration of one of Schopenhauer's own words,

Accordingly, and without reluctance, we will consider all existing objects – even our bodies themselves – simply as representations and will call them mere representations. In so doing, we will abstract from the will, the sole constituent of the other side of the world. For the world is, on the one side, completely representation, just as it is, on the other side, completely will. However, a reality that would be neither of these, but rather an object in itself (emphasis added). (*World V. I*, 25).

However, Schopenhauer's division between will and representations not only could "solve," as Schopenhauer believes, the Kantian "puzzling identification of the thing-in-itself," but actually could prove useful to providing argument for immortality of the subject (Ozen 255). The full import of this distinction is that when it applies in a dramatic fashion to human beings, which is based on the fundamental insight that man's relation to will is that of one thing toward another. In other words, the human body exists in two domains, both as an idea like any other insofar as it is an object recognized by the subject, and as will insofar as it is in itself. This is the basic Schopenhauer's assumption that gets the whole story of immortality plausible because Schopenhauer writes, "Without the object, without the representation, I am not a cognizing subject but rather mere blind will; and similarly, without me as the subject of cognition, the thing cognized is not an object but rather mere will" (World V. I, 203).

The above passage has direct implication for how human beings are immortal. In putting human subject and will on the same plane, Schopenhauer seeks to free humans from the illusion of mortality. According to him, everything we come across in this world belongs to the realm of the physical; it is just a form, a manifestation of the will which is primarily, according to Schopenhauer, metaphysical and the actual core of every living being. The implication, then, is that death, properly speaking, destroys the mere physical whereas the metaphysical core remains unaffected. In his philosophical essays, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer explicitly rejects the idea that the will is something perishable in time, and wonders, "How can we imagine, on seeing the death of a human being, that here a thing . in . itself becomes nothing? On the contrary, that only a phenomenon comes to an end in time, this form of all phenomena, without the thing-in-itself being thereby affected, is the immediate intuitive knowledge of everyone" (270).

In keeping with this view, Schopenhauer makes the curious claim that, "The will for life makes its appearance in an endless present: because this is the form of the species' life, which therefore does not grow old, but remains every young" (World V. II, 547). Therefore, for Schopenhauer, death does not mean the absolute end because, so he adds, "Death is for it what sleep is for the individual," and "Accordingly, we can at any moment cheerfully exclaim: "Despite time, death, and decay, we are still all together!" (World V. II, 547). The full sense in which Schopenhauer assures the possibility of individual immortality is made explicit in his work, *Essays and Aphorism* in which he declares that "while death may be able to end our life, it cannot end our existence" (66) – and adds that "death is not, from this point of view, to be considered a transition to a state completely new and foreign to us, but rather a return to one originally our own from which life has been only a brief absence" (68 )

### **Morrison and the Bitter Sweetness of Death**

Ernest (1964), in his autobiography *A Moveable Feast*, advises writers to start a narrative with a "simple declarative sentence" in order to capture the reader's attention and motivate them to continue reading (12). In this spirit, Morrison opens *Paradise* with a captivating, yet disturbing statement, "They shoot the white girl first" (3). In just six words, Morrison bombards the reader with a series of information. For example, the verb "shoot" indicates that it is an action in which violence plays a central role; there is a 'they' who murder a group of people, including, of course, "the white girl." The adjective "white" might, at first sight, sound a little perplex, but this perplexity dissipates when we come across the word "first" which implies that the attackers are going on to shoot other women, not White only; they are all women, though. More importantly, Morrison's subsequent interviews support this interpretation that women are all that matters in *Paradise*. For that reason, she declares, "I wanted the readers to wonder

about the race of those girls until those readers understood that their race didn't matter. I want to dissuade people from reading literature in that way. Race is the least reliable information you can have about someone. It's real information, but it tells you next to nothing" (Qtd. in Bloom,2002).

That is how Morrison begins her novel. But, what is it that brought Ruby's men into there, into brutally stalking the five women? It takes Morrison nearly 300 pages to tell readers how men get there from here. In the novel, Ruby is a city of 360 inhabitants, where "they establish a blood rule to maintain the racial purity of their group and to solidify 8-rock identity" (Bouson, 2000). Morrison, narrator of *Paradise*, writes that the "8-rock" – whose very name comes from the mining industry – indicates "deep deep level in the coal mines" (193). Ruby's emphasis on its 8-rock blood lead the town to live by isolationist and exclusive standards and to become the precious city for its inhabitants for what it represents in terms of security, prosperity and ethnic pride (Li 102). Both Ruby's founders and their families pride themselves on the racial narration with which they view themselves "Smart, strong, and eager to work their own land, they believed they were more than prepared – they were destined" (13-14). Here it is essential to add that the city in which the nine murderous men grew up is also a representation of fear. Fear of death, of losing stability and of disorientation are drift close to their hearts. In this respect, Ruby's townspeople believe they are right to punish criminals, enemies who hide in the Convent.

Ruby's internal problems lead its men to look for scapegoats abroad, "because Ruby must be perfect, the results of all imperfect behavior are siphoned to the Convent" (Kubitschek 1998). The consequence of their process of glorifying themselves and demonizing others, the men of Ruby accuse the Convent women of witchcraft and blame them for all the disgraces that befall their town. Ruby's blame game would later be sufficient to legitimize the murder of the Convent women. As Lucille Fultz (2013) observes, "Since the Convent women are free and beyond the 'protection' of the Ruby men, they must be inferior in character to women of Ruby and must, therefore, be demonized so that they can be 'legitimately' destroyed" (91).

It is worth adding that these public blames also hide deeper and personal reasons on the part of Ruby's men, namely the forbidden love affairs between some members of Ruby and the Convent women. The love affairs between Connie and Deacon and between Gigi and K.D. are examples intended not only to scandalize the allegedly "pure and holy" Ruby town, but also to exasperate its men, who are unable to understand the Convent women who, unlike Ruby's submissive mothers, wives and daughters, "They don't need men" (276). Moreover, the Convent women, in Ruby's eyes, had achieved at their shelter some ends that Ruby's townsmen were unable to achieve in their utopian city. The Convent women established a community on their own terms; a community which is not made out of similarity, exclusivist and homogeneous, but on the contrary of members who are different, inclusive and heteroecism, and who therefore rely on mutual aid and group therapy. Krumholz (2020) highlights that "in *Paradise* Ruby comes to exemplify the dangerous of home based on sameness, unity, and fixity, whereas the Convent becomes an 'open house' where women of unidentified race convene, move through, and transform the layers of historical accretion" (23).

These are the background to Morrison's opening sentence against which Ruby's men decide to massacre the unarmed Convent women. They are the build-up that we need to get a running start on the novel. It is evident that the success of Convent women is felt as a serious challenge to male patriarchy, and it reaches its climax when an armed group, consisting of nine men,

brutally invades the Convent. It so happens that the attackers come across empty “dusty mason jars,” unlike the kitchens of their own women, and so confirmed their shared contempt for the women, “Slack, they think. August just around the corner and these women have not even sorted, let alone washed, the jars” (5). Exasperated by the Convent success and their own failure, Ruby’s men “shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and the day has just begun.” (3).

This brings us to Morrison’s conception of death, one which also grows out of her comparison between Ruby and the Convent. In *Paradise*, Morrison draws the reader’s attention to two attitudes towards death. On the one hand, death strikes fear into the heart of Ruby’s citizens, in a way that the Western world knows it. Above all, the haunting fear of death requires Ruby’s inhabitants to conceive death as a complete and definitive cessation of the characteristic activities of living matter and its consequent decomposition of the body. But, on the other hand, – and this is the crucial version of death in the novel that needs to be carefully examined – the Convent women tend to think of death in its metaphysical sense, in which body and soul are separated and the possibility of more living would be embraced.

Morrison appears to have had good reason for stressing and embracing the concept of death on the part of the Convent women. According to her, the reason for this is very much part of what make Black people the way they are. In a 1983 interview with Claudia Tate (1994), Morrison remarks, “Black people have a way of allowing things to go on the way they’re going. We’re not too terrified of death, not too terrified of being different, not too upset about divisions among things, people. Our interests have always been, it seems to me, on how unlike things are rather than how alike things are” (162). Thus, there is, for Morrison, a particular sense in which Black people do die in the sense that there is more of them after they are dead. Indeed, in a 1981 interview with Charles Ruas (1994), Morrison comments, “The risk of getting in touch with that world is that some part of you does die. You relinquish something, and what you give up is the person that you have made. But something else is revitalized. It’s scary to contemplate, like the contemplation of death and change in the unknown. You discover you don’t know it, and that’s why it’s so frightening.” (110).

Interestingly, we can suggest a parallel point between Morrison’s speculative world and aspects of Schopenhauer’s world as it is in itself. Contrary to some belief that death is the end of everything about us, so being dead destroys any prospect of immortality and gives us a certain anxiety, Schopenhauer believes that our life does not start in the mother’s womb – that is to say, before we are born, there is an imperishable and indestructible life principle; so too, when we die, there is something in us that will persist and continue to hold. According to Schopenhauer, then, it is just a matter of believing that when we die, there is something, which he calls Will of life, that remains, because it is timeless, “The terrors of death rest for the most part on the false illusion that then the I or ego vanishes, and the world remains. But rather is the opposite true, namely that the world vanishes; on the other hand, the innermost kernel of the ego endures, the bearer and producer of that subject in whose representation alone the world had its existence” (*World V. II*, 500).

With these in mind, it is no exaggeration to state that Morrison’s *Paradise* is an intensely emblematic novel about death. Morrison’s epigraph to the novel makes us aware of this intensity,

For many are the pleasant forms which exist in  
numerous sins,  
and incontinencies,  
and disgraceful passions  
and fleeting pleasures,  
which (men) embrace until they become sober  
and go up to their resting place.  
And they will find me there,  
and they will live,  
and they will not die again.

The epigraph cites the final verses of the Gnostic poem entitled, "Thunder, Perfect Mind," a poem found at the Nag Hammadi Library, in Egypt, in 1945 and demonstrates unequivocally a doctrine whose referent belongs to another world, a transcendental world in which a dead woman "embodies opposing qualities and possesses transformative powers" (Li 104). What is interesting in the epigraph is that it anticipates an essential aspect of Morrisonian understanding of the dead and postulates the way she would come to specify the peculiar relation of the dead to the living. So from the outset, the idea of immortality is seen as an integral structure of the novel.

Notice that there may be a further way of reading Morrison's epigraph that is consistent with Morrison's emphasis on immortality. In particularly telling lines in the epigraph, "They will live/and they will not die again," Morrison makes a promise to the dead women that they will have a second chance of life. And this second chance seem to be supported by the point, which Michael Wood (2005) conceded, that "an acceptance of the first death is the condition for the avoidance of the second" (180). Accordingly, Morrison's reference point in the novel, the point that apparently blurs the dividing line between the living and the dead, asserts immortality as a possibility. Wood goes further to observe, "The dead and alive women of the epilogue to Paradise, like a number of other figures in Morrison's fiction, are pictures of possibility, of second chances" (180).

There is therefore no longer a valid border, where one would stamp the dead or alive women. By obscuring the realms of life and death, by making them interchangeable or almost so, Morrison appears to question the eerie demarcation between the living and dead to the point of questioning their necessity as true tools of representation. Indeed, Morrison responds as follows to her interviewer, Darling (1994), who asks whether, in evoking the dead, she had come to reject the boundary between the living and dead, "The gap between Africa and Afro-America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present does not exist" (247).

Notably – and herein comes the crucial moment for understanding the nuances of Morrison's thinking about immortality in Paradise – Morrison presents the Convent women as either half-dead or half-alive characters. Whatever they are, they can be seen as women implicit in some sort of ongoing activities, and so making possible forms of immortal existence. The moment comes after the massacre of the women and when Roger Best and the ambulance driver, as

well as Ruby murderers are surprised to learn that the bodies of the victims disappear. At such moment, the narrator says,

When Roger Best got back to Ruby, he didn't even change his clothes. He gunned the motor of the ambulance/ hearse and sped to the Convent. Three women were down in the grass, he'd been told. One in the kitchen. Another across the hall. He searched everywhere. Every inch of grass, every patch of Scotch broom. The henhouse. The garden. Every row of corn in the field beyond. Then every room: the chapel, the schoolroom. The game room was empty; the kitchen too—a sheet and a folded raincoat on the table the only sign that a body had been there. Upstairs he looked in both bathrooms, in all eight bedrooms. Again the kitchen, the pantry. Then he went down into the cellar, stepped over the floor paintings. He opened one door that revealed a coal bin. Behind another a small bed and a pair of shiny shoes on the dresser. No bodies. Nothing. Even the Cadillac was gone. (292)

This enigmatic episode, which attests to the supernatural power of women, could have closed off the whole plot circle. But this was not the case. Morrison further surprises the reader with a last chapter, namely "Save Marie." In this chapter, Morrison provides insights into the her characters' lives – in– death and so wants her readers to learn that both the time and place of the narrative moves from the tangible world to a kind of limbo, where the living and the dead communicate. Invariably, each woman of the Convent interacts with family members, and visits the places where they have been. Mavis, for example, meets her daughter Sally at a restaurant, when "Sally watched her mother disappear into the crowd. She ran her finger under her nose, then held the cheek that had been kissed. Did she give her the address? Where was she going? Did they pay? When did they pay the cashier? Sally touched her eyelids. One minute they were sopping biscuits; the next they were kissing in the street" (315).

Gigi is another character who meets her father, Manley, when he was in a prison, She appears in the place where "Manley wiped his hands on the little paper napkins. To his left, near a couple of trees, a young woman spread two blankets on the grass, a radio in between. Manley turned to see what the crew thought of this: a civilian (and a female, too) right in their midst. Armed guards strolled the road above them. None gave sign that they saw her" (309). Pallas also reappears at her mother's house with her baby. The mother tries to call her, when she passes, but could not articulate a word. The mother watched Pallas rushing into an old car parking outside and driving away "into a violet so ultra it broke her heart" (312).

Seneca's mother also sees her daughter, in a parking lot. Despite the mother's suspicion of her daughter's outward appearance, now with blood- red hands and "huge chocolate eyes," she is quite sure that it is the same girl she had abandoned at the age of five. (316). There is also, finally, Consolata, who is reconfigured as a woman-goddess, "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...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" (318).

In all of these encounters, Morrison constructs female characters that seem to inhabit the interstices of a life between the natural and the supernatural, and so gives the reader a particular sense in which these characters are not really dead. It becomes evident that each of the Convent women possesses a second life, embarks upon a rebirth journey, and in the process each acquires self-knowledge. It is striking to observe the measure of solace that each woman finds in oneself and in others, quite different from they used to. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu

gives some insight into the post-death experience within Paradise and explains how female characters gain an ultimate catharsis through a loving connection with others,

Finally freed from their own resistance to change, the Convent's women strive to heal the people they wounded after their figurative deaths in the massacre. Gigi/Grace Gibson\* visits her convict father, Seneca\* finds her mother, Mavis Albright\* comforts her daughter, Sally, over coffee, and Pallas Truelove\* returns to her mother for one last visit. While the women may not have discovered Paradise, they have found the new life of the apocalypse. (12)

Readers are also left with endorsing Beaulieu's insights by way of wedding them to Morrison's Piedade's song prior to the close of the novel, a song that features the Convent women as "at once earthly and unearthly—idyllic and apocalyptic" (Beaulieu, 2023). The song makes clear that "there is nothing to beat this solace" or exhaust the memory "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). As this quote suggests, there is nothing to prevent the women from "coming back to love begun." These are the last, but not least, things, we learn. Consolata, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas disappear without traces, but return again as if they were coming back home, in the fullest sense that Piedade's song suggests.

## Conclusion

Death and immortality are two themes lurking in Toni Morrison's Paradise. No one can deny that both themes produce a rich harvest of ideas, but how does Morrison's treatment of these themes look in the light of those envisaged by common belief? No doubt. Death and immortality are not new concepts; they are constantly present and dominant since millennia, but nevertheless Morrison approaches them in an original context, one which rests, as we have demonstrated, on Schopenhauer's two categories of the world, implying the will as the essence behind the world as representation. The shadow of Schopenhauerian two categories looms over Morrison and so gives a striking twist to her enterprise.

One especially apparent conclusion of our investigation is that Paradise figures death as an event accessible to readers through the experience of women, who, after dying, survive their own death. A number of authors have observed Morrison's representations of death and its associated immortality, but viewed them, nonetheless, as merely a plot device in her fictional works. No doubt. This view is well-informed, but we have speculated on the philosophical interpretations of both themes. In other words, this article has been an attempt to synthesize Morrison's insights on death and immortality with the philosophical counterpart to the Schopenhauerian metaphysics.

With hindsight we can distinguish two other conclusions of our discussion. First, death, contrary to the common belief that it is a source of anguish, is presented as more tolerated and less dreaded than one might imagine. With this positive aspect of death, Morrison's treatment of death stands as an attempt, if not to understand this requirement of the human condition, at least to register it with the paints of euphoria.

Secondly, and an even more poignant, Morrison manages to present death as something other than an end. Contemplating death in Paradise is not so much about the end of life as it is about the whole life. It should be noted that Morrison pushes back the limits of death, targeting the enterprise of death and destruction caused by the racist system in which the Convent women have become the expiatory victim of the Ruby's bad conscience. William Gladstone once says,

“Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals” (7). In line with Gladstone’s quoted passage, the study of death has become nothing more than a study of the living.

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