



GRAAT On-Line issue #7 January 2010

Justice in Toni Morrison's *Love*

Jacqueline Berben-Masi

Université de Nice

Introduction

Modern legal discourse tends to establish a fundamental opposition between law and justice.¹ Some critics align the law with reason and modernity while yoking justice to emotion and the old-fashioned; then again, “law is associated with the Dominant ... and justice with the Other”.² Philosopher José Ortega y Gasset said that “Law is born from despair of human nature; [that] out of mutual distrust of their own humanity people are careful to interpose between each other for the purposes of commerce and intercourse something deliberately inhuman: the law.”³ Law in America is also portrayed as “a highly fallible legal system” which traps the innocent and leaves the impression that “the legal system [is] the site for generating powerful discourses and social practices that, in the end, offer relatively little to ordinary people who turn to the law in order to find ‘justice.’”⁴ Roberto Unger, founder of the Critical Legal Studies Movement, sees “human life” as an unending “struggle between a human’s individualistic, desiring self and his or her aspirations toward the ideal, the good, and community.”⁵ Moreover, “a communal rule of law survives only where the structure of regulations (the law) exists in relation to the disposition of cultural forces (social norms).”⁶ All these considerations come to the fore when examining the basic tensions that propel the action of the short novel, *Love*, which alternates between chaos and order, law and justice, positive and natural law. As for the latter pair, a tenuous restrictive relationship exists between positive law, or that “posited” by human beings in legislatures for a particular civilization or indeed for

the world community, and natural law, which has gone through many definitions over the centuries—Eternal, Divine, instinctive, equitable, revealed in contrast to reflected, natural, *etc.* In some recent theory, natural law has been passed over in favour of popular justice, i.e., one which would “[remove] a case from the world of conventional courts and codes, rules of criminal procedure, and [place] it instead in the more popularly accessible context of cooperative decision making and alternative legality.”⁷ In this paper, I hope to show the relative weight of all these concepts in Toni Morrison’s novel *Love*, the conflicts that operate among them as well as between various characters at different points, and lastly the importance of final causality: the end or goal of action or development. Through the character-narrator L, final causality resolves the friction inherent between chaos and order, positive and natural law, law and justice.

The Plotlines

Upon first reading, Toni Morrison’s *Love* seems more about hate and revenge than positive sentiments: in analepses or flashbacks, William Cosey, a privileged male, grows old and vituperative in a climate of open warfare among the females with whom he has surrounded himself. Those antagonistic women—May, Christine, and Heed—live out their lives under the same roof racked by distrust and vengeance rooted in their relationship with that wealthy man. Junior, a saucy young woman with a Devil’s attribute, a hoof-shaped foot, appears virtually in a puff of smoke—a Greyhound’s exhaust—to stir up some action on the scene and terminate the stasis. The circumstances behind Cosey’s unelucidated death keep community—and reader—speculation churning until the final pages. Add to the preceding a certain dose of sex and numerous examples of both generosity and egotism to even out the adversarial balance and the principal driving forces of the novel are accounted for. Past and present mingle: current-day events in the timeline are bathed in the recollections and judgments of the minor characters. Junior, that youthful black feminist insurgent, acts as a catalyst to precipitate a tearful but joyous climax accomplished in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. None of which makes Junior a heroine: on the contrary, she is antiheroic, a servant of chaos and selfishness,

the not so unpredictable outcome of her violent childhood circumstances and unfair treatment at the hands of the law and juvenile detention officers. In a word, she is emblematic of many African-Americans caught in the cycle of economic and social injustice in the USA, a survivor thanks to her own inner strength and will-power. Indeed, she might be the antonym of love, having always been excluded from its grace. Only her appetites and passions shape her responses to life. It will require a miracle of Christian virtue to redress the scales of justice, upset throughout the entire span of *Love* by similar attitudes among other protagonists.

The Themes

Justice—in sum, giving to each his or her fair due—guarantees equality and probity. Prudence, temperance in the sense of knowing and respecting proper measure, recall the classic Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in their search for ethics and some form of common law derived from an order that followed nature. Rather than law *per se*, their concerns fall under the category of virtues: second-nature, learned habits. Christianity would develop its own priorities, its own triad hierarchy of virtues with Faith, Hope, and Charity superseding the quad of the Ancients. Indeed, viewed in the context of a kind of “natural” order, a fairer application of a community’s values as represented by certain characters in the novel, the rule of legislated law is less respected than circumvented in favour of a more equitable or at least viable solution in the eyes of the local people. Here, we return to a concept of popular justice. The result is neither chaos nor an exacerbation of the exercise of free will, but a restoration of life under a higher order (natural law) as it could be lived without the intervention of man-made rules and regulations (positivism). The example of Sophocles’ Antigone is most frequently cited as the perfect example of a subject’s knowing the spirit and the letter of the civil ordinances, but defying them in the name of obeying a command from the gods (Pantazakos, 65-66). Creon’s explicit command to all his subjects not to bury Antigone’s brother Polynices, the rebel against the City, is held by Antigone not as law, but as error. Such is the situation of L when she transgresses various boundaries between the legal and the illegal in *Love*, for like Antigone, she becomes literally a law unto herself. As

the incarnation of the virtue of Charity, the subject of First Corinthians, Chapter 13, L—Love— “appears as a pure and simple relationship of the human being to that of which [s]he miraculously happens to be the bearer, namely the signifying cut that confers on [her] the indomitable power of being what [s]he is in the face of everything that may oppose” (Lacan, 282). Such is the nature of the character, L, or interestingly enough, of final causality.

Also pertinent to the case at hand is the Stoics’ belief in the necessity for the individual good to yield before the greater importance of the general or common good. Some eyebrows might be raised here as the characters in *Love* provide ample illustrations of questionable activity: one wonders just whose good was prevailing. Clearly, selfish motives underlie many deeds. If 52-year-old Bill Cosey marries Heed, a pre-pubescent girl of 11—a guarantee of her virginity and fertility—whereas the youngest legal age for marriage in the US is 12, only daughter-in-law May and granddaughter Christine voice their disapproval. As for a notarized will that is destroyed in favour of an earlier, handwritten and cryptic version drafted under the influence of alcohol, a popular jury would probably acquit the perpetrator. In the context of the greater picture—blacks in a racist society, the community good versus questionable actions—a certain cause of justice is served in each transgression of the law. And the morality of the tale is communicated, since natural inclination without the impediments of artificial rules offers a true value here. The old friendship, indeed, Christian Love, that formerly united the adversaries Heed and Christine is rekindled from its ashes once the fetters of jealousy, class, and legality have been removed. Strict ethics may be ill-served: it is universally condemned to arbitrarily murder an innocent person, but our society is somewhat ambiguous on that score. Just who is a person with full rights accruing? Do unborn fetuses, convicted criminals, or Alzheimers’ patients qualify? Did protagonist Bill Cosey at the time of his murder fit in the category of a person with full rights or had he somehow descended to the level of a creature of baser instincts? Is it not true that law’s essential purpose is to achieve social order, one of the eight basic principles of law that double as moral ideas of fairness? Such was the intention behind several illegal deeds in the novel. Or is there simply no conceptual connection between law and

morality? Is there, for example, an acceptable way to poison your victim, as opposed to an unacceptable way? Legal theorist Ronald Dworkin's thoughts on natural law revolve about his theory of judicial obligations in face of what he labels as "hard cases": he invokes a Rights Thesis which charges the judge "...to discover what the rights of the parties are..."⁸ Dworkin also specifically challenges existing human law: "[I]t does not follow that a man is morally to blame every time he does what the law prohibits. He might not be blameworthy because the law is so unfair or unjust that the normal moral obligation to obey the law was lapsed".⁹ The question that arises for some readers is whether L is performing as an ethical, indeed, a responsible, nay – a "reasonable" person in the common law tradition of behavioural standards. It is our contention that it suits the purposes of the novel to lay L's conduct before the popular jury of implied readers to pronounce judgment in justice, bearing in mind the symbiosis between L's character and the virtue of Love that she represents.

In direct contrast to these moral positions on natural law is that of positive law which condemns many an action on the basis of common human values such as the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – or property. It will be up to the reader to determine whether the mores of the community – the Latin root for morality – have been served by Morrison's characters in the multiple instances of their transgressing the statutes. When the letter of the law or its application is unjust, what are the options for those outside the seats of power, for those who consider themselves the eternal victims of that power? If "popular justice ... does what the state cannot" (134); if it offers solution/resolution "outside the system," then at least in fiction it can provide satisfying redress for perceived wrongs.

Narrative Voices

As for Christine and Heed, if central to the novel's structure, they serve primarily to concentrate our attention on the underlying tension which this slim volume resolves and which is reported in two distinct voices. Everything revolves around a Hegelian dialectic between the two kinds of love, one leading to chaos, the other to order. Similarly, the double narration forms a dialectic: one relating the

theories posited by the characters with their limited information, the other proving them legitimate or otherwise, thanks to arcane knowledge; one impassively relating the incidents of the novel's present context from the outside, the other supplying the background information—history, motivations, first-hand witness, character depiction, and her own role in the operation, the inside story. One voice is disembodied, non-judgmental, formal, educated, recording events. The other voice is emblematic, intimate, oral, proletarian, and confessional. Common-sense philosophy and folk wisdom with a dash of the Biblical make that second narrative voice—L's voice—unique. Fewer than 30 out of the 202 pages of the novel are narrated through L's consciousness, but they compose an indispensable complement to the main narration of events in which others record L's legacy. Together, these mirrors reflecting her image and her direct confession make L the hub of interest.

In the five segments where L's presence presides, as she describes the attributes of love, she assumes each of these in the passages wherein she depicts her own character. Not surprisingly, the various thematic and structural patterns of the book all uphold the thesis of the ultimate victory of true love over mere infatuation, as L labels it (p. 63). I shall now turn to examining these methods of organization and showing how a form of order systematically triumphs over chaos, or how the rule of love ultimately conquers assaults on its hegemony, even if strict legality is not always respected.

The Novel's Architecture

Morrison's chapter index constructs the story around the deceased patriarch, Bill Cooney, and the different roles he played and continues to play after his death in the lives of those surrounding him, whether family, employees, or local residents. Like book covers, the sections "Portrait" and "Phantom" enclose the essential truths of the man's existence in relation to others, be it as Lover, Friend, Husband, Benefactor, etc. Now as a wise man moved by charitable feelings, now as a fool dominated by baser instincts, Bill Cooney is watched over by L, who often corrects the course of his path, to the point of stopping him from committing a travesty of justice—and love—by killing him in the nick of time. Whereas the *vox populi* held the

enemies May, Christine, and Heed guilty of the crime out of concupiscence, the true perpetrator and motive were totally unsuspected by all. Despite the apparent centrality of Bill Cosey to the plot, without L, the figure of the man would remain incomplete, an enigmatic kaleidoscope of an individual, often a blend of conflicting impressions as voiced by the reflecting figures surrounding him. In L's closing judgment, "You could call him a good bad man, or a bad good man. Depends on what you hold dear—the what or the why. I tend to mix them. He was an ordinary man ripped, like the rest of us, by wrath and love" (p. 200). The two oxymorons avoid the sort of Manichean judgments formed by the secondary figures, idolizing or demonizing the man. Either of these judgments contains matter for error. That L sees the man she misses as much as his mistress Celestial does in this light suggests there may have also been that perfect, if unrequited love, in L's relationship with Bill Cosey. After all, L did not have to "possess" the man as a lover to give precedence to his best interests; she was content to be associated with his success in the resort and her place in his household administration. Was it vicarious romance, like L's humming along with Celestial's graveyard song in the closing words? Or was it simply unselfish, unexclusive caring? To my mind, the most intriguing segments concern the relationship between Bill Cosey and L, especially in the emblematic sense of her name, of the role she played in his life while he played diverse parts with other figures in the tale.

Spatial Structures

Structural oppositions in the novel, such as spatial organization are worth exploring. Open and closed spaces—the beach, the hamlets of Silk, Upbeach, and the Settlement, the house at One Monarch Street, the Cosey Hotel, L's room and Christine's room, the hotel attic—all echo the cosmic conflict. The open space of the beach is occasionally the scene of passionate extra-marital activity. Little do the lovers know, like those swimmers who venture too far out into the ocean, like loose women and disobedient children, that they risk incurring the anger of what L designates as "the Police-heads," black, big-hatted, bearded natural vigilante forces lying in wait in the clouds above that punish the transgression of invisible

boundaries (p. 5). Some defy them, others succumb. At the novel's end, Police-heads are gathering, probably to intercept Junior, the youthful deviant who appears from nowhere, engages in sequences of seduction with the man in the portrait, corrupts the adolescent Romen, and abandons her dying employer, Heed. But "Police-heads" –like the justice they mete out–are not omnipresent nor is their retribution inevitable, which adds to the intrigue of their mysterious appearances and exactions. As for their space, it would appear to be open rather than closed. Open space is appropriate for acts that can be conducted in public; otherwise, it becomes like the "desert" in pre-Romantic literature: a place of great danger, far from the salvation of civilization, exposed to the elements and wild beasts. Closed spaces usually symbolized society and its protection from evil forces.

As for the three communities above, they seem to embody a measure of the degree of order that reigns in each. One of these resembles the open spaces—a wilderness to civilization that constitutes a stronghold of anarchy: "Unlike the tranquillity of its name, the Settlement heaved with loyalty and license, and the only crime was departure" (p. 54-55). It is Satan's own domain and carrying anything away from it to the world outside is patent failure. Chaos rules absolute as all of its elements run out of control: Heed's family, the Johnsons, were a prime example. Outside the boundaries of its shacks, no one pronounces its very name, "the Settlement." In regard to the other two, Silk is privilege and respectability where more successful strivers abide whereas Upbeach was the latter's service quarters until the construction of a black Levittown sprung from HUD money and a tsunami that basically wiped out the old shacks along the shoreline. The inhabitants of Upbeach enjoyed relative order. L lived there, in one of the few remaining shacks standing after the storm.

A similar disparity reigns among the closed spaces. In a feminist work, one might expect them to be protective and reassuring, the psychological replica of the woman's domain. The house at One Monarch Street, however, is total disorder, save for the third floor occupied by Heed, and the kitchen and L's former quarters where Christine has lived for the past twenty years, taking refuge in L's domain, as she had when a child grieving her dead father or hiding out from mother May's paranoia.

Here was sanctuary. As for that now abandoned hotel, it was once an oasis for its black guests from segregation, racism, social mayhem, in a word, injustice:

Cosey's resort was more than a playground; it was a school and a haven where people debated death in the cities, murder in Mississippi, and what they planned to do about it other than grieve and stare at their children. Then the music started, convincing them they could manage it all and last. (p. 35)

Better still, as its owner proclaimed with his motto, the Cosey hotel was "The best good time this side of the law" (p. 33).

Nonetheless, the words have a hollow ring as law and order here function erratically, as amply signalled hereabove. Indeed, several characters maintain a problematic relationship with rules and regulations. Their perception of formal justice's role in their lives was highly sceptical. As Bill Cosey maintained to fishing buddy Sandler, "every law in this country is made to keep us [black people] back" (p. 44). Hence the necessity for some other manner of harmonizing society. If the law is colour-prejudiced, and all species look out for their own survival, then, Morrison implies, separate codes not just of speech but of acts must be expected and tolerated, at least until true equality before the law is a reality in American society for black as well as white.

Temporal Structures

The time organization of the novel ranges over nearly a century, beginning in the chaos and self-love of Dark's betrayal of his fellows to the law for financial consideration and ending with the triumphant rebirth of true love between his great-granddaughter, Christine, and second daughter-in-law, Heed. Each period mirrors the basic plot in that it is characterized by a tension between order and chaos, unselfish and selfish love. First daughter-in-law May tries to avoid the resort's demise after the death of her husband Billy Boy and his father's grief, and stays the course of the business for several years until her father-in-law comes out of his period of mourning. Thereafter, she begins a gradual slide into paranoiac dementia

with the chaotic events that surround the civil rights movement and leaders like Malcolm X. To preserve it, she even buries the deed by the hotel on the beach, creating another legal void. During this period, granddaughter Christine's own slip into a nine-year period of anarchy with lover Fruit, albeit a satisfying love affair, merely confirms her unsuitability for a real commitment. Her later destruction of lover Dr. Rio's Cadillac—as a substitute for his person after he had jilted her—again points up a selfish love relationship and the victory of chaos over order. In short, as the narrator brings to our reader's attention, every man in Christine's life got her in trouble with the law (p. 90), implicitly because her relationships were not based on the right kind of love. Might it be a sarcastic innuendo that for her entire adult life, Christine flashes the twelve diamond engagement rings her grandfather was supposed to have pawned, symbols of a broken truth? Although she theoretically intended to put the rings in Cosey's coffin, she has kept them and in so doing maintained a certain contact and continuity with him. And broken another "contract" by not keeping her word. *In fine*, the rings further underline a state of disorder and problematic justice; they also tie the various periods together.

Genre and the Central Presence

All in all, the brief novel *Love* seems like a Mediaeval exemplum to Toni Morrison's entire opus, a taut morality tale within a larger context that illustrates its moral point with anecdotes and incidents drawn both from established "facts" and community legends.¹⁰ Characteristically, in addition to the "absent," third-person omniscient narrator, like the religious officiator, there is a very present, if spiritual, homodiegetic one. She is the Reasoner, the guiding conscience, who leads the reader through the maze of often-conflicting realities that emerge. Perspective or focalization is THROUGH her eyes, whereas it is ON all the other protagonists in the novel.¹¹ Thus, L opens and closes the opus, setting our initial and final impressions as well as adjusting the moral barometer of the tale. This latter figure hides her true identity and overall behaviour behind the initial L until the final pages, when she sends the reader to the Biblical passage whose subject finally reveals her name. That theme is charity, the most important of the three virtues, a synonym for Love in the

pure sense of love of human kind, the notion of “Christian love.” Behind her often misinterpreted epithet, L sets the example and tries to overcome or circumvent the injustices that self-serving love takes in the form of lust, desire, jealousy, greed, covetousness, pride, etc. She cooks love into her food in much the way the heroine of *Like Water for Chocolate* seasons her cooking with her emotions. She protects the women of the household from one another, restores reason over madness, organizes a funeral, separates fights, extinguishes fires set by arson, etc. Yet occasionally her actions, kept secret during her lifetime, seem in conflict with normal moral and legal order, as we shall see below. Her birth in a storm is emblematic of the chaotic forces that will surround her for her entire life, as she herself recognizes; moreover, she cherishes the tempest, like the swirling matter of Creation itself (64). The main protagonists of one thread of the complicated plot, Heed and Christine, discover pure love for one another before their loss of innocence, and hence temporarily enjoy that “mix of surrender and mutiny they can never live without” (199). In other words, true Love in the purest sense. Alas, the other manifestations of love will tear them apart, isolating each behind the fear of abandonment and loneliness until their last moments together, savouring the lingering smell of L’s baking which permeates the hotel years after L’s demise. (p. 175). In a word, L officiates over the ceremony of life, fulfilling a “priestly” (p. 37) office, as another character, Vida, remarks. It is with the endemic forces of chaos and crimes against love that L must do battle to try and re-establish an order—a fair and just order—crucial to maintaining the stability of her small universe. To return to the opening sentence of this paragraph, in retrospect, love as defined here above—freely given or denied—is at the heart of every Morrison novel from *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Tar Baby* through *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and *Jazz* to *Paradise*. Protagonist after protagonist either triumphs or suffers defeat because of the love felt, perhaps shared, perhaps unrequited, perhaps withheld. Combinations of all three are possible as well, but each heroine has a special relationship with the love of another, of a parent, of a friend, of the community at large. Thus, L overtly presents the key to many of Morrison’s creations.

Some critics might argue that L’s illegal actions betray her as an “unreliable narrator,” in Wayne Booth’s terms (p. 158-159). Given how iconoclastic a figure L

cuts, like the idiot Benjy in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, her deviance from the norm could be a sign of mental derangement, of delusions of grandeur or schizophrenia. Nonetheless, in the overall plan of the novel, indeed, in Morrison's literary opus as a whole, that conclusion is highly unlikely to fit in with her intentions. Sethe is not portrayed as a mad woman in the narration of *Beloved*, for example: the ghost that returns is seen by other characters as well, although executing her child was an act of desperation. Moreover, a certain amount of magic realism—like Pilate's absent navel in *Song of Solomon*—also demands the reader's full credence and complicity. No, L is not a deranged woman whose account of events should be considered suspect.

L as in Love – or in Legal

To reiterate, L's role in establishing order is the core of the novel linking the various intrigues with a single dominant theme. Although certain actions of L's were definitely against the law, her part in seeing that an unorthodox will "doodled" on an old greasy hotel menu as altruistic motives: L was defending justice as she saw it. This document is legally problematic: although written by hand, it is apparently unsigned and bears no witnesses' signatures. Morrison is a bit vague about the particulars. Perhaps the paper even lacks the proper expression of intent, all three conditions of a valid last will and testament.¹² Moreover, it only resurfaces three years after protagonist and legator Bill Cosey's death, even if three former drinking buddies belatedly recall the event. Its cryptic wording, bequeathing the bulk of the estate to "that sweet Cosey child," (p. 88) leaves the probate court with a difficult interpretation and identification. An unrecognized bastard? Heed, his child bride had always called him Papa. Granddaughter Christine's having vanished prods the probate court to temporarily award house, fortune, and case to the wife. Whence Christine's belated return to the town of Silk in "a noble battle for justice—her lawful share of the Cosey estate" (86). Thus is set in motion the bitter opposition of one strand of the plot: widow versus granddaughter struggle for the absolute control and disposition of a once handsome inheritance. The legal challenge Christine's feminist lawyer promises must be on the basis of the form and the circumstances surrounding

the drafting of the unusual document acknowledged by the court to be authentic. Was Bill Cosey's mental state so altered by drink that he did not have the prerequisite capacity to express serious intentions? Moreover, lacking the conditions cited above, a will "might be disallowed by a court and ... [the] estate might be distributed in accord with state law instead" (ABA website). In which event, Christine as granddaughter and Heed as widow of the legator would doubtlessly split the assets, in different proportions according to the different state codes. Morrison does not speculate on this eventuality: for artistic needs, the piece of paper embodies the priorities of Bill Cosey at one moment of his life and sets the stage for the decades long battle between his putative heirs. Or might that just have been precisely his intention as revenge for their making his own life unbearable? In the final pages, L's ghost as narrator reveals the existence of a second will which she has witnessed, one more recent, notarised and formally drawn up, which left everything to Cosey's "sporting woman," Celestial. However, L admits having destroyed it to avoid the injustice of throwing mad daughter-in-law May and uneducated wife Heed into the street, thereby assuring a certain continuity and guaranteeing the stability of the status quo—and to safeguard the continued operation of Bill Cosey's life achievement, the Cosey Resort. Despite its proper legal form, however, this new version might not have been strictly enforceable either. According to the American Bar Association, although one can disinherit one's children—except in Louisiana under the Napoleonic code—one usually cannot disinherit one's spouse and "A surviving husband or wife may have the right to a fixed share of the estate regardless of the will".¹³ Texas law on community property, for example, would include "Dividends and interest earned on either spouse's *separate* property during the marriage".¹⁴ Consequently, even if Heed and her family were penniless when she entered wedlock, she acquired wealth from her husband that could not be taken from her by another legatee. L's destroying the second will and substituting the folkloric version must be read as a charitable act, as common sense prevailing over wrathful folly. For mainline society, nonetheless, L, were she still living, would be guilty of "laches" or culpable negligence by delaying the assertion of a right in law even if for the sake of preventing an injustice in equity. But as we have already indicated, L

herself fashions the template of proper behaviour, of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Her higher authority seems to repose on her name drawn from the Bible. If she acknowledges the legendary Police-heads who are reputed to castigate those who step out of line, the latter do not legislate nor pontificate. Neither does L appear to fear any retaliation from their quarter for her own moral decisions.

Silent Complicities

Suppressing the notarized will is but one example of a post-mortem confession by L. Others include her turning a blind eye to Cosey's extramarital affairs and her committing murder by poisoning him, seemingly the ultimate betrayal at the hands of one's cook. In a recent work on the confession in justice and culture, Peter Brooks describes various qualities of the paradigm such as "shame, guilt, self-exposure, self-punishment" but leaves out self-justification, self-aggrandizement, or more in sympathy with the character, lesson-giving and revelation of "mysteries" (p. 69). L's having already passed into the hereafter negates any possible prosecution against her and accentuates her firm belief in the essential correctness of the path she chose out of love for her "neighbors," indeed for Bill Cosey himself and the legacy he would leave behind him. While most people may fear retribution for their deviant acts, whether freely chosen or accidental, L is virtually clear in her conscience. Like love itself. L's own relationship with Bill Cosey is implicit rather than explicit, one free of jealousy and rich in generosity towards other love objects in his life. Again, the reader's role as juror in this fiction implicitly requires delivering a verdict. L's perception of "the good of the people" which informs her acts – Cicero's *Salus populi suprema est lex*¹⁵--begs that we readers affirm the soundness of her judgment and behavior.

Conclusion

To end this discussion, let us return to the book's "cover" or opening and closing chapters, "Portrait" and "Phantom." Despite the apparent centrality of Bill Cosey to the novel, it is here that the pristine love between Christine and Heed is born and rekindled. Notice that Junior's perception of Cosey's omnipresence ceases

in “Phantom”, yielding to the scent of L’s baking, indicative of a change in influential presence. The once orderly attic where the climax takes place is a scene of devastation: the havoc wreaked by the teenage lovers Junior and Romen in their rampaging carnal jousts has set a scene of primordial chaos. In this jumbled atmosphere, the aged Heed and Christine face off in an ultimate confrontation. Only by breaking out of the hold of chaotic forces can their grip on the two women be loosened. Thus, chaos necessitates Heed’s fall—in the night, as her own Biblical name might predict—through the attic’s trap door into the sanctity and order of Christine’s old bedroom, the scene of their lost friendship, where their former emotions can once again come to the fore and allow order and love to triumph over chaos and selfishness, and ultimately to truly just resolution.

In the final analysis, our individual reader response to the novel depends on whether we accept that the end can justify the means; that there is a “natural” morality that supersedes all existing codes, from Exodus and Deuteronomy to regional and national Congresses; that Love is the strongest power on earth and through its unselfish offices justice reigns supreme. Just where in the scheme of positive and natural law, justice and injustice, we weak creatures and our strong mentors fall is a question for discreet appreciation.

Works Cited

American Bar Association. Public Education Website.

http://www.abanet.org/publiced/practical/will_disinherit.html, November 16, 2004 and http://www.abanet.org/publiced/practical/will_validate.html, 6 December 2004.

Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: of Chicago Press, 1961.

Brooks, Peter. “The Future of Confession”. In *Law, Culture and the Humanities*. Volume I, Issue 1, 2005, 53-74.

Chase, Anthony. “Popular Culture / Popular Justice”. In *Legal Reelism*. Ed. John Denvir, University of Illinois Press, 1996.

Dworkin, Ronald. *Taking Rights Seriously*. London: Duckworth, 1977.

- Holman, C. Hugh. *A Handbook to Literature*. Third Edition. New York: Odyssee, 1960.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. by Jacques-Allain Miller. Trans. by Dennis Porter. New York: Norton, 1992.
- Morrison, Toni. *Love*. 2003. New York: Vintage, 2004.
- Pantazakos, Michael. "The *Nomos* Beyond the *Ate*: Lacan on "Antigone" in Seminar VII". *Cycnos*, vol. 19, N° 2, 2002, 65-73.
- Prince, Gerald. *Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln & London: Nebraska UP, 1987.
- Reis, Dianne. <http://willsandprobate.com/FAQ/CP-SP.htm>, 6 December 2004.

Notes

-
- ¹ See Mark Tushnet, "Class Action: One View of Gender and Law in Popular Culture". In Denvir, John, ed. *Legal Reelism: Movies as Legal Texts*. University of Illinois Press, 1966, p. 244.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- ³ As quoted by Robert A. Ferguson in *The Trial in American Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 17.
- ⁴ Rosenberg, Norman. "Law Noir". In Denvir, *op. cit.*, p. 282.
- ⁵ See Grant, Judith. "Morality and Liberal Legal Culture". In Denvir, *op. cit.*, p. 167-168.
- ⁶ Thompson, E.P. "The Rule of Law". In *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*. New York: Random House, 1975, 258-269, as paraphrased by Ferguson.
- ⁷ Anthony Chase, "Popular Culture/Popular Justice". In Denvir, *op. cit.*, 149-150.
- ⁸ *Taking Rights Seriously*. London: Duckworth, 1977, p. 81.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ¹⁰ See Holman, p. 212.
- ¹¹ Genette and Bal, in Prince, p. 31-32.
- ¹² See the website of the American Bar Association.
- ¹³ Above site consulted in December 2004.
- ¹⁴ See Diane Reis' website.
- ¹⁵ *De Legibus*, III, iii, 8.