

“Hatred”

“Knowing that she would hate him long and well filled her with pleasant anticipation . . . she could get on with it, and have the safety, the thrill, the consistency of that hatred as long as she wanted or needed it to define and strengthen her or protect her from routine vulnerabilities.” Quoting *Sula* (153)

This inherent , reflexive inseparability of myself and my community—of the individual and society—remains, even today, a fundamental premise of my theology. God created me among us, me inseparable from us, me for us, and them for me. The necessity of collaboration and collegiality on the American frontier, ingrained in me, did not waver as I went out into the world . . . (154)

Timothy McVeigh. For the first time in my life, I wanted a God who threw people into the dungeon of eternal damnation and slammed shut the door. Screw grace. I wanted blood. (157)

We were reading Jonathan Edwards’s famous “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” and as always, my students viscerally hated his image of a harsh, judging God who so viciously meted out punishment on people who failed to follow the path of virtue. (157). [Edwards delivered this famous sermon in 1741; if interested, you can read the entire sermon—magnificent images of hell and damnation—by looking up the full text, or you can read a Wikipedia article about it.](#)

. . . I hear McVeigh’s name or see that immature, angular face and in a flash of recognition, something deep inside me catches—a pull, a little cringe at the base of my skull, a tightening of my shoulders. For the very briefest of seconds, the world tilts slightly of out kilter, my mind goes blank, and I feel an anger, a trembling rage that I know is pure, burning lust for revenge. And I don’t resist it. It’s called hatred, the least divine impulse there is. (167)

The inevitable family blow-up happened when my dad finally asked Kindy if she’d taken the boys to church. He knew their pastor well and wondered how he’d preached about it. Was it good theology? (169)

I left with a soul as arid as the Oklahoma plain. It had been one of the more sisterly times of my life, for sure, drinking together late into the night, caring for Kindy’s children, raging at every bad person we’d ever met. It had also been one of the least spiritual periods of my life—I hadn’t set foot in church, had no craving for prayer, no longing for divine consolation or even consideration. (170)

Later that same afternoon, Verity had joined in the push. . . . She had preached about it and survived, she said. Why couldn't I? It was my Christian duty, wasn't it? A divine calling? A heralding from on high? . . . Because like her, I was a guild-ridden, mission-driven Jones girl with a long line of grace-filled Okie sinners standing behind me, constantly uncertain whether to cheer or growl. (171-172)

Cursing at myself seemed to work. That and the fact that I'd just found Mokhtar—whom I hadn't seen since the day in the parking lot--sitting on the front row, a place he never assumed in class. And he was, believe it or not, taking notes. (174)

This God is big, so vast that the far reaches of the universe or of our minds fail to mark her edges. In her there is no edge, no moral judgment, no outreaches or inner sanctum, no measure of goodness or sorrow or ultimate meaning. She is, in one word, contradiction. (175)

. . . I would realize the fine line between the two, atheism and divine vision, nothingness and the holy. (176)