

“QUIET AS IT’S KEPT”: SECRECY AND SILENCE IN TONI MORRISON’S

THE BLUEST EYE, JAZZ, AND PARADISE

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ABSTRACT
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“QUIET AS IT’S KEPT”: SECRECY AND SILENCE IN TONI MORRISON’S
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Secrets and silence appear frequently in the work of Toni Morrison. In three novels, *The Bluest Eye*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*, she repeats a specific phrase that acts as a signal to the reader. Morrison three times writes, “Quiet as it’s kept” in her novels to alert readers to the particular significance secrets and silence play in these novels. Morrison portrays this secrecy and silence as a barrier to building strong communities and even a strong self-identity. While the phrase appears in the same form, with each subsequent appearance, Morrison takes the idea a step further. In each novel she demonstrates how breaking the silence and refusing to keep quiet is an act of healing or salvation and she expands this healing to be increasingly inclusive. What begins as a single voice breaking the silence in *The Bluest Eye* becomes a group of people sharing their secrets in *Jazz*, and finally an entire town coming to terms with the power of speaking up. This thesis looks at the secrets and their impact on characters in each novel and explores the progression of the power in refusing to keep quiet.

Karen R. Johnson, Ph.D., Chair

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