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**Other Places: Visions of Utopia in Selected African-American Novels**

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## Introduction

As a genre, literary utopia traces its history as far back as Plato's *Republic* (around 380 BC) or perhaps even further (dialogues *Timaeus* by the same author could be considered the first representative of the genre of utopia). Should we want to bracket the classical era, as well as Christian "proto-utopias" published in the first centuries AD, we can start with the first modern work of utopia, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). In either case, the genre originated many centuries ago, though it was formalized and classified as a specific genre only retrospectively much later. Since More's era, numerous utopian – and perhaps even more dystopian – stories have been written, including a number of utopias written by American authors, such as now classical pieces by Edward Bellamy or Charlotte Perkins Gilman. It is interesting to notice that only a small fraction of those stories deals with the question of race or is actually written by a non-white author. However, African American literary utopias do exist, and this thesis analyzes three of them: Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), George S. Schuyler's *Black Empire* (originally published under the pseudonym Samuel I. Brooks, between the years 1936 and 1937) and finally Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997). To provide the thesis with a theoretical background, I first look at the genre of literary utopia itself, its definition and development in history. Then I focus on utopia's specific role in the American "New World" rhetoric and subsequently on the place of African American utopia within this framework.

The crucial theoretical text for this thesis is Michel Foucault's lecture "Of Other Spaces" (1967)<sup>1</sup>, which introduced the concept of heterotopia.

Even a basic definition of utopia suffers from etymological ambiguity as it may stem from the Greek word *(o)utopia*, meaning "no place," or, as Thomas More introduced it, from *eutopia*, meaning a "good place." *Dystopia*, as utopia's opposite, was as a term established only much later. In either case, there is something precarious in the concept of utopia as it is on one hand substantially different from the world of the author, yet at the same time, it needs the contemporary context to work since it reflects it in a way. As Darko Suvin puts it in his article, a utopia has to have "an implicit or explicit *dramatic strategy* in its panoramic review conflicting with the 'normal' expectations of the reader. Though formally closed, significant utopia is thematically open: its pointings reflect back upon the reader's '*topia*.'" <sup>2</sup> This necessity to reflect and point backwards will be crucial for my further discussion of Foucault's theory of heterotopias.

Another interesting aspect of utopias is the question of their feasibility, or, to put it in other words, whether or not they are meant to become real. There is always a purpose with any utopia or dystopia, be it to show a better place or to criticize the current state of affairs in the given society. In both cases, the genre points out that some changes could be made. But are utopias expected to *bring about* changes? Or are they too implausible and impossible to be considered pursuable? Edward Rothstein's view is that "however out of reach, most utopias are meant to be pursued. Utopias represent an ideal toward which the mundane

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<sup>1</sup> "Des Espaces Autres," published by the French journal Architecture-Mouvement-Continuite in October, 1984, later translated into English by Jay Miskowiec.

<sup>2</sup> Darko Suvin, "Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genology (sic), a Proposal and a Plea." (*Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 6.2 (1973)) 134.

world must reach.”<sup>3</sup> This statement goes together with another of Suvin’s claims which is that utopias are not supposed to be *perfect* in absolute view, but rather *more perfect* than the society they arise from. Moreover, this attempted “betterment” does not necessarily work for everyone and often there is only a tiny border between utopia and dystopia. To quote Rothstein again, “one man’s utopia is another man’s dystopia.”<sup>4</sup> From the numerous definitions at hand, thus, I introduce this definition specifically for the purposes of this thesis: (modern) literary utopias describe a non-existent place more perfect than the real one, yet they imply that such a place, in its reflection of the real one, could be, or should be, achievable. By achievable I do not necessarily mean that all the aspects of such a utopia must be realistic or probable; there are utopias involving time travelling, or even magical components and immortality. Nevertheless, what should be achievable, or at least imaginable and pursuable, is the working of the utopia, its principles and values.

In their *Utopian Reader*, the authors Gregory Claeys and Lyman T. Sargent introduce two major types of utopia in history – utopias of sensual gratification and utopias of human contrivance.<sup>5</sup> The former type starts with the first “Golden Age,” Arcadian idyll utopias describing a land of plenty inhabited by immortal people enjoying the abundance of the place. A similar role is played by saturnalia, feasts of fools or carnivals during which the usual working of the world is turned upside down and those involved may engage in a careless joy. In the middle ages, the land of Cockaigne was another representative of this type of utopia, offering the land of plenty as a medieval peasant’s dream achieved after

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Rothstein, Herbert Muschamp, and Martin E. Marty, *Visions of Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Rothstein et al., 4.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Claeys, and Lyman T. Sargent, *The Utopia Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 2f.

enduring the hardships of everyday labor. All these utopian visions, however, are beyond human control; they are just promised spaces where people do not have worries, but at the same time where people are not empowered to affect anything. The modern utopias, i.e. utopias of human contrivance, are substantially different in this respect. The places they describe are finally susceptible to human control and as such are no longer simple and abundant, but often complicated and complex.

More's *Utopia* is often considered the first modern utopia in the Western tradition but it is more accurate to see Plato's *Republic* with its picture of Hellenic ideal city as its predecessor and inspiration. Since More there have only been several utopian structures which have been repeated in most utopian works until today: egalitarian schemes, be it in the context of religious radicalism in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, or later influenced by socialism; celebrating virtues of primitive people from the times of discovery voyages; and visions of seemingly indefinite scientific and technological progress from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on.<sup>6</sup> Also, as Krishan Kumar points out in his book *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, utopian writings by More and his successors, unlike their ancient counterparts, usually introduce "society not as an abstract ideal, and not simply as a satirical foil to the existing society, but as a society in full operation in which we are invited vicariously to participate."<sup>7</sup> This statement again adds to the idea of utopia as something potentially achievable or feasible.

Having thus summarized the features of the modern utopia, I will now proceed to talk about literary utopia within the American context. I argue that it is not improper to say that traditional America has always suffered from what I

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<sup>6</sup>Claeys, and Lyman, 3.

<sup>7</sup>Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987) 25.



would call *exceptionality syndrome*. The “Manifest Destiny” to come and take the new land, by any means necessary, is just one of many examples. After having been “discovered,” America has represented the mythical possibility of a new beginning for many people, being “free from the contamination and intrusion of the unregenerate world,”<sup>8</sup> starting over and better. The traditional American rhetoric has always been based on progress, and not only at a macro level of the whole society, but also, and perhaps above all, most people have believed that they can achieve a better future for themselves. There has always been *hope* that one can fulfill his or her own “American Dream” and even today, people keep coming to the USA in pursuit of their happiness and a new start. At the same time, America has put itself in the position of a chosen people and even these days still proudly claims itself to be the greatest nation in the world. This immense self-esteem on a country level has provided the American citizens with a ubiquitous belief that nothing is impossible. As such, America has been what Robert Nozick calls “meta-utopia,” a space where each individual, each community can aspire for the best, and the whole country then becomes a framework of different utopias.<sup>9</sup>

However, all this had *not* been true for the oppressed and exploited minorities such as Native Americans or African Americans. Having said that, it is interesting to look at the question of race again and also to recall Rothstein’s idea that one man’s utopia can actually become another man’s dystopia. It is almost unbelievable to notice how many American utopias have dealt with painful issues such as poverty, hunger, diseases and death, or even the relationship between men and women, but at the same time, the issue of race,

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<sup>8</sup>Kumar, 81.

<sup>9</sup>Kumar, 81.

perhaps the most painful one of all (and, also, intersected with all the problems mentioned above), has largely remained untouched and avoided. I argue that the main reason for this is that the state of race relations in the United States, at least from the dominant American perspective, stands very little chance of being perfected or idealized, so for authors of utopian works it has seemed better to refrain from any attempt to comment on it. In his *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, a book which Erich Fromm called “one of the most remarkable books ever published in America,”<sup>10</sup> Edward Bellamy mentioned just one African American character – his male servant, and that only very briefly without any larger significance to the story. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* was brave enough to challenge the chauvinist male-dominated world but to that purpose, the author employed a fictional nation of beautiful Caucasian women.

Another possible explanation for this lack of race issue in American utopias can be found in the problem of the *homeplace*. Utopias are inevitably connected to a place (the Greek word *topos* means *place*), often a city. However, African Americans have been living in a kind of a diaspora, dispersed all over the country, and thus have not had a common space which they could perfect.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the only homeplace they have had has always been hostile to them, and even after the abolition of slavery, blacks were legally segregated, not allowed to occupy the same space as the whites did. They could not have their share of America as the meta-utopia because their options were limited. In fact, to them, America was everything *but* a utopian place. To quote Rosemary Veronica Millar’s dissertation thesis, “African-Americans have a perspective on

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<sup>10</sup> Erich Fromm, Foreword, *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, by Edward Bellamy (New York, NY: New American Library, 1960) vi.

<sup>11</sup>see William Nichols and Charles P. Henry, “Imagining a Future in America: A Racial Perspective” (Journal of Utopian Studies, Spring 1978).

utopianism that emphasizes America as an anti-utopian site.”<sup>12</sup> One can argue that slave narratives, a once dominant genre in American black literature, involve a tint of utopianism; a journey from hell to a better world. Nevertheless, these accounts, however dream-like, are only individual stories of survival. There is no unifying power envisioning a more perfect future for all the slaves, or all the blacks suffering under the white man’s oppression. It can definitely be argued that there has always been an impulse of revolt and defiance in African American writing, but rarely an envisioned “better world.”

It is crucial to realize how significant a role race has always played in America. The fact that the United States has been able to view itself as one nation, though consisting of a huge melting pot of many different nationalities, is interesting. In her book *The Black Nation Novel: Imagining Homeplaces in Early African American Literature*, Adenike Marie Davidson makes an important remark: “[t]he exclusion of Native and African Americans from citizenship and the relatively speedy inclusion of European immigrants, despite differences in language, religion, ethnic identity and even class, suggests that race can be very important to nation formation.”<sup>13</sup> This brings back the question of homeplace and diaspora: for people in America, *race* has always been the unifying power, and given the fact that blackness has always been viewed as negative, African American utopia, first and foremost, seeks to find “a space defined by the act of loving blackness, and within which loving blackness becomes possible.”<sup>14</sup> Even though there are African American authors such as Samuel Delany or Octavia

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<sup>12</sup> Rosemary V. Millar, “A Liveable Places: (anti)utopianism and the African-American Literary Imagination” (*Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 72.4 (2011): 1295) 9.

<sup>13</sup> Adenike M. Davidson, *The Black Nation Novel: Imagining Homeplaces in Early African American Literature* (Chicago: Third World Press, 2008) 5.

<sup>14</sup> Davidson, 8.

Butler, who do not base their utopian writings on the racial separatism, most actual attempts at inclusion have proved futile, and therefore the radical utopian vision is precisely that of black separation, as can be seen in the subsequently analyzed writings by Griggs, Schuyler and Morrison.

As I mentioned earlier and as Millar further argues, African American utopianism stems from the history of segregation and, interestingly enough, this “segregation offers interesting parallels to Anglo-utopists ideals of utopia.”<sup>15</sup> Just like Bellamy’s and Gilman’s novels were, so to say, *lacking* in color (as it can be argued that white, in terms of race, is not considered a color and is viewed as unmarked), so are the black utopias darkly colored. As a reaction to the enforced *segregation* in real life and to the almost complete omission of blackness in utopian literature, they introduce a voluntary and purposeful black *separation*. Davidson says that for a nation to form, there is always a shared grievance to fight against,<sup>16</sup> and this grievance has a very concrete shape in this case: as if through a looking glass, African American utopia was very often the white man’s dystopia.

I argue that for the purposes of analyzing utopianism in the African American context, it is appropriate to use Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia as the main theoretical background. According to Foucault, in what he calls the *epoch of simultaneity*, there exist different spaces as “an ensemble of relations that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other – that makes them appear, in short, as a sort of configuration.”<sup>17</sup> All these spaces can be seen as mutual *heterotopias* which

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<sup>15</sup>Millar, 12.

<sup>16</sup>Davidson, 5.

<sup>17</sup>Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1. (Spring, 1986) 22.

Foucault defines as sites “that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.”<sup>18</sup> What is implied in this definition is that heterotopias only gain the full meaning when observed in the relation to other places that surround them.

For Foucault, utopias are, by definition, unreal places (or even non-places). Heterotopias, on the other hand, are real, existing places which are part of a larger society. Foucault expands his definition: “[heterotopias] are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the function of heterotopian spaces, in part, is to contest and challenge the other real sites. Even though I used Rothstein’s claim earlier, i.e. that utopias *are* in fact supposed to be possible, I want to maintain the distinction between utopias and heterotopias, for there is a difference between *real* and *possible*. As I stated earlier, when I talk about a utopia’s feasibility or possibility, I do not necessarily mean that all its features must be real. Though they show a system that is supposed to be achievable in a given real society, utopias allow for unreal and otherworldly, and that distinguishes them from heterotopias which reflect the world of the author in a realistic way. Thus they in fact suggest changes and perfection, seen within the whole network of all the sites present.

In elaborating on the “realness” of heterotopias, Foucault further uses the mirror metaphor: these sites are both real and unreal at the same time because as we look in the mirror, we need the reference, the “virtual point which is over

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<sup>18</sup>Foucault, 24.

<sup>19</sup>Foucault, 24.

there.”<sup>20</sup> In the mirror, we see ourselves at a place where we are actually absent. In other words, we need both sites at once: the actual one and the one in the mirror, to fully understand the status of both; their juxtaposition is what makes them work. Moreover, viewing them in mutual perspective enables us to differentiate between two basic types of heterotopias, as Foucault states them, i.e. *heterotopias of crisis* and *heterotopias of deviation*. The former is designed for individuals in a state of crisis, such as women, children, or the elderly; these people are privileged in a way and they need protection. The latter, on the other hand, is a place to “lock up” those who are deviant from the norm – i.e. prisons, or psychiatric hospitals. They are established to separate those who are inside from those who remain outside. It is essential to determine in what heterotopia one finds himself or herself as, according to Foucault, it is impossible to enter a heterotopia without leaving it untouched. By entering, just like by looking in the mirror, one enters a space where they are, in fact, absent, non-existent.

Having thus introduced Michel Foucault’s concept, I argue that heterotopias represent the most suitable theory for analyzing African American utopianism. There is perhaps no better example of a country living in an epoch of simultaneity than the United States of America. Since the beginning of colonization of the continent, the land has been one complicated patchwork of peoples, nations, cultures, languages, religions and views of life. Though all members of this huge nation may have kept much of their home-country tradition, the truth is that they all have come through the proverbial melting pot and their identity is affected by that. All the non-white minorities, be they Hispanic, Asian, Native American or African American, are no longer defined by

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<sup>20</sup>Foucault, 24.

themselves independently, but always with respect to the white majority. They all represent a kind of heterotopia, juxtaposed to the white-dominated world surrounding them. So, to reformulate an earlier statement, America is a *meta-heterotopia* in this respect, and all its individual utopias aspire to become real heterotopias.

I argue that the most important concept within this theory is that of the mirror; the idea of heterotopias reflecting the space outside, both replicating and inverting it. Millar argues that “African-Americans critique and signify on utopia within a context of the American tradition of racial segregation.”<sup>21</sup> To elaborate on this, I say that African American utopia uses the shared experience of discriminating segregation (“the grievances”, as Davidson puts it) and transforms, or inverts, it into black separation. At the same time, however, it repeats some of the most substantial features and rules operating in the world they try to position themselves against. Among these features is above all the belief of the chosen nation, the conviction that the race is exceptional. To quote Katrine Dalsgard’s article, “African American nationalism – no matter of what its hue – must necessarily be articulated on oppositional grounds. Hence, despite its European origins, the African American exceptionalist discourse (...) is a counter-discourse that works in the service of a separate black nation.”<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, black utopianism, as it is represented in the novels I analyze, also inevitably repeats other issues ingrained in American tradition, such as racism, violence, or patriarchal oppression.

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<sup>21</sup>Millar, 10.

<sup>22</sup>Katrine Dalsgard, “The One All-Black Town Worth the Pain: (African) American Exceptionalism, Historical Narration, and the Critique of Nationhood in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*” (African American Review 35 (Summer 2001): 233-248) 237.

African American utopianism functions as a racial heterotopia in another way as well: within the framework of W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness. Du Bois describes the African American feeling of double-consciousness as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."<sup>23</sup> The question then is whether one can be both American and black. The mirroring function of heterotopia makes this complicated as every African American citizen always sees himself or herself through the prism of the white gaze; to look at oneself, one has to first look in the mirror because the reflection there (i.e. the white perspective) is what actually constitutes being a black person in the United States. The problem which arises from the status of heterotopia is, thus, that the community in question lacks in positive value, i.e. a value in itself. Regarding African Americans, it is especially true that that they are defined in juxtaposition and thus in negative terms – as what they are *not*: they are *not* white. Moreover, this reflection of the white world, this "deictic" relationship of a utopia, determines its category: from the white point of view, all-black empires and towns are by all means heterotopias of deviation, unnatural spaces where African Americans can be independent, self-sufficient, and equal with whites in their self-esteem. From the black perspective, of course, the community is a safe harbor, a shelter protecting them from oppression, i.e. in Foucauldian terms, a heterotopia of crisis. African American utopias like those by Griggs, Schuyler or Morrison do not work with imaginative societies in the future; they picture the desired, more perfect place *within* the contemporary

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<sup>23</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co.; [Cambridge]: University Press John Wilson and Son, Cambridge, U.S.A., 1903; Bartleby.com, 1999. [www.bartleby.com/114/](http://www.bartleby.com/114/). [11/05/2012]).



world. All the spaces exist simultaneously there and their respective functions or meanings depend on the perspective taken, or, in other words, on the position of the mirror.

Given the theoretical background introduced above, I discuss three novels by and about African Americans, in the chronological order of their publication. The reason I chose these three pieces of writing is because all of them introduce the idea of an independent black space. There are other African American utopias, e.g. *Light Ahead for the Negro* (1904) by Edward A. Johnson depicting a future world where blacks and whites are equal and integrated and where racism no longer exists. *Dark Princess* (1928) by W. E. B. Du Bois tells a utopian story about a black college student who is discriminated against in his home country but travels around the world to discover prominent world leaders of color. Although they treat the question of race and envision a better future free of racism and racial oppression, neither of the two texts works with the concept of all-black space, be it a town, territory, or the whole continent, as is the case of the three novels that are subject of this thesis.

The first chapter focuses on Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), a short utopian piece envisioning a formation of a separatist African American nation located in the state of Texas. In the form of a bildungsroman, the novel follows two black protagonists, Bernard Belgrave and Belton Piedmont, in pursuit of their dreams, depicting the rise of the "New Negro," a self-confident, educated and fearless generation of African Americans without any direct experience of slavery. The context for the story is the late nineteenth

century and the atmosphere after the *Plessy vs. Ferguson*<sup>24</sup> court decision and the “separate but equal” Jim Crow laws. Just like African Americans were meant to remain invisible and hidden to the eyes of the white majority, so is the nationalist organization secret and conspiring, preparing for the better world to come. I focus on the Imperium as a heterotopia within the context of American tradition of oratory and the history of the American fight for independence, and crucial attention is paid to the concept of double-consciousness.

The second chapter analyzes George S. Schuyler’s novel *Black Empire* (1936-1937), which strongly reflects the time of its origin, i.e. the rise of Nazism and fascism in the pre-Second-World-War atmosphere. In a way, this novel represents another step in the “New Negro” movement, introducing the dystopian nightmare of the militant race conflict. Employing the Pan-African rhetoric, it imagines an all-African empire in Liberia under the dictatorship of Dr. Belsidus. I examine how the Black Empire acquires the heterotopian status, replicating the beliefs and acts of the world outside, only to escape this status in the end by finding its own positive value.

The third and last chapter focuses on the most recent work, Toni Morrison’s novel *Paradise* (1997). The story represents the most complex exploration of African American heterotopia, not only in the dimension of race, but also, and perhaps more importantly, it deals with the issue of patriarchal oppression of black women. I thus argue that in her depiction of the all-black separatist town of Ruby and the nearby Convent, Morrison offers in fact two heterotopias: heterotopia of race, and heterotopia of gender. She also points out

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<sup>24</sup> An 1896 Supreme Court decision upholding the constitutionality of racial segregation based on the 1892 case of African American Homer Plessy who was denied the right to travel on the “whites only” railroad car in New Orleans.

the impossibility of entering a heterotopia from the outside as the attempt to do so ends in a tragic massacre of the Convent.

## *Imperium in Imperio: Imagining Black Future after the Reconstruction*

Sutton E. Griggs's short novel *Imperium in Imperio* (1899) represents one of the first African American literary contributions to the science-fiction genre. It is presented as a true account, supposedly delivered to Griggs and narrated by a third party, Berl Trout, a friend of both protagonists, Bernard Belgrave and Belton Piedmont. The utopian project depicted in the novel takes the form of an underground organization striving for the rights of African American people in the United States after the Reconstruction, i.e. in the era of Jim Crow laws and the beginning of segregation in the name of the "separate but equal" phrase. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, discrimination against blacks was culminating with mob lynching and violence in general as a part of everyday life. The secret black Imperium, i.e. "empire", located in Texas, is supposed to put a stop to these events, protecting its members by all means necessary. However, no matter how anti-American and anti-white their policy might be, the Imperium, while trying to subvert it, still mirrors many aspects of the dominant society, forming thus a heterotopia of a kind. While replicating American history (War of Independence), tradition (oratory), and manners (race pathology, patriarchal attitude to women), I argue that *Imperium in Imperio* is most interestingly heterotopian in the context of W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness.

Like all black utopian societies discussed in this thesis, Griggs's vision does not venture into a fantastic future, nor is it necessary for the reader to travel to unknown and perhaps yet undiscovered places, as is the case of most traditional utopias. Its simultaneity with the contemporary world, i.e. the world

of the author and the narrator, is one of the main reasons why it could be considered a heterotopia rather than a utopia. For heterotopias are real places, “a kind of effectively enacted utopia[s].”<sup>25</sup> It is thus crucial to view all the black societies depicted in the novels in question as possible or even real. All of them, also, gain their full meaning only when juxtaposed against the (white) world outside them, which they inevitably reflect.

The title of Griggs’s novel itself suggests this reflection as it foreshadows that the structure and system of the new society will be very similar to its “mother” country, the United States of America. The Imperium’s president, Bernard Belgrave, has never concealed the imperialist ambitions that the black nation is about to pursue. The secret organization has in fact formed a complete shadow government to which African American state affairs are forwarded so that “[a] record of our decisions is kept side by side with the decisions of the United States.”<sup>26</sup> But before I go any further with the analysis of the political aspects, I want to start with the two protagonists themselves, for, as Rosemary V. Millar correctly states, it is necessary for the reader to start “thinking about the protagonists’ personal relationships as ideological triggers.”<sup>27</sup> Given that the novel itself is a romance of sort, it is undeniable that romantic involvements play a crucial role in the lives of both Bernard and Belton. However, love is outweighed by ideology in both cases: Bernard’s fiancée chooses death over miscegenation and in a tragic gesture she commits suicide as she is convinced that her union with light-skinned Bernard would contribute to the ultimate annihilation of African American race; Belton’s family is disrupted when he

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<sup>25</sup>Foucault, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of the Negro Race* (Lexington, KY: Greenbook Publications, 2010) 96.

<sup>27</sup>Millar, 28.

questions his paternity due to a too-light skin color of his newborn son. Interestingly enough, it is the oppressive race pathology that prevents the male protagonists from finding happiness in their relationships; in other words, the racism which the Imperium fights against in the first place is present in their own views, only inverted. To quote Adenike Marie Davidson, “Viola's rejection, based on Bernard's racial makeup, is a mirror exclusion as radical as that suffered by the African American community.”<sup>28</sup> Also Belton's decision to abandon his family is a demonstration of the “one-drop” rule that had discriminated against people with the slightest trace of African American ancestry from enjoying the same rights as “pure” whites. I argue that the black empire depicted in Griggs's novel is thus heterotopian in the way it simultaneously subverts and replicates the world outside.

The heterotopian character can be best observed in the character of Bernard, who is a light-skinned mulatto. There is a race hierarchy according to whites and a corresponding race hierarchy felt by blacks. These two hierarchies, however, are not continuous (in the sense that the range would start with the absolute white, go over lighter to darker skinned and end with the dark-black), but they rather mirror each other, with the mulatto as the reflecting, mirror point in the middle. As Millar points out, in Griggs's novel, mulatto “is seen as a threat to both Whites and Blacks.”<sup>29</sup> He is not white enough for the majority society and at the same time, he is not black enough for the heterotopian project which demonstrates “a reversal of white racial hierarchy.”<sup>30</sup> Both sides show

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<sup>28</sup>Davidson, 144.

<sup>29</sup>Millar, 55.

<sup>30</sup>Millar, 45.

strong anti-miscegenation sentiments and treasure race purity above everything else.

Not only does Griggs's empire replicate the racism of the white man's world, but it also employs patriarchal stereotypes of women who are represented "as domesticated, sacrificing and sacrificial."<sup>31</sup> Similarly as in the other novels discussed in this thesis, *Imperium in Imperio* reflects the political emasculation of African American men (i.e. disenfranchisement) in the manner in which women are treated by them as a reaction to this emasculation. In other words, if they are not allowed to be masculine enough for the whites, they are at least masculine enough in relationships with their wives and daughters. The men are portrayed as the dominant leaders and financial providers, whereas women's roles are stereotypically restricted to those of a tragic heroine (Viola, Bernard's wife), a tragic victim (Antoinette, Belton's wife), an ignorant "Negro" (Belton's mother) or a beautiful mulatto who could pass as white (Bernard's mother). Rather than fully developed characters, they are mere tokens, or archetypes of African Americans.

Interestingly and significantly enough, the black rebellion force at work in Griggs's novel lies very much in the tradition of the "enemy," the white United States, for it is largely based on oratory skills and performance. However bloodthirsty and militant the novel might seem in general, the truth is that almost all the battles fought in it are rhetorical. The first encounter on the oratory field between Bernard and Belton comes in the last year of school when they participate in a competition attended by a large white audience, including a congressman. This time, the subjects of their speeches lie within the framework

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<sup>31</sup>Millar, 41.

of American history; Bernard talks about Robert Emmet, an Irish nationalist and orator fighting against the British, and Belton chooses the subject of “The Contribution of the Anglo-Saxon to the Cause of Human Liberty.”<sup>32</sup> The next time when the oratory skills come into force is when Bernard defends Belton at court, saving thus his life as the latter is charged with murder (fighting, then, one of the few physical battles in the novel). Eventually, both protagonists clash in the final battle of speeches which is supposed to decide the future events in both the Imperium and the whole United States – Bernard expressing his militant, separatist views, whereas Belton, on the other hand, holding onto his accommodationist policy.

In her article “Oratory, Embodiment, and US Citizenship in Sutton E. Griggs's ‘Imperium in Imperio,’” Maria Karafilis focuses on the role of rhetoric in the novel. Interestingly, she views the reliance on oratory skills as a sign of integration politics, for it “functions as a linguistic marker of one's fitness for citizenship and one's subscription to the republican ideals of ‘Americanness.’”<sup>33</sup> However, not only Belton, but above all Bernard is a great orator, winning all his battles with his eloquent speeches. Thus, it can be argued again that while trying to subvert the American empire by conspiring behind its back, it is, however, the traditional idealistic weapon of white Americans – rhetoric – that is in force. Bernard knows that in order to be taken seriously he has to adjust to the American standards of behavior and thus in his effort to distinguish black nation from the white man's world outside, he needs to replicate the tools he has learned from his white teachers. In employing oratory as the necessary part of

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<sup>32</sup>Griggs, 22.

<sup>33</sup>Maria Karafilis, “Oratory, Embodiment, and US Citizenship in Sutton E. Griggs's ‘Imperium in Imperio’” (*African American Review*, 40.1 (2006)) 125.



fighting for freedom of the black nation (alongside other weapons, of course), Griggs, whose text itself is written in the form of a declaration or speech by Berl Trout, foreshadows the era of the Civil Rights Movement of 1950s and especially 1960s, with great orators like Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X (who in their attitudes, in fact, somewhat resemble those of the more pacifistic Belton and the more militant and radical Bernard, respectively).

Not only do the protagonists rely on this traditional technique in American history; more importantly, they are inspired by American history itself, with a special attention paid to “the story of the rebellion against the yoke of England.”<sup>34</sup> Again, in their heterotopian project, their efforts mirror those of the American decades before them when they fought in the War of Independence. The very first secret organization which Belton forms, a student college group with the aim of improving the status of the only African American teacher of their school, chooses as its password to be “Equality or Death”, which resembles the liberatory and democratic rhetoric of the Founding Fathers. Later on, in the politics of the Imperium, there are many striking similarities, too. In his article on masculinity in three African American novels including *Imperium in Imperio*, Robert Nowatzki noticed this parallel stating that “in asserting their manhood, African-American men were striving for political freedom against hostile white supremacists, just as the ancestors of these white supremacists had thrown off hostile British rule.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, paradoxically, in their strife to liberate themselves from the white American yoke, the members of the Imperium and Bernard in

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<sup>34</sup> Griggs, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Nowatzki, “‘Sublime Patriots’: Black Masculinity in Three African-American Novels” (*Journal of Men’s Studies*. 8.1 (1999)) 60.

particular find inspiration in the successful fight for American Independence in 1770s.

It is then interesting to juxtapose the “Declaration of Independence” (1776) and Bernard’s presidential speeches. Significantly enough, Bernard does *not* criticize the insufficient treatment of blacks in the founding document; instead, he replicates some of its objectives in his speech. First there is the requirement of “the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it [a government], and to institute new Government,”<sup>36</sup> which is exactly what Imperium has done, for its members no longer saw the American Government’s powers as just and consented by the governed, i.e. African Americans. Also, in both the “Declaration of Independence” and Bernard’s speech, there is a call for ending the time of silence and deciding on an action against the oppression. Next, the authors of the “Declaration of Independence” blame the King that “[h]e has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures,”<sup>37</sup> which resembles the status of the Ku Klux Klan in the American South after the Reconstruction. These “Standing Armies,” as the Declaration continues, were protected by the King from any punishment in performing mock trials at which no one was ever held responsible for murders and violence inflicted on the American people. Inevitably inspired by that, Bernard talks about the injustice at court, where a murder of a black man is pardoned, whereas the pettiest crimes committed by African Americans are severely punished. Both texts then involve a complaint about the unfair exclusion of the subjugated nation from the jury box. Last but not least, there is another historical parallel: the fight against “the Brethren.” The Declaration protests against the fact that Americans

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<sup>36</sup>The United States Declaration of Independence.

<sup>37</sup>The United States Declaration of Independence.

are forced to join the British Navy “to bear Arms against their Country,”<sup>38</sup> and Bernard storms against the Cuban war to which African Americans were sent to fight against people of the same African origin. These parallels and similarities are hardly coincidental and, therefore, I argue that the rebellion of the Imperium relies significantly on the American revolutionary ideals, mirroring them in the black heterotopian fight for independence and freedom. To quote Belton’s talk to Bernard when he introduces him to the whole idea of the Imperium, “we needed a George Washington.”<sup>39</sup> The fact that the empire’s headquarters are located in the halls of Thomas Jefferson College only further illustrates this point.

At this moment, however, it is very important to realize that there is not just one single point of view in Griggs’s novel; first there is Bernard and his nationalist separatism, then Belton and his accommodationist, non-violent approach, and last but not least, the traitor-patriot contribution of the narrator Berl Trout, whose actions are eventually responsible for the doom of the Imperium in *Imperio* as he decides to reveal the secret organization to the (white) public. I argue that the revolutionist plans are marred due to one, Belton’s reluctance, and two, Berl’s betrayal in the name of patriotism, both of which signify the inescapable feeling of double-consciousness as defined by W. E. B. Du Bois. One of the most interesting and important features of *Imperium in Imperio* is its lack of a dominant perspective which readers could easily identify with. Technically it involves two frame narratives, one by Griggs himself as the accidental addressee of the manuscript, and the other by Berl Trout, a treacherous member of the Imperium. Within the story itself, there are then two conflicting views and strategies of Bernard and Belton. As there is no easy

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<sup>38</sup>The United States Declaration of Independence.

<sup>39</sup>Griggs, 96.

answer to the African American question, the author does not seem to side with any of these perspectives. Nevertheless, I argue that he presents a case of a humiliating acceptance of the double-consciousness.

The main assumption is that the concept of the double-consciousness, introduced by Du Bois in his article “Strivings of the Negro People” (published in *Atlantic Monthly*, 1897), corresponds to Foucault’s theory of heterotopias. The African American sense of double-consciousness consists in the incapability of seeing oneself as an independent human being without the necessary prism of the white man’s gaze. In other words, black citizens of the United States will always strive to reconcile the two identities, the African, and the American, that are both present in their souls. Just like in a heterotopia, the status of blacks is only defined when juxtaposed to the status of whites. They are not able to see themselves directly; they always look through a mirror and the image they see there is determined by how they are perceived by the white majority in society. This is then rather problematic because African Americans see their image in the white world, i.e. the world they are excluded from. In Griggs’s *Imperium in Imperio*, there are at least three characters affected by this double-vision: Bernard’s fiancée-to-be Viola, Belton and, perhaps most tragically, Berl Trout.

Viola is a controversial character; on the one hand she proclaims the ultimate separation of races and is willing to die for the idea of racial purity. On the other hand, her rhetoric is still trapped in the white man’s thinking. In her suicide note, she expresses (among others) her wish “to persuade the evil women of my race to cease their criminal conduct with white men.”<sup>40</sup> In her fight against miscegenation, she blames black women, despite the fact that she is one of them.

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<sup>40</sup>Griggs, 84.

She accepts the white point of view, looking at her own kind in despise. Her opinions exactly reflect those of the white supremacists and racists. Also her pride in her rejection of the light-skinned Bernard as her husband is more racist than patriotic. Thus, her seeming race patriotism takes rather the shape of eugenics and race pathology which the blacks have suffered from since the first time they were brought to the American soil.

Belton expresses his ambivalent relationship to white America from the very beginning of his higher education. He is, of course, outraged with the position the only black teacher at his college must suffer, but at the same time he is able to rejoice from the tiniest crumbs the white board gives him. He is thrilled to see the teacher just sitting with the white teachers as “[he] knew that there was a colored teacher in the school but he had no idea that he would be thus *honored* with a seat with the rest of the teachers. A broad, happy smile spread over his face, and his eyes danced with delight.”<sup>41</sup> He sees such a normal thing as sharing the same space and air as an *honor* for his race. Even later on, when he is involved with the Imperium, his views are highly contaminated with the white perspective on the blacks and he is (unlike Bernard) only able to see this mirror-reflection of his nation. He is always cautious about the potential reactions of the dominant society, as if willing to get its approval or even blessing. In his final speech, he accepts the white perspective to the point of self-denial, not ashamed to express his disgust with “[o]ur grotesque dress, our broken language, our ignorant curiosity, and, on the part of many our boorish manners, [which] would have been nauseating in the extreme to men and women accustomed to refined

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<sup>41</sup>Griggs, 31 (*my emphasis*).

association.”<sup>42</sup> His race, which “has furnished some brutes lower than the beasts of the field,”<sup>43</sup> does not deserve an equal status with the dignified society of the white man. This attitude of Belton’s means, in fact, killing the black part of his double-conscious mind, leaving him just with the internalized white-perspective reflection.

Bernard, on the other hand, can be seen as the very opposite in this struggle: he eventually suppresses the American self in him. The most tragic case, however, is that of Berl Trout. He calls himself both a patriot and a traitor in the justification of his acts: “I have betrayed the immediate plans of the race to which I belong; but I have done this in the interest of the whole human family – of which my race is but a part.”<sup>44</sup> He finds himself confused between his two selves, the black and the American one, and he eventually loses both of them because he participates in both the execution of Belton and the revelation of the Imperium with Bernard as its president.

In Sutton E. Griggs’s novel *Imperium in Imperio*, there are many instances of how an alternative African American state, however it distinguishes itself from its oppressor, replicates the tradition of the United States. Though ambiguous in its plurality of voices, it definitely describes the dangers of a black heterotopian project based on the double-consciousness which denies African American people any positive self-definition and forces them to juxtapose their identity to that of the dominant society. In this mirror juxtaposition, they see themselves then as a mere reflection within the white perspective. Thus, the

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<sup>42</sup>Griggs, 113.

<sup>43</sup>Griggs, 114.

<sup>44</sup>Griggs, 7.

Imperium, instead of being the heterotopia of crisis for those who need shelter and protection from the white oppression, becomes rather a heterotopia of deviation, humbly accepting the supposed vices imposed upon them by whites.

## ***Black Empire: Pan-African Utopianism in Times of War***

George S. Schuyler, African American author, journalist and social commentator, originally wrote his *Black Empire* in serial form as two separate texts – *The Black Internationale* and *Black Empire*. They were published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* between 1936-1937 which gives an important context of the coming Second World War and especially the Italo-Ethiopian War which started in October 1935 and ended with Mussolini's annexation of Ethiopia in May 1936. Schuyler's novel was first published just after the war ended, and it is without any doubt a direct response to these events. However, given that Schuyler himself as a person was rather full of ambiguities and contradictions, it is a response of a particular kind, as I shall analyze in this chapter.

In his article "A Fragmented Man: George Schuyler and the Claims of Race", Henry L. J. Gates writes about the somewhat schizophrenic nature of Schuyler's beliefs and acts. On one hand, while opposing white racism segregation, he was also critical of his own race and he "chastised excesses of black nationalism, from Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa movement and black-on-black oppression in Liberia."<sup>45</sup> In his essays and articles he was rather anti-Garveyst. However, his *Black Empire*, written under the pseudonym of Samuel I. Brooks, shows quite the opposite sentiments as it depicts a violent path to liberation of black people throughout the world and a foundation of a new all-black empire on the African continent, much like the prospects of the teaching of Marcus Garvey. The diabolical leader Dr. Belsidus could embody the Jamaican orator and proponent of Pan-Africanism himself, only, unlike Garvey, Belsidus is

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<sup>45</sup> Henry L. J. Gates, "A Fragmented Man: George Schuyler and the Claims of Race" (*New York Times Book Review*. 199220 (1992)) 42.



successful in his plan. He shares Garvey's conviction of righteousness of the black cause, the manifest destiny. To solve this ambiguity in the author's views, one option is to read the novel as a satire or even a parody, and in fact, as a dystopian, rather than a utopian story. However, Schuyler's intentions and motives are not so important in my analysis since I am above all interested in the literary depiction of the black future in his novel and how it both fulfills and escapes the concept of heterotopia as introduced by Michel Foucault.

Unlike the other two novels which are the subject of this thesis, Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* and Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, *Black Empire* introduces an international plan of black liberation; in other words, its effects and consequences are not restricted to the realm of the United States. With its pan-Africanist goals, the empire in Liberia is not a nation within a nation but an equal state within the whole world's framework. Having said that, it is evident that the heterotopian features of the black future imagined by Schuyler are different from those depicted by Griggs and Morrison, who both work with the idea of a "black island" in the "white ocean." Nevertheless, I argue that *Black Empire* does initially represent a heterotopia, not only with respect to the white United States but also, given the context, with respect to the white fascist tendencies in the 1930s Europe.

To recall, heterotopias, according to Foucault, "are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."<sup>46</sup> The inversion here is rather obvious: whereas in the majoritarian real sites whites dominate, race heterotopias are

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<sup>46</sup>Foucault, 24.

governed by blacks. What is more interesting, however, is the way in which the Black Internationale represents and contests the other world, and to a great extent *mirrors* it. Because what this initially secret organization does is precisely mirror the other world; only the coloring is negative. Like in a film negative, African Americans are race chauvinistic, or even racist. The protagonists of *Black Empire* do not lag behind the whites – if they do not exceed them, they are at least equally cruel when dealing with the other race, taking revenge for all the treatment they had to suffer from the white slaveholders and oppressors. Their methods and beliefs do not differ much from those of Ku-Klux-Klan, and as Mark Christian Thompson says in his book, “Belsidus fights fascism with fascism itself.”<sup>47</sup> Belsidus’s goal is not only to found an all-black state in Liberia, but also to wipe all the whites from the African continent and even destroy European colonizers in their homes, cost what it may. Liberation is only the first phase; what follows is the conquest of the whole world.

The imperialistic ambitions of the Black Internationale which I have just described can be viewed as troubling and disturbing. In her article on Schuyler’s novel, Etsuko Taketani talks about a challenge to “our [*scholars*’] tendency as critics to associate blackness automatically with the political ideals of anti-imperialism and antifascism.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, in its embracing violent imperialism, *Black Empire* replicates all the wrongs that the blacks had to suffer from the whites. So inevitably, to quote Taketani again, “black thought and politics are defined as always already counter to – and hence dependent on – the forces of Western imperialism that work against them and that created the black

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<sup>47</sup> Mark Christian Thompson, *Black Fascisms: African American Literature and Culture between the Wars* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2007) 73.

<sup>48</sup> Etsuko Taketani, “Colored Empires in the 1930s: Black Internationalism, the U.S. Black Press, and George Samuel Schuyler” (*American Literature: a Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*. 82.1 (2010)) 122.

diaspora in the first place.”<sup>49</sup> In this paradoxical mirroring, Dr. Belsidus and his empire represent a heterotopian alternative to the white fascist forces dominating in Europe in the late 1930s. They express the belief in black supremacy and are prepared to exterminate all the whites living in Africa. They have no compassion for the weak and old, and employ euthanasia with patients diagnosed with terminal diseases. With his ruthlessness and racism, Dr. Belsidus can easily equal or even surpass fascist leaders like Hitler or Mussolini. Here, too, we are confronted with a sort of “aestheticization of violence” and a “cult of love.”<sup>50</sup> For illustration, it is interesting to examine the vocabulary used when the narrator, Carl Slater, refers to Internationale’s proceedings: “devilishly ingenious plan,”<sup>51</sup> “astonishing and diabolical plot”<sup>52</sup> or the experience of “terrible fascination as destruction approached.”<sup>53</sup> Slater is both appalled and fascinated at the same time and cannot help the ideology soaking deeply into his skin.

In Schuyler’s literary vision, the founding of the Black Empire is inevitably connected to, and in fact conditioned by, the destruction of the white supremacy. In other words, this “New (Fascist) Negro” is no longer interested in accommodationist policy of his black predecessors. Nor does he strive for the mere equality of races. Just like white imperialists, he wants to *dominate* the world. As Hill and Rasmussen say in the novel’s afterword: “*Black Empire* figuratively turns the table.”<sup>54</sup> Its members will not be satisfied at an equal level with the white world as they have long suffered the unequal terms and they want

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<sup>49</sup>Taketani, 123.

<sup>50</sup>Thompson, 75.

<sup>51</sup>George S. Schuyler, Robert A. Hill, and R K. Rasmussen, *Black Empire* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991) 194.

<sup>52</sup>Schuyler, 200.

<sup>53</sup>Schuyler, 216.

<sup>54</sup> Robert A. Hill, and R. Kent Rasmussen, “Afterword,” *Black Empire*, by George S. Schuyler (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1991) 293.

revenge. To quote Dr. Belsidus on this subject, “[m]y ideal and objective is very frankly to cast down to Caucasians and elevate the colored people in their places”<sup>55</sup> and later he promises to his people, “[f]rom an inferior you will become superior. Now despised, you will come to be honored and feared.”<sup>56</sup> Although their fight is in the name of “liberation” of the Africans, it is in fact an imperial battle, the winner of which will dominate the world. Thus, in their effort to fight against injustice, the members of the Black Internationale end up mirroring the unjust treatment of the other race, establishing “their own repressive regime,”<sup>57</sup> as John C. Gruesser points out in his article. Moreover, there is a necessity for the nation’s enemy, an “Emmanuel Goldstein”<sup>58</sup> figure who is the racial *Other* in this case. In other words, the African Empire heterotopia first needs to define itself *against* the other world dominated by the white man because its value and meaning is only full when juxtaposed next to the white world.

Moreover, only with respect to the world outside the Empire is it possible to differentiate between heterotopias of crisis and deviation, as Foucault categorizes them. At the onset of Dr. Belsidus’s conquest, he gives the following speech: “We had hope for peace, for time to build here on the bosom of Mother Africa a great united land – one people, one soul, one destiny. We had hoped to build here a haven for all those wearing and burnished livery of the sun, who wearied of battling discrimination and segregation, disfranchisement and perpetual insult in alien lands and yearned for a place of rest.”<sup>59</sup> The way he presents the Black Empire speaks in favor of the heterotopia of crisis. It is

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<sup>55</sup> George S. Schuyler, *Black Empire* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1991) 10.

<sup>56</sup> Schuyler, 65.

<sup>57</sup> John C. Gruesser, “George S. Schuyler, Samuel I. Brooks, and Max Disher” (*African American Review*. 27.4 (1993)) 684.

<sup>58</sup> The symbolical and probably nonexistent enemy of the Party and the Big Brother in George Orwell’s novel *1984*.

<sup>59</sup> Schuyler, 166.

supposed to be a “haven,” a shelter for the oppressed and discriminated. However, the reader is well aware that this is not its whole purpose; on the contrary, the ultimate ambition of Dr. Belsidus is to create a world dominated by blacks, which is, from the white point of view, definitely a case of an insane heterotopia of deviation. Just like in Foucault’s example of mentally ill people, from the white perspective, these individuals deviate from the (white) norm and as such, they must be located in a space specifically designed for them.

The Black Empire resembles the world powers, such as the United States, in several ways. For one, its philosophy is based on their dominance in technological and scientific progress. In this context, Lisa Yaszek talks about *afrofuturism* as a specific literary genre within black science-fiction writing. Yaszek defines afrofuturism as a “speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th-century technoculture – and more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future.”<sup>60</sup> In this respect, Dr. Belsidus’s experts are immensely successful, introducing solar energy, underground aircraft facilities, fax machines, or television, i.e. ideas which were still undeveloped or unusual at the time Schuyler wrote *Black Empire* but which are, however, well-known today. The acquisition of a technological advantage over the whites is a crucial part of Dr. Belsidus’s conquest plans that would help him in his efforts to reverse the roles of the inferior and superior peoples.

In addition, the black dictator also fulfills the American tradition of superheroes, or, in a different perspective, the fascist concept of *übermensch*,

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<sup>60</sup>Lisa Yaszek, “Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future” (*Socialism and Democracy*. 20.3 (2006)) 42.

super-man. He represents the perfect combination of mental brilliance and physical health, and positions himself in the role of an idol to be worshipped. He even masters white women better than the white man does. Furthermore, yet another instance of fighting with the “white man’s weapons” is Dr. Belsidus’s use of terror. Before the empire attacks directly and openly, he wants to bring fear and chaos to his enemies. He advises his followers: “Embarrass the white man, disorganize the white man, disunite the white man, disturb the white man, but do not attack the white man except secretly and with skill and intelligence.”<sup>61</sup> It is the fear of terror that prevented blacks from liberating themselves in the past and now it is the fear of terror which will help them destroy their white oppressors. Etsuko Taketoni comments on this:

The war Belsidus instigates likewise does not end in the physical destruction of white civilization, but rather in the terror he produces in the white race through violence. This terror reflects their hegemony, which is clothed as democracy but sustained through slavery, Jim Crow, and lynching.<sup>62</sup>

Consequently, what is even more interesting than the replication of the imperialistic ambitions of the white world is the Black Empire’s resorting to exactly the same practices and machinations that whites in the United States employed when treating both slaves and freedmen after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, not only towards their enemies, but towards the fellow blacks as well. The reliance on science means that education plays a very

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<sup>61</sup>Schuyler, 35.

<sup>62</sup>Taketoni, 143f.

important role for the empire. However, Dr. Belsidus is willing to educate only a few chosen experts and then he exploits the ordinary people for his higher purposes, keeping them generally ignorant. Moreover, as John A. Williams points out in the foreword to *Black Empire*, “it is evident that Schuyler considered *African Americans* far superior to *African Africans*.”<sup>63</sup> Belsidus’s attitude towards the nation is very pragmatic – take the euthanasia as a form of “health care.” While he appreciates the minds of his closest followers, he perceives the majority of ordinary inhabitants as a mere set of bodies which either work (according to his plans), or do not. In a way, he is a new slaveholder, only the slaves are not tortured anymore, they are just sedated and used at his will.

Moreover, religion in *Black Empire* is also used as a means of manipulation. A completely new religion is created as there is a need for “a religion designed for suppressed colored people.”<sup>64</sup> It is based on Temples of Love which aim at the most basic and primitive of human instincts. Whereas in his closest co-workers Belsidus expects a brilliant brain and technological skills far exceeding the average, he appreciates whole another quality in the masses of ordinary people: a plain and manipulatable mind and no independent thinking. The sermons represent a combination of high technology, drugs and tribal traditions, causing the auditors a state of trance as well as both psychical and physical exaltation. The Temple of Love gives the believers an irresistible pleasure, and keeps them obedient and brain-washed. In other words, the religion for suppressed people does not emancipate them, quite the reverse. What is more,

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<sup>63</sup> John A. Williams, “Foreword,” *Black Empire*, by George S. Schuyler (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1991) xiv.

<sup>64</sup> Schuyler, 36.

Belsidus does not merely use this new God; he “*stands in* for the God of Love”<sup>65</sup> as the robotic statue resembles Belsidus’s figure. He embodies the religion; he is the one who pleases the masses. He is well aware of the power the Love Church brings and wants to make the most of it. The Temples of Love are the complex center of people’s life, they give them not only sermons, but food and entertainment as well. Thus, in this way, Dr. Belsidus’s “liberation” turns into just another form of oppression.

At the beginning of this chapter I argued that the empire depicted in Schuyler’s novel first fulfills and in the end escapes the concept of heterotopia. So far I have demonstrated the features that make the Black Empire a heterotopia with respect to the white world outside, be it the United States or the fascist states of the Europe of 1930s. I have shown how, despite its efforts to fight injustice, the empire in fact mirrors and replicates it. However, there is also a ground for arguing that Dr. Belsidus’s project is, in the end, successful in escaping the heterotopian status.

First I will clarify what I mean by success here. Heterotopias, as I see them in the context of African American path to freedom, are just a first step on this route. Heterotopias only exist in relation to something, gaining its full meaning in juxtaposition, in contrast. They lack a positive definition as they are mostly determined by what they are *not* – blacks are *not white*. Their status is dependent on their position with respect to the world outside. Thus, to succeed, to stop being just a nation within a nation, a small and insignificant island in the sea, blacks have to find their own positive value, independent of their American-melted self, and above all, free of any double-consciousness feelings. Schuyler

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<sup>65</sup>Thompson, 80.



himself, in his 1938 essay “The Rise of the Black Internationale,” commented on the situation of African Americans after the Reconstruction:

The decline in the fortunes of the darker races was quickly reflected in the attitude of the white world toward them and the colored people’s attitude toward themselves. An important factor in the racial equation, this self-opinion, for there is a human tendency to become what we think we are.<sup>66</sup>

I argue that the step necessary to overcome these feelings is present in Dr. Belsidus’s return to African roots and heritage.

The change of perspective is crucial here. Although it may seem an unimportant playing with words, it is very significant when, in his article, Amor Kohli talks about the Black Internationale’s goal being “driving white imperialists out of the *black world*.”<sup>67</sup> Hence, it is no longer a struggle for a place in the white man’s world, but rather taking back what is truly theirs, and going back to their own roots. When W. E. B. Du Bois talks about the sense of double-consciousness, he expresses his doubts about the possibility of reconciliation of these two selves – one American, one black. Is it possible to be both black and American?, he asks. First, Dr. Belsidus is aware of this conflictive thinking. He admits that after having lived with the whites, accepting their religion and education, African Americans do have “the minds of white men.”<sup>68</sup> However once Black Empire is established and finished, it does not need

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<sup>66</sup> George S. Schuyler, and Jeffrey B. Leak, *Rac(e)ing to the Right: Selected Essays of George S. Schuyler* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001) 29f.

<sup>67</sup> Amor Kohli, “But That’s Just Mad! Reading the Utopian Impulse in Dark Princess and Black Empire” (*African Identities*. 7.2 (2009)) 169 (*my emphasis*).

<sup>68</sup> Schuyler, 34.

to deal with this doubleness. Dr. Belsidus acknowledges this change of perspective when he speaks to his people:

Africa does not need and does not want the white man. Africa will not have the white man. We will have our own culture, our own religion, our own education, our own army, navy and air fleet.<sup>69</sup>

African heritage is present in the new religion, Love Church, celebrating sunsets and sunrises after the Egyptian model and employing primitive dances. Despite its advanced technology, the empire still communicates and spreads information with the help of tom-tom drums. Unlike in Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio*, there is no search for a new George Washington who would liberate blacks; on the contrary, the Black Empire's battleships are named after significant black personalities, such as the leader of slave rebellion Nat Turner, the ex-slave and social reformer Frederick Douglass, the first African American pilot Bessie Coleman, the poet Phyllis Wheatley, or the West African ruler Samory. There is no longer any need to rely on the benevolence of the white man, asking him for a permission to live in his world, for there is now an independent African world. Even though they started with using white sources (ideological, technological), they end up surpassing them, employing the talents of their most gifted fellows. In this respect it could be said, unlike in Griggs and Morrison, that Schuyler's empire escapes the status of heterotopia in the end.

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<sup>69</sup>Schuyler, 140.

## *Paradise: Utopia in the Name of Pride and Love*

Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise* (1997) explores and subsequently undermines the possibility of finding a perfect place in the context of African American South after the Reconstruction and especially later, in 1960s and 1970s. From the beginning it becomes obvious that the idea of paradise the novel presents is inevitably conditioned by its total seclusion from the outside, from the non-paradisiacal other, or, better to say, by its *exclusion* of everything and everyone coming from outside. As Ana María Fraile-Marcos puts it in her article "Hybridizing the 'City upon a Hill' in Toni Morrison's 'Paradise,'" "paradise seems to materialize through the enforcement of utter isolation and exclusion."<sup>70</sup> The novel's whole picture is thus determined by three different realms: the all-black town of Ruby, the Convent as a refugee shelter, and the (white-dominated) world beyond the boundaries of these two spaces. The existence and value of both Ruby and the Convent is based on isolation as well as on rules following this isolation. Rather than proclaiming what they *are*, both the town and the shelter are defined negatively by what they are *not*, when seen through the prism of the normative gaze of the whites. This determination is made possible by a mutual juxtaposition of the three realms mentioned earlier, i.e. Ruby, the Convent and the white-dominated outside, using again the concept of heterotopia as presented by Michel Foucault in his lecture "Of Other Spaces".

The mirroring and inverting effect which Foucault introduces in his theory is crucial when we read *Paradise* as all the three realms stand in a particular opposition to one another. Ruby, like its predecessor Haven, is a town founded

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<sup>70</sup> Anna Maria Fraile Marcos, "Hybridizing the 'City upon a Hill' in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*" (MELUS 28:4, 2003), 14.

by several African American families after having been both literally and metaphorically “disallowed” from the rest of the world. They are rejected by whites, Native Americans, and worst of all, even by black towns in Fairly, Oklahoma, due to the crucial thing the expelled African American families share: the too-dark color of their skin: “eight-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren't 8-rock like them.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, they are *not* in the least white. In their seclusion from outsiders they could finally try to define themselves in positive terms. The Convent represents another level of seclusion, yet, at the same time, it embraces integration in a way. Its exclusivity is not based on race (in fact, the race of the inhabitants is rarely if ever mentioned or specified), but rather on gender as it helps oppressed women in need. Whereas Ruby strives for homogeneity secured by racial purity, the Convent is heterogeneous and chaotic, sheltering women of diverse racial background including one white girl (who remains purposefully unspecified). Ruby, as a racially pure town, is a symbol of African American patriarchy, whereas the Convent, representing gender purity, is inhabited and run by women. The two places mirror each other in many ways, each of them being a heterotopia of its own kind. I argue that the two subjects, race and gender, are the core interest in analyzing Morrison's *Paradise* on the background of Foucault's heterotopia theory.

As I mentioned previously, the crucial definition of heterotopias is that they “are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture,

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<sup>71</sup> Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (London: Vintage, 1999) 193.

are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, the function of heterotopian spaces, in part, is to contest and challenge the other real sites. Ruby, located somehow between the outside world and the Convent, thus tries to define itself against both of these realms precisely by challenging their rules. At the same time, however, the very same misogynous rules as in the outside “white” world are being used in Ruby. Ruby represents a simultaneous contestation and replication of the surrounding world. According to Foucault, as I have already pointed out, heterotopias are real and unreal at the same time because they function as a mirror and as we look in the mirror, we need the reference “virtual point which is over there.”<sup>73</sup> In the mirror, we see ourselves at a place where we are actually absent. Thus, similarly, to describe Ruby we need to describe the outer world. To describe Ruby, we need to say what it is *not*. As Katrine Dalsgard says in her article, there is “[a]n apparent plenitude, the paradisiacal (African) American community is revealed by the imperfection outside and/or beyond its limits and against which it seeks to define itself.”<sup>74</sup> The question remains whether it can be then stated what Ruby *is*. The goal is, by looking in the mirror, to return to oneself, to reconstitute oneself in a way. This is, then, the major task: first, for the people (men) in Ruby, and second, for the women in the Convent.

As stated above, Morrison’s *Paradise* in fact introduces two possible heterotopian spaces: Ruby and the Convent. In looking how they differ and how they are defined with regard to each other and the outside world, it is useful again to apply Foucault’s two main categories of heterotopias: crisis heterotopias

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<sup>72</sup>Foucault, 24.

<sup>73</sup>Foucault, 24.

<sup>74</sup>Dalsgard, 237.

and heterotopias of deviation, judged according to the position of those located in the heterotopia in question. Both the town of Ruby and the Convent can fall in either of these categories, depending on the point of view taken. Again we face the clash between the three realms present in the novel, each of them providing a different perspective. The notion of perspective is crucial in *Paradise* as it also opens a discussion of the possibility to enter a heterotopia. What Michel Foucault claims is that this possibility is only illusory because “we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded.”<sup>75</sup> This invites us to analyze the question of outsiders in the novel and what it is that excludes them. The boundaries between the three spaces are not firmly shut and inhabitants of all of them do cross them sometimes and even form relationships across them. However, the actual crossing does not necessarily involve inclusion.

The three realms (Ruby, the Convent, the world outside) are in many ways contrasting and complementary as far as the question of race is concerned. The town of Ruby (preceded by Haven) originated as a heterotopia of race, an all-black place separated from the remaining world. I deliberately use the word *separated* instead of *segregated* because here the important nuance consists in who has the power to claim that separation: it is the white man who enforces *segregation*, but it is the black man who chooses *separation*. Even this detail says something about the position of Ruby since the citizens are no longer labeled black by the others as a form of a stigma, but quite on the contrary: they pride themselves in being not only black, but “8-rock black”. The racial purity (often demonstrated absurdly like the necessity to have “all parts [of a body]

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<sup>75</sup>Foucault, 26.

black”<sup>76</sup> in the coffin with remains destroyed by a bomb) is one of the key working mechanisms of Ruby (it is closely connected to its patriarchal system of oppression which will be discussed further). With its “one-drop rule” reversed, Ruby represents a racially heterotopic site with respect to the world outside. The town not only despises whites but even disrespects the lighter-skinned blacks as in the case of Pat Best, a Ruby teacher and historian and a daughter of a lighter-skinned woman who married an 8-rock man. These attitudes mirror those of the white-dominated world, only inverted. They have come as a rebound of their own experience of rejection:

(...) for ten generations they had believed the division they fought to close was free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always, white against black. Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequence, serious consequence, to Negroes themselves.<sup>77</sup>

Again it can be seen that spaces and sites in *Paradise* are determined only within the whole structure, as Foucault suggests in his article. Whereas whites define themselves as not in the least black (not one drop of black blood), the people of Ruby do just the opposite. In this way they try to reverse the power structure and thus stop whiteness from being the normative gaze of judgment. However, the problem here is that it is still a negative definition. As Verena Harz comments on this, the reader witnesses “their inability to translate the experience

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<sup>76</sup>Morrison, 112.

<sup>77</sup>Morrison, 194.

of refusal into a different, more positive self-definition and their failure to move beyond racism.”<sup>78</sup> Once again, it is worth recalling that the point of heterotopia, with its mirroring effect, is to find one’s real self while looking in the mirror. As Foucault phrases it:

The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.<sup>79</sup>

The mirror, in this case, is represented by the boundaries of Ruby. The 8-rocks of Ruby, in order to form their identity, have to look outside and find out who they are by discovering what they are *not*. Their existence is mediated through a white referent. The effort or, better to say, the aim of Ruby is of course to build an independent space where no whites are welcome or necessary (the absence of any state institutions such as prisons or police forbid the white law to act in Ruby; in this respect, the town is free from the white normative gaze as the inhabitants are not pursuing civil rights and equality, i.e. integration, but on the contrary, they are struggling for an independent existence).

However, Ruby’s problem consists in its fear of change. A possible way of constructing a new identity could be embracing the African heritage but the old rigid generation is not interested as can be seen in the following quote:

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<sup>78</sup>Verena Harz, “Building a Better Place: Utopianism and the Revision of Community in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*” (<http://copas.uni-regensburg.de/article/viewArticle/135/161>).

<sup>79</sup>Foucault, 24.



All Soane knew about Africa was the seventy-five cents she gave to the missionary society collection. She had the same level of interest in Africans as they had in her: none.<sup>80</sup>

The blackness connected to Africa is too far away and, paradoxically enough, the blackness connected to whiteness is much easier to grasp for them. The younger generation, on the other hand, seem to embrace the atmosphere of the black Afrocentrism which started to be dominant with the Black Power Movement in the US in the late 1960s. Within the course of the novel, however, the change is not likely to happen any time soon.

Ruby functions as a racial heterotopia in another way as well: within the framework of W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of *double consciousness*, i.e. the already discussed "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."<sup>81</sup> In founding Haven and later Ruby, the 8-rocks have actually tried to reject this identity imposed on them. Nevertheless, they have only been successful to the extent of creating their own inverted version of racial exclusivity believing themselves to be the chosen people, this assumption based only on the color of their skin. In his article, Read supports this idea stating that "'Eight-rock' skin becomes the most important of the external symbols through which they construct their identity; it masks their inner emptiness."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Morrison, 104.

<sup>81</sup> Du Bois, online.

<sup>82</sup> Andrew Read, "'As If Word Magic Had Anything to Do with the Courage It Took to Be a Man': Black Masculinity in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*" (African American Review 39.4 (Winter 2005): 527-40) 534.

The Convent, on the other hand, represents a site of integration of races (as opposed to Ruby's racial separatism). As I have already said, the women in the Convent are of a various racial origin including a white girl as well. The fact that race is referred to only vaguely there implies that it does not matter anymore. The inhabitants there are not defined as "colored"; first and foremost, they are human beings and women. Outside the racial and patriarchal realms, they can finally discover their true selves. The Convent thus does not follow in creating a racially heterotopic site, but, rather a heterotopia of gender and gender purity.

Within the heterotopian mirror metaphor, the Convent represents a matriarchal alternative to the town of Ruby whereby it is an economically self-sufficient heterotopia. The purpose of the Convent is then analogical to that of the town: the people there strive to define themselves while juxtaposing themselves against "the Other" left outside, albeit negatively. Whereas Ruby is "not white", the Convent is "not male." Similarly to the men of Ruby, the Convent women try to find a positive self-definition. I argue that in the house "permeated with a blessed malelessness,"<sup>83</sup> they are more successful in the end than their husbands, fathers and brothers in Ruby.

Gender and race are closely interconnected in *Paradise*; in order to maintain racial purity the community needs to reproduce and there are very specific requirements for the women: 8-rock skin, of course, chastity, faithfulness and, in general, compliance with the men's wishes. For instance, bad sexual reputation is often connected to the lightness of the skin, as in case of Billie Delia. Women are viewed as commodities, reproductive tools. And in fact,

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<sup>83</sup>Morrison, 177.

the Convent massacre is, as Sara Upstone puts it, a punishment “for both sexual and racial deviancy”<sup>84</sup> as the women’s mixed and above all non-8-rock racial origin is seen as a kind of a sin as well. It is clearly stated in Ruby’s unwritten laws, as Pat sighs, that “[t]he generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too. ‘God bless the pure and holy’ indeed. That was their purity. That was their holiness.”<sup>85</sup> Moreover, not only do gender and race play into the intersectionality<sup>86</sup> of oppression: there is a social aspect as well. The women of Ruby are nothing without their men. As the teacher and historian Pat Best goes through the town records, she is outraged and saddened by the fact that most women have “generalized last names” and their “identity rested on the men they married.”<sup>87</sup> Being a woman means to be lower on the social ladder, and in fact, to lack any positive value, a value of herself alone.

The way women are treated in Ruby can be interpreted as an extension of oppression which the men experienced from the people in the world outside; they cannot dominate in society so they want at least to subjugate someone at hand: their wives and daughters. Slavery and racism have stripped them of the paternal authority they need to express and the resulting outcome is a violent relationship to women. What they perceive and present as protection (“Nothing for ninety miles around thought she was prey. She could stroll as slowly as she liked, think of food preparations, war, of family things, or lift her eyes to stars and think of nothing at all.”<sup>88</sup>) is in fact patriarchal mastery and control. In their vain attempt

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<sup>84</sup> Sara Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009) 158.

<sup>85</sup> Morrison, 217.

<sup>86</sup> The term was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6., pp. 1241–1299.

<sup>87</sup> Morrison, 187.

<sup>88</sup> Morrison, 8.

to distance themselves from the white world, they fail in not repeating the pattern. Philip Weinstein aptly asks the question in his book on Faulkner and Morrison: “how can a black man achieve masculinity outside a white model of manhood?”<sup>89</sup> In order to maintain at least some feeling of superiority, the men of Ruby are doomed to create an alternative all-black place which, however, is not any better than that of their oppressors.

The ultimate destruction of the Convent and the massacre of the women then represent a desperate attempt by the men to restore the order of their world. They killed the women “because they could - which was what being an 8-rock meant to them.”<sup>90</sup> In her work, Amanda Plaizier describes the Convent as a “feminocentric world free of persecution, statutes, covenants, and traditional family life”<sup>91</sup> which is like a red flag for the men of Ruby. Their masculinity is threatened as they realize that the women in Convent “don't need men and they don't need God.”<sup>92</sup> With the help of Connie, the Convent women are able to find a positive value and fill the emptiness that has defined them so far. They accept their bodies, no longer refusing it as “the Other.” They finally know, to quote Connie, that “[s]cary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside.”<sup>93</sup> The vague ending of the novel which shows the mysterious disappearance and re-emergence of the women after the massacre can be then interpreted as the ultimate liberation of the oppressed women who are now able to find their own place in society, not based on any juxtaposition anymore, unlike their male counterparts in Ruby.

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<sup>89</sup> Philip Weinstein, *What Else But Love? The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996) 113.

<sup>90</sup> Morrison, 297.

<sup>91</sup> Amanda J. M. Plaizier, *Re-creating Eden: The Failed American Paradise Project in Toni Morrison's Paradise* (Thesis (M.A.) -- Utah State University, American Studies, 2006) 2.

<sup>92</sup> Morrison, 276.

<sup>93</sup> Morrison, 39.

So far, I have analyzed the town of Ruby and the Convent in terms of their inhabitants using a three-realm structure, i.e. I called them heterotopia of race and heterotopia of gender, respectively. Following Michel Foucault's theory, I will go further now, examining the two spaces in juxtaposition according to their purpose and their significance, and also in juxtaposition with the white-dominated world outside of them both. Depending upon the perspective, Ruby and the Convent can be viewed both as heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation. The determination depends on what is defined as *the norm* and what is considered deviant from this norm. In the case of Ruby and the Convent, we might rephrase the question: *who represents a threat to whom?*

From the perspective of the white normative gaze, the town of Ruby is clearly a space of deviation. There is the issue of race hierarchy, of course, which establishes whiteness as the standard and privileged color of skin. The darker one is, the further away from the norm they find themselves. However, this is not the only deviation that the all-black town represents. Above all, it is absolutely independent from the white world outside. Not only do the people in Ruby not need whites to employ them and buy from them, but they also refuse to recognize white civil authorities such as the police or the court. The town is like a self-sufficient island in a white sea, with its own rules and laws. And as such, it represents a threat to the white world that is best demonstrated when a white couple arrives in Ruby, lost on their way somewhere else. They are scared to get out of their car in an all-black town because they know that in a place like that, their racial supremacy no longer works. In fact, the roles are now potentially reversed. In seeking help for their sick child, they stop in Ruby to get medicine. After being treated like hostiles by the Ruby patriarch Steward, they drive away

only to die in the coming blizzard. We can see the parallel to the death of Steward's and Deacon's sister Ruby many years before – just like her, the sick child dies due to hostility of the other race.

However, no matter how white supremacy and black separatism mirror each other in *Paradise*, they are not the same. Whereas Ruby, the girl, dies as a direct result of white supremacy, the white sick child is in fact killed by the combination of both black *and* white racism. The mirror here functions as an intensifier since the white hatred towards blacks is projected back through the black hostility towards whites. In other words, the family's death is an indirect result of their own feelings of superiority. In this respect, Morrison's poetics demonstrate the battle of two white powers. One is represented by the lost family, whose child is ostensibly described as blue-eyed and yellow-haired, as if to enhance the impression of whiteness; the other is then the white snow blizzard they eventually die in.

What this signifies is that the town is a dangerous place for the outsiders, be it in terms of race or locality. In other words, you should not enter unless you are like them, much like a prison or a mental hospital, the examples from Foucault's theory. Moreover, Ruby can be considered a "deviant" place for one more reason: their obsession with racial purity (much resembling that of whites) is a trap as the community is about to die out: children are either no longer being born at all in Ruby, or they are born severely sick, as in the case of the Fleetwood family. All this hints at incestuous practices and inbreeding, a fatal investment in notions of racial purity.

From the 8-rocks' point of view, however, Ruby, as well as its predecessor, Haven, can be also viewed as a heterotopia of crisis as it was

founded as a kind of shelter for those who had been “disallowed,” not only by whites, but by Native Americans and lighter-skinned blacks as well. As a chosen people, they are lead through forests by a mysterious specter to the Promised Land, paradise. The name itself, “Ruby,” refers to the great injustice that the families experienced when trying to find a place to live; a girl named Ruby, Steward’s and Deacon’s sister, got sick on the way and was refused treatment by the white doctors and died while waiting for the veterinarian who had been summoned to help her. As Vera Harz argues, “[t]he name Ruby thus reflects the community’s obsessive preoccupation with their victimization.”<sup>94</sup> Their pride was hurt and in turn, they decide to disavow the whole outside world. Though never stated explicitly, they make a deal, a vow, never to leave Ruby so that they are protected from harm forever. Anytime someone leaves Ruby, they are no longer safe, which is proved in the case of Deacon’s sons being killed in the Vietnam War. The men of the town are convinced that the borders of Ruby provide the families and especially the women with all the protection they need and that any significant threat can only come from the outside. Thus, in their view, the women leaving for the Convent expose them to such a danger, potentially threatening their peaceful existence.

The Convent has a colorful history: originally built as a house for an embezzler, it later served as a missionary schoolhouse for Native American girls led by nuns. After it failed, two of these nuns remained in the Convent, the old Mother Superior and Consolata, aka Connie, the latter being the one to take care of the refugee women from Ruby in the end. From the female perspective, thus, the Convent clearly represents a heterotopia of crisis as it serves as a shelter for

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<sup>94</sup>Harz, online.

oppressed and abused women. Unlike the men from Ruby, they come to realize that isolation does not mean protection, and again, that danger can be (and often is) found inside, not outside. With Connie's help, they are finally able to discover their true selves outside patriarchal oppression and live, though only temporarily, in a relative peace. The men's view of the Convent is, of course, very different. Much in the way that the white perspective changes the status of Haven and Ruby, so does the male point of view cast a reversed judgment on the place where their women find a shelter. The refugees from Ruby are moral outcasts in the first place. They abandoned their families, some had abortions, and others have reputations as prostitutes. They do not fit the pure ideal of a Ruby woman anymore. In other words, they deviate from the norm. The patriarchs of Ruby, represented mainly by Steward and Deacon, are afraid of change; they keep returning to their past and annually act out the story of the "Disallowing." Unlike the younger generation, they do not want to participate in any activities of the Civil Rights Movement, as it could bring changes to Ruby and change means deviation. Their motto, inscribed in the Oven, has always been "*Beware* the Furrow of His Brow," never "*Be* the Furrow of His Brow." As long as they keep the vow and remain isolated, they are safe from harm. However, strange things begin to happen in Ruby:

[a] mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons. Two brothers shot each



other on New Year's Day (...): the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women.<sup>95</sup>

Almost all of these uncanny events concern fundamental relationships between mothers and their children or between husbands and wives. The roles of women, as they are defined in Ruby (and in black patriarchal society in general) are too different from the roles performed by the women in the Convent. In Ruby, women are supposed to be just wives and mothers but in the Convent, they embrace their femininity independent of men. This immediate threat to institutions of marriage and family, to reproduction, is thus the justification for the men's final decision to massacre the women in the Convent. They see it as a righteous act which, in fact, fulfills the wishes of the whole town (which is, actually, not true). They convince themselves, as Pat realizes with a sad smile, that "everything that worries them must come from women."<sup>96</sup> Chaotic, hybrid, and free-spirited as it is, the place is deviant from the homogenous and orderly town of Ruby. In the logic of the men of Ruby, it is deviant to get pregnant before you are married and therefore Arnette is the one to blame, not her lover K.D; it is deviant to be a prostitute and therefore Elder, the older brother of Steward and Deacon, finds himself supporting white men beating a black woman; and, above all, it is deviant not to need men. Labeling the women witches, members of a cult, or lesbians, and calling the Convent a brothel with a wide entrance to hell, gives them the right to carry out their mission, for the greater good of Ruby. They cannot have the history repeated:

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<sup>95</sup>Morrison, 11.

<sup>96</sup>Morrison, 217.

Freedmen who stood tall in 1889 dropped to their knees in 1934 and were stomach-crawling by 1948. That is why they are here in this Convent. To make sure it never happens again. That nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain.<sup>97</sup>

Just like Ruby's independence is threatening to the whites, the Convent's independence, both economical and sexual, is something that cannot be accepted by the men of the town. However, the killing of the women not only removes the threat from outside, but, inevitably, also the men's own failures and imperfections. The women are just scapegoats and victims. To quote Harz again, "the Ruby men ultimately attack and massacre the Convent women in order to restore perfection in terms of order, purity, and immutability."<sup>98</sup> The men despise the Convent and its inhabitants; but more than that, they despise themselves for being attracted to it, using it for their own purposes, deviating from what they officially state as proper.

The purpose of heterotopias, as Michel Foucault defines them, can only be determined in juxtaposition with the outside and with other heterotopias within the whole picture; a prison only serves as a prison when we know what kind of people are locked in it as opposed to those who are outside. In other words, if the whole world was one huge prison building with inmates, it would be the norm, not a deviation. This necessity of juxtaposition, however, makes it difficult if not entirely impossible to enter a heterotopia without being excluded at the same time. Crossing the borders would threaten the whole system, like a free man among locked-up prisoners. Nevertheless, both Ruby, as a heterotopia of race,

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<sup>97</sup>Morrison, 5.

<sup>98</sup>Harz, online.

and the Convent, as a heterotopia of gender, face this trespassing, which, eventually, leads to their end.

Ruby, as an all-black town, is defined by its racial purity and homogeneity. They are successful in isolating themselves from the white-dominated world outside, however, the purity cannot be kept forever and there are people in Ruby (hardly coincidentally, all women) who have lighter skin as a result of interracial marriage. In fact, these women in question represent three generations within the same family: in the center is Pat Best whose mother Delia was an outsider with a very light skin who died when giving birth to Pat. Pat, though she marries a very dark eight-rock, has a daughter, Billie Delia, of the same light color. As such, they are both viewed as impure, especially Billie Delia who has a promiscuous reputation, though she is, in fact, a virgin. Pat is a teacher and a historian, trying to write up the genealogy of Ruby, drawing from the town records. This very fact puts her in a difficult position as she is, at the same time, both an insider and an outsider – an intruder to Ruby's secrets. She personifies the impossibility of entering a heterotopia: while she is studying and, in fact, criticizing the history of her town, she is no longer a member of it. She basically undermines and questions its foundational principles. As Plaizier suggests, "[a]s a woman sifting through patriarchal town records, she [Pat] is seen largely as an intruder – historical records of the town are not supposed to be verified or altered."<sup>99</sup> Her critical view of Ruby in fact seems to bring back the white normative gaze in a way, ridiculing what the men are proud of – the town's claims to racial purity. At the same time, Pat's inappropriateness as a critic stems also from her being a woman. Through her eyes, thus, the reader sees Ruby

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<sup>99</sup>Plaizier, 42.

filtered through a perspective marginalized by both race (too light-skinned) and gender (female), which provides the novel with an additional third gaze standing outside both categories, somehow on the threshold of both Ruby as heterotopia of race (heading out), and the Convent as heterotopia of gender (heading in).

The Reverend Richard Misner, who is relatively new to the town, symbolizes yet another threat, another subverting philosophy for Ruby: he promotes the Civil Rights Movement and a connection to African heritage. He, too, is viewed as an outsider, someone who does not understand the idea of Ruby. His friendship with Pat is thus significant as she helps him to discover the town's history. But she also realizes the futility of his effort as he can never become a member of the community without disrupting it from the inside:

*[Pat:] "You don't know where you are, do you?"*

*[Misner:] "Well help me figure this place out. I know I'm an outsider, but I'm not an enemy."*

*[Pat:] "No, you're not. But in this town those two words mean the same thing."<sup>100</sup>*

Recalling Foucault, by entering the heterotopia, they are immediately excluded, as their inclusion would mean the end of the heterotopia as it is defined now.

The Convent does not have such rigid borders as Ruby and crossing them is not so difficult. In fact, the men from the town come to the Convent regularly, for various reasons. One of them is to purchase a special hot pepper used as an aphrodisiac that the women grow. There are also two intimate relationships

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<sup>100</sup>Morrison, 211f.

formed across the borders: K.D.'s passionate obsession with Gigi, and Deacon's and Connie's affair. These bonds prove that as much as the men of Ruby despise the Convent and the "fallen women" in it outwardly, deep inside they are attracted to it and it is actually this feeling of guilt for having sinned, be it in thought or in deed, which makes them decide to destroy the place, to get rid of what is so tempting, yet so dangerous to their integrity at the same time. To quote Sara Upstone, "the men ultimately destroy (...) their own bodily 'transgressions' – their own sexual desires and fear of hybridity – displaced onto the women."<sup>101</sup> Thus, in order to preserve the image of the Convent as a heterotopia of deviation, they cannot be a willing part of it; they cannot enter it without disrupting the image they need for their own sake. The only solution is then to destroy it.

Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise* offers two promised lands – an all-black town of Ruby where the disallowed dark-skinned eight-locks find a shelter and a new sense of pride for who they are, and the Convent, a place where the oppressed women from Ruby seek help and compassion. However, as Amanda Plaizier states in her work, "[n]either community is an absolute model for building paradise. Both patriarchal and matriarchal models are problematized in the text."<sup>102</sup> The problem of finding an absolute paradise in this novel, I argue, consists in the juxtaposing principle of Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia. Neither Ruby nor the Convent represents a perfect space in itself, independent of the spaces surrounding them. On the contrary, they are both defined within a set of relationships among the three realms in the equation: the white-dominated

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<sup>101</sup>Upstone, 153.

<sup>102</sup>Plaizier, 76.

world, Ruby, and the Convent. These relationships are then not firmly set, as the parties in question keep crossing the borders and thus subverting the original nature of the heterotopia they have entered. At the end, when the Convent is destroyed and the women are killed, the Reverend Misner muses, “[h]ow can they hold it together, he wondered, this hard-won heaven defined only by the *absence* of the unsaved, the unworthy and the strange?”<sup>103</sup> In other words, the negative, mirror-definition of both heterotopias of Ruby and the Convent is not sufficient in providing for the paradise it promises, always oscillating between deviance and crisis, race and gender, the inside and the outside.

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<sup>103</sup>Morrison, 306 (*my emphasis*).

## Conclusion

In my thesis I analyzed three novels by and about African Americans envisioning an alternative space for the black racial minority in the United States: Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), George S. Schuyler's *Black Empire* (1936-1937) and Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997). Using Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopias, I argued that all these stories could be considered something different from mere utopias; each of them represents a racial (and/or gender) heterotopia, too.

Despite different times of their publication, all the novels in question share three important characteristics: they envision an all-black space seemingly uncontaminated by whites; unlike many utopias they do not work with a distant future and instead depict a world contemporaneous with that of the author – a world that is possible, comparatively realistic and theoretically achievable; and they all work based on the juxtaposition with the majoritarian white world outside their borders, which they reflect and mirror. These three characteristics justify my application of Foucault's theory of heterotopias which relies on simultaneity, network of relationships and mirroring of other real sites and spaces.

It is especially interesting to study heterotopias in the realm of the United States of America which on the one hand, provides the patriotic rhetoric based on the ideas of Manifest Destiny, American Dream, and Chosen People, and on the other hand, is a land tainted by hundreds of years of racial discrimination and oppression, despite its melting-pot rhetoric. Significantly enough, the visions by Griggs, Schuyler and Morrison reflect both these characteristics simultaneously,

showing communities struggling with the double-consciousness of second-class citizens, yet at the same time trying to find pride in their own exceptionality. These strivings lead in all the novels to repeating many of the wrongs that were suffered from the whites, as the protagonists are not able to escape the working mechanism of the larger society. All three of them implement in one way or another black racism, Griggs and Morrison even base their communities on racial purity and one-drop rule, only negatively reversed. All the all-black societies depicted in the novels are dependent on the world outside to provide them with meaning because they define themselves only negatively, as what they are *not*, in juxtaposition to whites.

Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* introduces a secret society, a nation within a nation in the state of Texas. With its shadow government, the Imperium represents an institution mirroring the United States government. Though opposing their "mother country," the members of the Imperium employ some of its foundational traditions or acts in the pursuit of freedom. Rhetoric and oratory skills play a crucial role in most of the battles fought in the story, just like they had always been important in American history. Moreover, the liberation of the Imperium within the United States resembles the War of Independence and the events that led to freeing Americans from the yoke of the British Kingdom. This reflection of the despised country is even more enhanced in the omnipresent sense of double-consciousness, the inescapable feeling of the black race's inferiority and the unconscious acceptance of the white man's perspective. In search of the new George Washington, the Imperium does not step out of the American shadow and mirrors both its virtues and vices.



*Black Empire* by Schuyler employs racist rhetoric as well, and unlike Griggs, it does it in an explicitly militant and violent way. Just like blacks have been terrorized by lynching and Jim Crow laws, Dr. Belsidus spreads terror among whites, keeping them in ignorance as to who stands behind the attacks on them. The Empire mirrors the acts and ideology of fascist Italy in Italo-Ethiopian War, this time with the African and European roles reversed. As in Griggs's novel, in Schuyler's text we can see the arrival of the "New Negro." Unlike his parents and grandparents, he is self-confident, educated and not afraid to fight for his rights. However, this "New Negro" has many faces – starting with the right for education and ending as a serious militant conflict. As if Schuyler further developed the "New Negro" character, dismissing the mild, pacifistic Belton who only wants to be equal with his Southern "brothers" and relies on humanistic education, and also Bernard, with his conviction that to study and talk is not enough and that there has to be a revenge and fight. He now introduces Dr. Belsidus, who uses educated people and technology for his cruel intentions and does not hesitate to shed blood and kill innocent people. In Schuyler's text, thus, the "New Negro" evolves into the "New Fascist Negro." Schuyler further employs the American tradition of superheroes and the imperative of technological progress. Nevertheless, despite all this mirroring, I argued that the Empire, when embracing African heritage, in fact escapes the dependent status of heterotopia in the end.

Morrison's *Paradise* offers a most recent, smaller-scale vision of black separatist space, telling the story of an all-black town Ruby. The African Americans living in this town do not aspire to overturn the world's rule; however, they contest the space beyond the town's borders with their feeling of

exceptionality and superiority. They, too, believe themselves to be the Chosen People. In their effort to rule an independent territory with the whites and their official institutions excluded, they, nonetheless, replicate the oppressive methods of their greatest enemy – the white man. The Ruby community of eight-rocks is based on misogyny and patriarchy, and also on racial purity; therefore, it is no more perfect than the world outside which they strive to define themselves against. This racial heterotopia is challenged and undermined by the Convent where the women on the run from Ruby form a heterotopia of gender, a space beyond the man's reach. The final massacre of the women in the Convent means not only the end of the shelter for females in need, but of Ruby, as it was established, too. Within the Foucauldian theory, Morrison's novel best illustrates the impossibility of entering a heterotopia without ultimately destroying it.

Describing heterotopias rather than utopias, all three novels prove the difficulty in finding an independent value of black separatist communities as these are inevitably based on their definition *against* the white world outside, which in itself is not sufficient. The aim of this thesis was to trace the mirroring parallels between white and black worlds depicted in juxtaposition by Griggs, Schuyler and Morrison, and simultaneously to show their limitations for creating a better world for the oppressed minority. An interesting further research might be done on other more recent African American science fiction writings which do not work with black separatism, such as novels by Samuel R. Delany or Octavia Butler, and their possible heterotopian features, for I see the concept of heterotopia and the question of race closely intertwined, as I tried to demonstrate in this thesis.

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## Abstract

The thesis analyzes three novels with utopian features written by African American authors: Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), George S. Schuyler's *Black Empire* (1936-1937) and Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997). The novels and their description of alternative all-black spaces are analyzed on the background of Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopias. In the first part of the thesis, I provide the introduction to the genre of utopia and its brief history, and I state a definition of utopia for the purposes of the thesis. Next I discuss the specificity of American context and introduce the concept of heterotopias as opposed to traditional utopias. The crucial features are simultaneity, juxtaposition, mutual relationships and mirroring.

In the latter part of the thesis, I proceed to the analysis of the novels themselves, stressing mainly their treatment of race and racism. In Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio*, I describe the parallels between the white and black world in their use of rhetoric and in the Imperium's inspiration by the American War of Independence. I also examine the role of Du Boisian double-consciousness and its working in the concept of heterotopia. In the analysis of Schuyler's *Black Empire*, I focus on the fascist rhetoric resembling that of Italy in Italo-Ethiopian War, American tradition of superheroes and technological progress. Next I study the role of African heritage for the final emancipation of the Black Empire. In Morrison's *Paradise*, I analyze two heterotopias: one of race, the other of gender. The main focus is to show the impossibility of entering a heterotopia, and to draw parallels between white and black misogyny.

I conclude the thesis with stressing the contribution of the concept of heterotopia to the question of race in the United States.

**Key words:** African American literature, utopia, heterotopia, race

## Abstrakt

Diplomová práce se věnuje třem románům afroamerických autorů, *Imperium in Imperio* (1899) Suttona E. Griggse, *Black Empire* (1936-1937) George S. Schuylera a *Paradise* (1997) Toni Morrison, jejichž příběhy vykazují prvky utopistického žánru. Romány a jejich znázornění alternativních prostorů obývaných pouze afroameričany byly analyzovány na pozadí teorie heterotopií Michela Foucaulta. V první části práce předkládám úvod do žánru utopie a jeho krátkou historii, zároveň uvádím definici utopie pro účely této práce. Dále se věnuji specifikům amerického kontextu a představuji koncept heterotopií v kontrastu s tradičními utopiemi. Klíčovými prvky jsou simultánnost, juxtapozice, vzájemné vztahy a zrcadlení.

V druhé části práce pokračuji v analýze samotných románů s důrazem na jejich zacházení s otázkou rasy a rasismu. U Griggsova *Imperium in Imperio* popisují paralely mezi světy bělochů a černochů ve využití rétoriky a v inspiraci Impéria americkou válkou za nezávislost. Také zkoumám roli konceptu dvojího vědomí (double-consciousness) W. E. B. DuBoise a jeho fungování v rámci teorie heterotopií. U Schuylerova *Black Empire* se zaměřuji na fašistickou rétoriku připomínající Itálii v italsko-etiofské válce, americkou tradici superhrdinů a důraz na technologický pokrok. Dále studuji roli afrického dědictví v konečné emancipaci Černého impéria. U *Paradise* Toni Morrison analyzuji dvě heterotopie, rasovou a genderovou. Hlavní důraz je kladen na ukázání nemožnosti vstoupit do heterotopie a odhalení paralel mezi bílou a černou misogynií.



Diplomovou práci zakončuji zdůrazněním přínosu konceptu heterotopií pro analýzu rasové otázky ve Spojených státech.

**klíčová slova:** afroamerická literatura, utopie, heterotopie, rasa