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THE WITCH HUNT IN *PARADISE* BY TONI MORRISON*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reveal how the attitudes of ex-slave black men in Ruby fictionalized by Toni Morrison in *Paradise* against their women and young people and then the women in the Convent near Ruby with ambition for power resemble to the witch hunts in the 15th century in Europe. The men developed a new kind of dominancy in their village founded to have a new, free and peaceful life turn this fake paradise into a hell for women because of patriarchal attitudes and behaviors. After a while, this paradise evolves into a paradise for only men and their full-blooded power. In consequence of the race of having control over women and young people and efforts to shape the future according to their own rules, some changes perceived as corruption and degeneracy by men come up. Living in the Convent, women who are offended, beaten or humiliated in one way or another are blamed to be witches and to have some supernatural forces because they live in peace together and in solidarity without any need to men. Some men who are pride of coming from full-blooded families tie some troublesome developments in these women. Relating their own sins, wrong attitudes and mistakes and bad progression in the village to the women's free and independent lives, these men refuse blaming themselves and try to get rid of their responsibilities. This situation ends up with the men of eight full-blooded families launch a witch hunt against the women in the Convent.

Key Words: Toni Morrison, *Paradise*, Witch Hunt, Patriarchy, Male Domination

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TONİ MORRİSON'UN *CENNET*'İNDE CADI AVI

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Toni Morrison'un Cennet isimli yapıtında kurguladığı Ruby köyündeki, kölelik zincirlerinden yeni kurtulmuş siyahî erkeklerin iktidar sevdası ve güç tutkusu ile kendi kadınlarına ve gençlerine, daha sonra ise köyün yakınlarındaki Manastır'da yaşayan kadınlara yönelik tutumların 15. yüzyılda Avrupa'da başlayan cadı avları ile nasıl bir benzerlik içerisinde olduğunu gözler önüne sermeyi amaçlar. Özgür ve huzurlu bir yaşama kavuşmak amacıyla kurdukları köylerinde yeni bir iktidar biçimi geliştiren erkekler, ataerkil tutum ve davranışlarla yaşadıkları cenneti sonunda kadınlar için cehenneme dönüştürürler. Yarattıkları cennet bir süre sonra yalnızca kendilerine ve saf kan iktidarlarına yönelik bir cennete evrilir. Kadınlar ve gençler üzerinde kontrol sahibi olma yarışının ve geleceği kendi kurallarıyla biçimlendirmeye çalışmanın sonucunda köyde bazı değişimler başlar ve erkekler bunu yozlaşma ve çürüme olarak adlandırır. Manastır'da yaşayan ve hayatları boyunca o veya bu şekilde örselenmiş, hırpalanmış veya aşağılanmış kadınları bir erkeğe ihtiyaç duymaksızın, rahat ve dayanışma içinde yaşamalarından ötürü cadılıkla ve bir takım doğaüstü güçlere sahip olmakla suçlarlar. Saf kan ailelerden gelmekle övünen bazı erkekler, köylerinde meydana gelen can sıkıcı gelişmeleri onların lanetine bağlarlar. Kendi günahlarını, yanlış tutumlarını, hatalarını ve köylerindeki kötü gidişatı kadınların bağımsız ve özgür yaşamlarına bağlayarak, kendilerini suçlamayı reddeder ve üzerlerindeki sorumluluktan kurtulmaya çalışırlar. Bu durum ise köyde yaşayan sekiz saf-kan ailenin erkeklerinin Manastır'da yaşayan kadınlara yönelik bir nevi cadı avı başlatmasıyla sonuçlanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toni Morrison, *Cennet*, Cadı Avı, Ataerkillik, Erkek Tahakkümü

Introduction

Being known as one of African-American writers in USA, Toni Morrison doesn't write merely about the white oppression on black people as she is expected but she also writes about the black oppression on their own people as it is in her novels such as *Beloved* or *Jazz*. Known as the third part of a trilogy including these two novels, *Paradise* that was published in 1997 and Morrison's first novel since winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 for *The Bluest Eye* is one of these novels which are written about black male's endeavors of generating supremacy on women in a village named Ruby. Counted as an ethnic writer, Morrison chooses writing on racial oppression not only on white one. At the very beginning of the novel, the readers read that how ex-slaves moves from Mississippi to Oklahoma in order to get rid of white oppression on them and to construct a life of safety and freedom in their new home, Ruby. However, this utopian home or fake paradise is managed by black men who have a great passion to direct women and the young people in the village and construct their own rules. For this aim, they decide taking actions against degeneracy and irregularity newly felt in town and set their eyes on the Convent on which they blame for corruption and the women in it, which results in massacre of these women. Considered the reasons for this massacre, it's possible to say that what black men have done to these women has a lot in common with the actions of witch hunt realized between the centuries 15th-18th in

Europe and North America. As La Fontaine states: "Witchcraft presents a framework to explain the occurrence of otherwise random misfortunes such as sickness or death and the witch sorcerer provides an image of evil" (*La Fontaine* 34). The black men claiming to have a pure blood and praising their descendents who were the first habitants of Haven and Ruby kill the women in the Convent with exactly the same reasons with the ones in the mass of witch hunt in Europe and North America although they are actually the only reason for corruption and uneasiness in the village. This paper aims to display how the aim of generating a paradise of security and peace turns out to be a kind of witch hunt by black men that is said to be in search for equality and freedom in their new home and how it resulted in slaughtering four women in the Convent which is mentioned as "unjudgemental, tidy, ample and forever" (Morrison 48), because of patriarchal conditions and passion for power of men.

Ruby: Paradise for Whom?

Divided into nine parts seven of which is named after a women who is related to the Convent in one way or another apart from the first and the last chapter, the novel opens with the Ruby chapter whose first sentence is a very important one for the rest of the novel: "They shoot the white girl first" (Morrison 3). Then, as Page states, "readers are confronted with questions whose answers are usually delayed and sometimes never revealed: Who are "they"? Do they kill or only wound the girl? Which girl is white? Who else do they shoot, wound or kill? Why are they shooting these women?" (Page 637). Soon after the writer tells quickly that nine armed men search for the Convent, we read about the past of Ruby and the inhabitants of it:

> On the journey from Mississippi and two Louisiana parishes to Oklahoma, the one-hundred and fifty-eight freedmen were unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith. Turned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children, they were nevertheless unprepared for the aggressive discouragement they received from Negro towns already being built. (Morrison 13)

After being humiliated for the second time by black but rich people and disappointed, they asked themselves this question: "Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference?" (Morrison 14) implying another image of exclusion which is not racial but rather financial. After all of these exclusion and humiliation, the black men create a new appearance of domination and oppression mostly on women and sometimes on young people. The battle between the men of different families about having power is told by Bilie Delia who is humiliated in very young ages by community in the village as: "But to Bilie Delia the real battle (…) about disobedience, which meant, of course, the stallions were fighting about who controlled the mares and their foals" (Morrison 150). As clearly seen, stallions, mares and foals are the words metaphorically used for men, women and young people in Ruby. Apart from that, men's control over women and young girls is constantly emphasized in different parts and it ranges from deciding about their futures to "arranging their mind" (Morrison 61). However, it can be said that the young boys respect the adults if they are men because they are forced to be respectful to adult men in the village feeling a kind of humiliation. As a result of this involuntary respect, young boys take this humiliation out on young girls or sometimes on their own mothers. This revenge is implied clearly by the sentences said for K.D. who beat his girlfriend and is forced to marry with her as a result of his behaviors. He said to be "servile to his uncles, brutal with females" (Morrison 62).

The black men construct their own rules including marital missions and social positions of women in order to create a real paradise for themselves. However, while they creating a paradise of their own, they turn the life out a hell for women and sometimes for one another. These men who flee away from racial discrimination and white domination try to oppress and pacify the women by

saying that they are protecting them. However, this protection is not demanded by women but only the men have the idea of feminine susceptibility and fragility which are used as an excuse of being superior to women: "The men are actually not defending their women for the sake of their women; they are murdering in self-interest, to keep alive the inheritance of an all-black community controlled exclusively by men" (Parvaneh 20). Furthermore, it is clear throughout the novel that gender roles in society are explicit in the village. Men and women know their roles and missions and behave according to them. It is widely known that social gender roles cause pressure on both men and women in society. The gender-based hierarchy gender constitutes multi-directional pressures on gender identities through hegemonic gender identities that it idealizes (Kahraman et al. 814). Suppressing their women through their roles clearly, these oppressed ex-slaves also discriminate against white people in their own village. In the way of demonstrating these racial and gender discriminations of black men, the theatre is very important evidence. The play which blows the hatred for white people and implies their monstrosity is performed by the primary school student and represents the black men's stance against racism and gender discrimination:

> The face of each is hidden by a yellow and white mask featuring gleaming eyes and snarling lips, red as a fresh wound. Above a sign tacked to the table front, which reads INN, they count money make slurping noises and do not stop when a parade of holy families dressed in torn clothes and moving in a slow two-step approaches them. (…) The boys carry staffs; the girls cuddle baby dolls. (Morrison 208)

Carrying staffs of boys gives the impression that men are always ready for protecting women when they care their baby in their homes. This discrimination and marginalizing increasingly continue during the course of events in the village. Not satisfied with their power on women and young people, the black men also try to get the control over one another. The men leaded by Morgan twins and coming from some families who are the first inhabitants of the village and never marry with a light skinned count themselves as having racial purity: "Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. (…) The sign of racial purity they had taken for granted had become a stain" (Morrison 194). This separation causes the exclusion of some inhabitants from the society including Roger Best and Menus who fell in love with white girls, and Reverend Richard Misner who is not a member of one of the respectful families. Patricia Best who is the daughter of Roger and believes that she lost her white mother because of hatred for white people calls these pure-blooded families as 8-R, an abbreviation for eight-rock implying "a deep deep level in the coal mines" (Morrison 193). This situation can be counted as a kind of paradox in terms of domination and power because as Keller states: "Requiring its citizens to be racially pure constituted a highly ironic move on the part of Ruby's rulers since the founders of this all-black town were themselves fleeing racism and oppression" (Keller 48).

Limiting and controlling the lives of women and discriminating against the people who is not from them or is not like them and not keeping up with times by sticking the past results in the corruption, degeneracy and uneasiness in the village. The black men try to be the only owner of their own paradise and battles for getting the power on it, which inevitably annihilates the dream of the residents, especially of women. As Lone DuPres says in the novel, neither Deacon Morgan nor Steward Morgan "puts up with what he couldn't control" (Morrison 278). Even these women's participating in the wedding of Arnette and K.D. disturbs the residence of Ruby. Because, as Griffith also asserts: "to the patriarchs, participation and inclusion upset the established order of things and disturb the sociopolitical peace. The fight for justice gets messy, is difficult to predict, curb, or control once underway" (Griffith 592). Therefore, instead of considering their own behaviors and attitudes, the black men choose to blame the innocent and offended girls whose aim is only live freely away from pains, humiliations and social pressure on them in the Convent for corruption and unwanted progression in Ruby.

The Convent: The Paradise for Offended Women

Being a real convent in which three nuns run a school for young girls once, the Convent now turns out to be the home of Consolata, frequently called as Connie in the novel, after the death of the real owner, Mary Magna, as known as Mother in the novel. Connie was kidnapped as a child by Mary Magna with other two children and feeling as if she had lost her roots after Magna's death is defined in the novel as: "This sweet 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" (Morrison 262). This old lady embraces many people especially women who were offended, humiliated, sick or psychologically collapsed. Four women whose names are given as headlines for the chapters of the novel can be counted as long-term inhabitants of the Convent: Mavis who is mentally depressed because of the death of her twins, Grace or Gigi who participates in anti-war demonstrations and takes drugs, Seneca who was abandoned by her sister (or mother) and punishes or relieves herself by cutting her arms and finally Pallas who is a rich girl and was cheated by her beloved boyfriend with her mother, Dee-Dee, as an abbreviation for Divine. After residing in the Convent for a while, these four women seems completely different from the past and they seem as they have gained their self-confidence and with this way, the Convent has a mission of healing them mentally and morally. For example, the alteration of Mavis after coming to the Convent is told by these lines in the novel:

> Pounding, pounding, even biting Gigi was exhilarating, just as cooking was. It was more proof that the old Mavis was dead. The one who couldn't defend herself from an eleven-year-old girl, let alone her husband. The one who couldn't figure out or manage a simple meal, who relied on delis and drive-throughs, now created crepe-like delicacies without shopping every day. (Morrison 171)

Apart from these four women, some black women in Ruby also take refuge in the Convent. Bilie Delia who is humiliated and excluded from the society because of blaming for having over-sexuality, Arnette who is pregnant but doesn't want her child from her future husband K.D. and Soane who is lack of love and loses her two sons in the war and whose husband cheats her with Connie can be counted among these women who doesn't live in the Convent but feel sympathy and are grateful for women in one way or another. When looking generally to the novel, it's very apparent that most of the black women living in Ruby such as Patricia Best and Lone DuPres who warns women against the attack of eight-rock men love the Convent and the women in it. Soane's situation is even more interesting. Even though her husband cheats her with Connie, she feels intimacy against her and most of times help and visit her no matter how much Connie tries to keep herself away from her because Connie saves one of her children after a car accident long before he already died in the war. Not only they act with solidarity, these five women also bear a hand for other women in Ruby who need their help or compassion. Bilie Delia is one of these women who need their nonjudgmental intimacy and friendship. She meets them in one of her hour of need:

> But ashamed of having to explain her face to his parents and put up with the stares of any one of his twelve brothers and sisters, she asked him to drive her out to the Convent. (…) What she saw and learned there changed her forever. Agreeing to be Arnette's maid of honor was the last sentimental thing she would ever do in Ruby. (Morrison 153)

The Convent witnesses a great solidarity and interdependence between women and they live without men by discovering themselves, their own characteristics and feelings day by day. In one page, the Convent and its effects on women are depicted clearly: "The whole house felt permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain, free of hunters but exciting too. As though she might meet herself here- an unbridled, authentic self, but which she thought of as a

"cool" self- in one of this house's many rooms" (Morrison 177). After the days of being drunken and collapsed, Connie's awakening turns out to be a revolution for each woman and it becomes an opportunity of realizing themselves and facing their pasts for women. After saying her full-name, Consolata Sosa, Connie continues:

> If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for. (…) If you have a place, (…) that you should be in and somebody who loves you waiting there, then go. If not stay here and follow me. Someone could want to meet you. (Morrison 262)

These days of lying down on the floor undressed and however they want as a part of self-actualization resemble to a revolution in which women face with their problems and forget their past and become a new people in the end. Resembling to a kind of ritual, this process also helps women to heal their spiritual and individual well-beings. According to Romero: "Not only Consolata teaching the other women not to separate the body from the spirit, but also she is urging them not to separate women into categories either" (Romero 417). After this ritual, their change is so great that none of them could manage leaving the Convent and the other women. For example, even if her father is very rich and she has a live of luxury, Pallas feels at home best in the Convent. Similarly, soon after Mavis decides to leave the Convent and have a new life outside, she turns back to the Convent. In the end, "in no time all they came to see that they could not leave the one place they were free to leave" (Morrison 262). From the beginning, the attitudes of men towards the Convent and the women are away from understanding and sympathy. However, its turning out to hatred takes a time. At the very beginning of the novel, a boy expresses his opinion about the Convent softly: "Two old women in that big place. Don't seem right" (Morrison 46). However, the reader is told about the progression of this hatred also at the beginning of the novel: "Who could have imagined that twenty-five years later in a brand-new town a Convent would beat out the snakes, the Depression, the tax man and the railroad for sheer destructive power?" (Morrison 17). However, the women's way of dressing and behaving, their freedom and interdependence troubles the male residents of the village whose wives and daughters aren't allowed to behave like this and who feels they losing the control over their women and young people and are uncomfortable to see the changes and degeneracy in their lives as Grausam asserts: "This can be compared to a revolution, with a visionary charismatic leader remaking the social fabric of a community in ways that prove especially troubling to its neighbors" (Grausam 136). The black men declare implicitly a war against these women in the Convent because they live without men and set a bad example for their wives and daughters. In fact, the women are found guilty because they live away from men's world and choose to be the only subject in their own world by refusing to live under the control of men. Because for women, world is completely men's world. Man is the founder of this world; he is also the one who rules and will rule this world. Woman is not responsible for the world whose ruler is man. She herself accepts that she is a dependent and secondary creature; (…) she can never become the subject. (Eliuz 224) The women in the Convent live in their own world where there is no ruler except from themselves. This is, of course, an abnormal situation for men. Therefore, these innocent women living together freely, eating together, crying and laughing together are blamed for witchcraft and perversity resulting in the witch hunt done by eight-rock men in the end.

The Witch Hunt

The allegory of witch hunting in this paper can be perceived in two ways: one is the witch hunting by Europeans and North Americans in order to get rid of some ungovernable occurrence such as sickness or death as mentioned before. Similar with this historical event, the black men blame women for their community's corruption and degeneration and in order to save Ruby and in the sake of Ruby; they start to hunt female sinners in the Convent in *Paradise*. The other perception

lies behind the connotation of the term "witch hunt" which is clearly defined in online Oxford Dictionary as: "A campaign directed against a person or group holding views considered unorthodox or a threat to society." These two perceptions need to be discussed separately in this paper. Two emotions, anger and violence are felt continuously throughout the novel. At the beginning of men's hunting mission, the reader encounters a bizarre scene of kill devices: "(…) they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, a palm leaf cross, handcuffs, Mace and sunglasses along with clean, handsome guns" (Morrison 3). The devices sound strange for a merely killing mission. According to Parvaneh, "it looks more like they are preparing for an exorcism" (Parvaneh 18). Even though it is not like an exorcism completely, it's very clear that this mission includes some supernaturalism apart from murdering. Especially the cross, mace and sunglasses are known widely as being used by some reverends against witchcraft or sorcery in the past. When they break into the Convent and encounter Connie, Deacon wishes he wore the mirrored sunglasses (Morrison 289) in order to avoid the women whom he called as a witch. However, it is not the reality:

> As she bellows "No!" to the men now inside the convent, who take aim against the women they have forced outside, she lifts her gaze to something high above their heads: "You're back, she says, and smiles." Deacon Morgan wishes he wore the mirrored sunglasses folded in his pocket. Without them, he has to see in Connie's eyes "what has been drained from them and from himself as well" (289). (Mayberry 574)

Furthermore, the word "witch" is used a few times for the women in the Convent by black men to depict and to make sense of the women's strange way of living according to their moral values. They call the women in the Convent as witch in some lines in the novel such as: "It will turn silver soon and make grass rainbows low enough for children's play before the sun burns it off, exposing acres of bluestem and maybe witch tracks as well" (Morrison 4), "Bitches. More like witches" (Morrison 276). They also have the impression that they cast a spell over some people in the village:

> That ravenous ground-fucking woman (Connie) who had not left his life but had weaseled her way into Soane's affections and, he suspected, had plied her with evil potions to make her less loving than she used to be and it was not the eternal grieving for their sons that froze her but the mess she was swallowing still, given to her by the women whose very name she herself had made into a joke and a travesty of what a woman should be. (Morrison 280)

Connie is held responsible for Soane's inclining love for Deacon because of his cheating, control and oppression over his wife. Blaming the women with whom he had an affair once eases his conscience and provides him that he purifies and gets rid of his sins and mistakes when he put the blame on someone. They also blame women by saying: "They don't need men and they don't need God" (Morrison 276) and claim that God is at their side in their hunting mission before shooting the women: "God at their side, the men take aim. For Ruby" (Morrison 18). Together with the betrayals of two women, Sweetie and Arnette helped by the ones in the Convent, the black men hold them responsible for many bad courses of events including K.D.'s beating Arnette, two brothers' fighting for Bilie Delia and even the birth of some sick children in the village. The claims and accusations are so absurd that after listening the hunting plans of the black men secretly, Lone DuPres concludes ironically: "Not women locked safely away from men; but worse, women who shoes themselves for company, which is to say not a convent but a coven" (Morrison 276).

Apart from blaming women for witchcraft and sorcery or other supernatural things, it's clearly emphasized that another violent action, hunting, is a passion for the black men. Morrison also makes hunting an integral part of her patriarch's manhood (Keller 51). For example, Deacon

Morgan's passion of hunting is explained by these lines: "Shooting well that morning had settled him and returned things to the way they ought to be. (…) And later today, quail without their brains would melt in his mouth" (Morrison 107). As if Soane is empathized herself with quail as the women who has her share from Deacon's violence and pressure, she warns quail silently: "Look out, quail, Deek's gunning for you" (Morrison 100). These are not the only lines which include hunting actions and the verb itself in it. In another line, Anna Flood resembles his actions to a kind of hunting emphasizing the violence in his behaviors, she talks about Deek's way of checking the young people talking to each other in the Oven: "I don't like the way Deek's face looks when he's checking the Oven. He does it every day God sends now. More like hunting than checking. They're just kids" (Morrison 117). Hunting is also used as a verb at the end of the "Consolata" chapter to depict Connie's thoughts about the actions of black men against the Convent women for which they are warned many times by Lone: "That she might realize what was missing: unlike some people in Ruby, the Convent women were no longer haunted. Or haunted either, she might have added. But there she would have been wrong" (Morrison 266).

In order to punish the women or get rid of their sins, the black men seem to have a God-like position questioning and judging these damned and "unredeemed women by Mary" (Morrison 18). Therefore, "the Convent's "blessed malelessness" (Morrison 177), on the other hand, is an affront to patriarchal Christian values and is part of what goads the men to destroy its all-female residents" (Keller 47). This God-like position of men is implied by the progression of the motto written on the wall of the Oven. Firstly, it was "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison 195) and as Fuqua suggests: "they interpret this sentence as a command to obey the law of God, and, by inference, to uphold the traditions of the community" (Fuqua 45). However, this intention turns out to be a device for men using the motto as the fear of men and adults and empower their reign in the village implying the meaning that: "Beware the Anger of our Patriarchs" (Keller 50). Young people are aware that this motto is to keep them down (Morrison 84) and then they try to change it with the motto: "Be the Furrow of His Brow". This new motto gives them the impression that they have the mission of God and must take actions against what they see as wrong in society. They start their hunting witches after this motto. After slaughtering the two women in the Convent, the motto has already been changed: "We are the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison 298). Now that they have completed their hunting mission and got rid of their sins by killing two women and causing the rest's fleeing away from the Convent. The three women's magic disappearance and also the disappearance of two killed women left in the Convent by the witnesses after the murdering is interpreted as another integral part of their witchcraft by the eight-rock men and other residents.

Conclusion

Known as a life-long committed defender of women and their rights, Morrison depicts another portrait of discrimination in her novel, *Paradise.* Although the name of the novel suggests some positive connotations about the new home of black people oppressed and excluded, Morrison wants to show that each kind of discrimination and exclusion is resulted in same way. Moreover, she displays the women power and endurance in spite of all notions and perceptions about them by emphasizing the inclination of violence which may be in every man's hearts. The women power is seen most clearly in the defense of women against offensive black men in the Convent. In spite of Lone's warning, they choose fighting not fleeing and they struggle against men with the kitchen utensils known as being particular to women: an ashtray, a skillet, the stock and a butcher knife (Morrison 286). After all, the paradise generated by the people who are ex-slaves doesn't meet the expectations and it turns out to be a paradise for only men after a while. The paradise's leaders become the people who damage it at most. However, the black men hold the Convent women for the corruption in the village and they blame them for witchcraft and being an evil. It gives them an excuse for giving start to the witch hunt in the Convent. They think they would get rid of all of

these damns over the village when they murder the evil and they exactly do the same thing: they shoot two women, Connie and Mavis. This action resembles the witch hunt in which many women were burned at the stake in the middle age and implies that the ruling men of Ruby created a bad imitation of white dominancy in the village with a good or bad grace and then witnessed its collapse.Taking all these progression into consideration, one easily can conclude that the slaughtering the completely innocent and poor women doesn't heal the image of the fake paradise generated by the black men in Ruby but rather it causes to reveal men's violence and passion of power and thus, it empowers women in performing their self-actualization and raising awareness of men's dominancy and oppression.

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