

Morrison, Toni (1931-) Encyclopedia Article

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Morrison, Toni (1931—)

Born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931, Toni Morrison is one of the most important authors of contemporary American literature. In the late 1970s through the 1980s and 1990s, she, along with acclaimed authors such as Alice Walker and Ntozake Shange, helped revise the white, male-dominated literary canon. Their works placed on all of the major best-seller lists and were increasingly taught on college campuses across the nation. Known primarily for her novels—*The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1974), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1998)—Morrison is also a prolific author in the area of nonfiction, writing literary criticism, such as the well-received *Playing in the Dark Whiteness* and the *Literary Imagination* (1992); she is also the editor of the anthology, *Race-ing Justice: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Others on the Constructing of Social Reality* (1992). Though all of these works vary in terms of subject, place, and time and, in the case of the fiction, characters and story, they are all complex and compelling works that concern sexism, racism, and class in the United States.

In 1988 Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for her fifth novel, *Beloved*, a historical novel on the enslavement of Africans and African Americans, which was adapted to a feature film in 1998. In 1993 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the second American to do so and the first African American. Other honors include the National Book Critics Circle Award (1977), the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award (1977), and the Robert F. Kennedy Award (1988).

Further Reading:

Butler-Evans, Elliott. *Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1991.

McKay, Nellie Y. *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*. Boston, G. K. Hall, 1988.

Page, Philip. *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*. Oxford, University of Mississippi Press, 1996.

Peterson, Nancy J., editor. *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.