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# TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*, POST-COLONIAL WRITING AND THE DISCOURSE OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS

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**What do black writers want to say when they tell stories about black people, about their history? What was Toni Morrison doing when she wrote *Beloved*? Is this a postcolonial writing of self? Is it the voice of a black feminist writing herself and her people a new past?**

Toni Morrison said:
"... black women ... seem to be the only people writing who do not regard white men and women—the white world—as the central stage in the text. ... black men are interested in white men because that's the area in which they make the confrontation. Those are the people who have denounced them, repressed them, and those are the white men who have in large part told them that they are lesser. Black men are serious about this confrontation. Black women don't seem to be interested in this confrontation. ... It's as though black women writers said, 'Nobody's gonna tell our story.' Nobody but us."

*Cecil Brown, "Interview with Toni Morrison,"* ***Massachusetts Review****, Fall 1995, pages 455–6.*

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If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred

> back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this "within," to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.
>
> *Hélene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in "Utopias," **New French Feminisms**, page 257.*

Morrison is aware of the limitations of language to convey the experiences suffered by Sethe and the others. Sethe says:

(she) knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they could get it right off—she could never explain." (161)

Sethe's difficulty reflects the experience of women writers who struggle with the inadequacies of male-centred language to convey female experience. When presented with the newspaper report of her trial, Sethe instinctively knows:

"that the words she did not understand, hadn't any more power than she had to explain." (161)

*General Notes on Toni Morrison's **Beloved** page 16. Adrian Fox. Online.*

> "... the squealing of the swine, it seemed to Kunta, was no uglier than the language of the toubob who so closely resembled them. He would have given anything to hear even a sentence of Mandinka, or any other African tongue."
>
> *Alex Haley, **Roots** pages 208, 209*

**If your discourse has been colonised, repressed or taken from you, how do you re-create it?**

Fanon (a psychiatrist from Martinique) argued that the first step for colonialised people in finding a vice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. For centuries the European colonising power will have devalued the nation's past, seeing its precolonial era as a pre-civilised limbo, or even as a historical void. Children, both black and white, will have been taught to see history, culture and progress as beginning with the arrival of the Europeans. If the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one's own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued.

*Peter Barry, "Postcolonial Criticism," page 192*

Some post-colonial writers have concluded that the colonisers' language is permanently tainted, and that to write in it involves a crucial acquiescence in colonial structures. Language itself, then, is a second area of concern in postcolonial criticism.

*Peter Barry, "Postcolonial Criticism," page 194*

Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is "essentially" post-colonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field.

*Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin (eds)* ***The Post-Colonial Studies Reader****, (Routledge, London & New York, 1995) page 2.*

**If you are in a place where the dominant language is not your own, how do you open a space in the hegemonic discourse for your own voice?**

It is not possible simply to assume that a work written by an "Other" (however defined), even a politicised Other, will have freed itself from the dominant ideology. ... Radical writing, by definition, is writing that is struggling ... to rewrite the dominant ideology from within, to produce a different version of reality.

*Margery Fee, "Who Can Write As Other?" in Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, pages 244–5.*

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**... Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew.**

*Toni Morrison,* ***Beloved****, page 163.*

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The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonised place.... Appropriation is the proces by which the language is taken and made to "bear the burden of one's own cultural experience, or, as Raja Rao puts it, to "convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own."

*Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin,* ***The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures****. page 38.*

Morrison and her characters tell the story as *griots*, or oral historians, in whom the African ancestral experience is stored, and who can see and sing the past, present and future. This is achieved through an interplay of voices and a narrative structure which disrupts chronology, meandering and circling and repeating.

*Cecil Brown, "Interview with Toni Morrison,"* ***Massachusetts Review,*** *Fall 1995.*

Toni Morrison said: "Black people have a story and that story has to be heard. There was an articulate literature before there was a print. There were griots. They memorised it. People heard it. It is important that there is sound in my books—that you can hear it, that I can hear it."

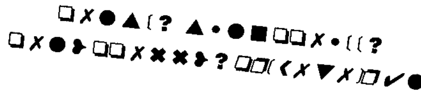
*Cecil Brown, "Interview with Toni Morrison."*

> **With a sledge hammer in his hands and Hi Man's lead, the men got through. They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves or seen others tame. They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life. They sang lovingly of graveyards and sisters long gone. Of pork in the woods; meal in the pan; fish on the line; cane, rain and rocking chairs.**
>
> ***Beloved, page 108.***

**There are links between Morrison's post-colonial reclaiming of self, of history, of place, and Aboriginal Australians rewriting themselves a new discourse in opposition to the hegemonic discourse of white Australia.**

**What are black writers telling?**

**All that's been lost.**



**The names, the families, the children, the places, the ancestors, the future. The selves. The community.**

**Naming signifies power.**

One of the most subtle demonstrations of the power of language is the means by which it provides, through the function of naming, a technique for knowing a colonised place or people. To name the world is to "understand" it, to know it and have control over it.... To name reality is to exert power over it.

*Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, page 283*

> **"Mr Garner," she said, "why you all call me Jenny?"**
>
> **"Cause that what's on your sales ticket, gal. Ain't that your name? What you call yourself?"**
>
> **"Nothing," she said. "I don't call myself nothing."**
>
> **Mr Garner went red with laughter. "When I took you out of Carolina, Whitlow called you Jenny and Jenny Whitlow is what his bill said. Didn't he call you Jenny?"**
>
> **"No, sir. If he did I didn't hear it."**
>
> **"What did you answer to?"**
>
> **"Anything, but Suggs is what my husband name."**

"You got married, Jenny? I didn't know it."

"Manner of speaking."

"You know where he is, this husband?"

"No, sir."

"Is that Halle's daddy?"

"No, sir."

"Why you call him Suggs, then? His bill of sale says Whitlow too, just like yours."

"Suggs is my name, sir. From my husband. He didn't call me Jenny."

"What he call you?"

"Baby."

"Well," said Mr Garner, going pink again, "if I was you I'd stick to Jenny Whitlow. Mrs Baby Suggs ain't no name for a freed Negro."

Maybe not, she thought, but Baby Suggs was all she had left of the "husband" she claimed. A serious, melancholy man who taught her how to make shoes. The two of them made a pact: whichever one got a chance to run would take it; together if possible, alone if not, and no looking back. He got his chance, and since she never heard otherwise she believed he made it. Now how could he find or hear tell of her if she was calling herself some bill-of-sale name?

***Beloved**, page 142.*

## and in Australia

MRS MCPHEE: I see they have a smattering of English.
MULLER: Yah.
MRS MCPHEE: That makes things easier.

*She opens the ledger.*

What do you call yourself, dear woman?

MAYDINA *says nothing*

[*Slowly*] What is your name?

MAYDINA: Maydina.
MRS MCPHEE: ... "Maydina" ... We'll find you a good Christian one.
BLIGH: We shall indeed.

MAYDINA: [*worried*] I Maydina. That's my name ...
MRS MCPHEE: [*ignoring the protest*] And the child's?
MAYDINA *decides not to answer.* BIRI *vanishes behind her, suddenly frightened by all the attention.*
MULLER: That's little Biri.
MRS MCPHEE stares at BIRI and smiles.
MRS MCPHEE: We'll call her "Emily."

*from* ***Women of the Sun****, Sonia Borg and Hyllus Maris, Currency Press, from Currency plays series.*

Welou is the son of a slave, one of thousands kidnapped from their island villages to work on the sugar plantations of Queensland.

Welou or Warwick? The boy has two names, one from the Pacific Island of Ambrym, in what is now Vanuatu, where his father grew up, the other from his Australian baptism. Two names and two cultures: his mother and her warm-hearted Irish neighbours offer Warwick the sturdy traditions of Australia's white settlers, but campfire tales of village freedom and canefield bondage implant in Welou his father's Island values.

*from* ***Welou, My Brother****, Faith Bandler, page 9.*

**The renaming is reclaiming. Postcolonial reclaiming.**

"Telling you, I am telling you, small girl Sethe," and she did that. She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew, "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Telling you, I am telling you, small girl Sethe."

***Beloved****, page 62.*

Kunta raised the baby upwards, turning the blanketed bundle in his hands so that the baby's right ear touched against his lips. And then slowly but distinctly in Mandinka, he whispered three times into the tiny ear, "Your name is Kizzy. Your name is Kizzy. Your name is Kizzy." It was done, as it had been done with all the Kinte ancestors, as it had been done with himself, as it would have been done with this infant had she been born in her ancestral homeland. She had become the first person to know who she was.

*Alex Haley, **Roots**, page 320.*

Sojourner Truth renounced her name of Isabella and said that henceforward she would be known as Sojourner Truth. "Sojourner," she explained, "because I am a wanderer, Truth because God is Truth, so Truth shall be my abiding name until I die."

***Sojourner Truth**, 1994, D.P. Ellens, (online).*

In contemporary Australia, Aboriginal politics have evolved in many ways around the crucial symbolic act of naming, and in the bicentennial year of 1988, Kath Walker made the very determined move of changing her name to Oodgeroo Noonuccal as both a rejection of Europeanisation and an assertion of cultural selfhood. Her new name identified her with paperbark, her functional dreaming as chronicler of her people's stories.

*Eva Rask Knudsen, in **Oodgeroo, a Tribute**, ed. Adam Shoemaker, UQP 1994, page 105.*

Oodgeroo recalls a pastor saying: "Kathy, you must be a tribal sister to the paperbark trees because you write so good. You couldn't do what you do without their help. Your real name must be Oodgeroo, which is our name for the paperbark trees."

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**With the character Beloved, Morrison foregrounds the mass of black people who have died unnamed and forgotten, and brings them back to the centre of the discourse.**

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away.

***Beloved**, page 274.*

**I am standing in the rain falling the others are taken I am not taken I am falling like the rain is I watch him eat inside I am crouching to keep from falling with the rain I am going to be in pieces he hurts where I sleep He puts his finger there I drop the food and break into pieces she took my face away there is no one to want me to say me my name I wait on the bridge because she is under it there is night and there is day**

***Beloved**, page 212.*

**One way the coloniser establishes and maintains power is through familial disruption.**

The chief function of the disciplinary power is to "train," rather than to select and to levy; or, no doubt, to train in order to levy and select all the more. It does not link forces together in order to reduce them; it seeks to bind them together in such a way as to multiply and use them. Instead of bending all its subjects into a single, uniform mass, it separates, analyzes, differentiates, carries its procedures of

decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units. It "trains" the moving, confused, useless multitudes of bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements—small, separate cells; organic autonomies; genetic identities and continuities; combinatory segments. Discipline "makes" individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise.

*Michel Foucault on power from "The Means of Correct Training" (from* ***Discipline and Punish****) in* ***The Foucault Reader****, ed. Paul Rabinow,*

*and from* ***Beloved.***

It made sense for a lot of reasons because in all of Baby's life, as well as Sethe's own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children.

***Beloved****, page 23.*

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**He had already seen his brother wave goodbye from the back of a dray, fried chicken in his pocket, tears in his eyes. Mother. Father. Didn't remember the one. Never saw the other. He was the youngest of three half-brothers (same mother—different fathers) sold to Garner and kept there, forbidden to leave the farm, for twenty years. Once, in Maryland, he met four families of slaves who had all been together for a hundred years: great-grands, grands, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, children. Half white, part white, all black, mixed with Indian. He watched them with awe and envy, and each time he discovered large families of black people he made them identify over and over who each was, what relation, who, in fact, belonged to who.**

"That there's my auntie. This here's her boy. Yonder is my pap's cousin. My ma'am was married twice—this my half-sister and these her two children. Now, my wife ..."

***Beloved**, page 219.*

## and in Australia

All members of the camp stood in some relation to the child. They were his kin. This was the Koori concept of the extended family and it is not surprising that extended families are still important in contemporary Koori society. Everyone had a well-established network of identities and obligations that would last through life. Kinship welded Koori society together.

*James Miller, **Koori: A Will to Win**, page 2.*

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**But for several generations, Australian governments systematically broke up Aboriginal families. From the time the practice began, not long after the turn of the century, until it ended less than 30 years ago, an estimated 100,000 children were taken, many of them never to know their parents again, many to be brought up in indifferent institutions.**

**The full extent of the dislocation that resulted is probably unquantifiable, partly because the consequences were both emotional and material, and partly because record-keeping was so**

**incomplete as to disguise much of the problem.**

*Mike Seccombe, "When the past stays with us," (in "Agenda"),* ***Sydney Morning Herald,*** *10 October, 1996, page 9.*

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*They round them all up—like cattle, mumma say, under the Dog Act—and they put chains on dadda and uncles and make mumma and all the kids march behind to the beach and then they put them in a boat and won't tell nothin.*
*Where we goin? mumma keep asking. Where you taking us?*
*You shut up, Mary, they keep telling her. Mumma's name not Mary. It Lou. He know that.* (2)

*Thea Astley,* ***The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow***

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I was born in Bordertown, South Australia. I don't remember much, but what I do remember I've always wanted to keep. There's lots of bad things too which we tend to block out. I must have been about four or five and I remember the night we had to leave. Our grandparents woke us up and told us we had to go, we had to leave very quickly to get away. We didn't understand what we had to go away from.... I didn't know at the time but they were taking away the children. Anyone with light skin was taken away and put to work in a home, so they could be taught to work, for what I call, lazy white women. This was in 1937. I still remember it.... it seemed strange to us to have to leave what we had in the place where we were born.... I still use the language although when we were children we weren't allowed to because the white people thought we were inciting the devil, their little minds thought we were doing witchcraft and that sort of thing.... I will go back to my country one day.

*Betty Tournier, "We Will Not Lose," in* ***Australian Short Stories****, ed. Bruce Pascoe, No. 48, 1995, pages 87–8.*

**Another power the coloniser has is to take the strongest natural human imperative then distort, disrupt and destroy it.**

**Sethe speaks:**

> **My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don't remember, I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks—that's the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was.**
>
> ***Beloved, page 60.***

**And Ruby Langford can't speak:**

> A few months after I'd been dating Sam, I was on my way to Dante's dry cleaning shop when I saw my mother further up the street. She was on her own, and loaded up with shopping in string bags. I stopped and watched her. She was a solid-built tall woman, and she had waist-length black hair tied back in a ribbon. Everything matched, she was stylishly dressed. It was the first time I'd had a real chance to look at her. I realised I didn't know anything about her. How old was she? What street did she live in? How did she feel about me, a child she had when she was fifteen? sixteen? and then the other kids. And then how we hadn't seen her for nine years. And here she was on the street, walking towards me. What would I say to her?
>
> "Hullo my girl," she said. She never did call me Ruby, later. It was always "my girl."

"Hullo Mum." I felt wary. I didn't think I could hug her yet.

"I can't stay long." She explained she had to get home with the groceries, cook tea for the kids. Then she took out a piece of paper from her handbag and wrote down her address.

"Will you come and see me? Come over and have dinner. And bring Gwennie."

I stood there outside Dante's shop with her address fluttering in my hand.

*from* ***Don't Take Your Love to Town,*** *Ruby Langford, page 51.*

That before Sethe could make her understand what it meant—what it took to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hands; to hold her face so her head would stay on; to squeeze her so she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through that adored body, plump and sweet with life—Beloved might leave.

***Beloved,*** *page 251.*

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**Both Howard and his Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Herron, have stated there is little to be gained by examining past policy, and that financial resources would be better devoted to improving the health, education, housing and employment opportunities of Aboriginal people.**

**Herron defended the decision by quoting Lady Macbeth: "What's done cannot be undone." He also said—in context, but provocatively,**

**nonetheless—that many Aborigines had benefited by their separation from their family values.**

*Mike Seccombe, "When the past stays with us" (In "Agenda"), **Sydney Morning Herald**, 10 October 1996, page 9.*

I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was *that* wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon—there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to.

***Beloved**, page 162.*

## And what of the places that have been lost?

## More than geography ...

## Place lies in history and culture.

Morrison's concern is to reclaim and find her place within black cultural history. ... an objective which reaches its climax in *Beloved*, where she faces the unspeakable source of her people's oppression: slavery. In blocking out that whole experience, of slavery, some things of value might be lost. So courageously she confronts the diaspora (the dispersion, or migration) of her enslaved ancestors. In doing so, she affirms the positives of black life and culture that enabled them to survive.

*General Notes on Toni Morrison's **Beloved**, page 7.*

**Of that place where she was born (Carolina maybe? or was it Louisiana?) she remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother, who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones—pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field.**

***Beloved**, page 30.*

**And in all those escapes he could not help being astonished by the beauty of this land that was not his. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water and tried not to love it. On nights when the sky was personal, weak with the weight of its own stars, he made himself not love it. Its graveyards and low-lying rivers. Or just a house—solitary under a chinaberry tree; maybe a mule tethered and the light hitting its hide just so. Anything could stir him and he tried hard not to love it.**

*Paul D on the run, **Beloved**, page 268.*

Sally Morgan's story cannot be separated from that of her clan. She turns the European genre of autobiography into a device for collective story-telling.

"My place" becomes synonymous with "our place." At a functional level, liberation and cultural self-discovery are embedded in the very act of writing the book. These aspects of the book combine in a pilgrimage towards unlocking a past that has been stowed away, but could not be repressed. Gradually the unity of memory, place and identity turns into the matrix of Morgan's narrative, almost as if prescribed by the literary practices of the traditional world.

*Eva Rask Knudsen, "Fringe Finds Focus: Developments and Strategies in Aboriginal Writing in English" in **European Perspectives, Essays on Australian Literature**, UQP 1991 pages 42, 43.*

"I was very lucky," he told us, "I came back. I made it my business to come back and find out who I belonged to.

I belong here. It's good to be with my people. I'm glad you've come back"

We were glad, too. And overwhelmed at the thought that we nearly hadn't come. How deprived we would have been if we had been willing to let things stay as they were. We would have survived, but not as whole people. We would never have known our place.

*from **My Place**, Sally Morgan*

Place and displacement are crucial features of post-colonial discourse. By "Place" we do not simply mean "landscape." Indeed the idea of "landscape" is predicated upon a particular philosophical tradition in which the objective world is separated from the viewing subject. Rather "place" in post-colonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment. It is characterised firstly by a sense of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies, or the more widespread sense of displacement from the imported language, of a gap between the "experienced" environment and descriptions the language provides, and secondly, by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place.

*Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, page 392*

**Morrison problematises the tasks of finding and writing her people a place in white American history.**

Ironically, the presence of African slaves in the South seemed to exacerbate the whole issue. Slaves used as laborers for military fortifications, and as agricultural workers, and in some cases

industrial ones, made a major contribution to the Confederate war economy. But they were arguably as great a drain on it as a support to it, and the whole Southern labor system broke down under the war itself. Slaves ran away, they followed the Union armies as they invaded the South, they worked slowly and unwillingly while their owners were away fighting. There were of course the loyal house servants who identified with their rulers, the stuff of subsequent romantic legend of the Old South, but the existence of that hostile servile class presented Confederates with virtually insurmountable dilemmas.

*from* ***A Short History of the Civil War****, James L Stokesbury*

> **Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim. The three (now four—because she'd had the one coming when she cut) pickaninnies they had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky, take back and raise properly to do the work Sweet Home desperately needed, were not. Two were lying open-eyed in sawdust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one—the woman schoolteacher bragged about, the one he said made fine ink, damn good soup, pressed his collars the way he liked besides having at least ten breeding years left. But now she'd gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her and made her cut and run. Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think—just think—what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education.**
>
> ***Beloved****, page 149.*

The problem of history becomes particularly crucial for the post-colonial writer. For not only are questions of truth and fiction, or narrativity and indeterminacy, time and space, of pressing importance—because the material ground, the political dimension of colonial life impresses itself so urgently—but the historical narrativity is that which structures the forms of reality itself. In other words, the myth of historical objectivity is embedded in a particular view of sequential narrative, and its capacity to reflect, isomorphically, the pattern of events it records. The post-colonial task, therefore, is not only to contest

the message of history, which has so often relegated individual post-colonial societies to footnotes to the march of progress, but also to engage the medium of narrativity itself, to reinscribe the "rhetoric," the heterogeneity of historical representation.

... In post-colonial societies the term "literary" may well operate in its traditional canonical way, but more often it has come to operate as a mode by which the objectivity of narrative is contested, and particularly the narrative of history.

*Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, pages 356, 357.*

The novel is based on real events. Although the occurrences, past and present, at 124 Bluestone Road, where Sethe seeks sanctuary with her freed mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, are fictional, they have a basis in real life.

Events are based on the trial in Cincinnati of Margaret Garner, who with her husband and seventeen other Kentuckian slaves crossed the Ohio and lodged in a supposedly safe house. Finding themselves surrounded by pursuers, with her husband overpowered, Margaret Garner acted:

At this moment, Margaret Garner, seeing that their hopes of freedom were in vain, seized a butcher's knife that lay on a table and with one stroke cut the throat of her little daughter... she then attempted to take the life of the other children and to kill herself, but she was overpowered and hampered before she could complete her desperate work. (Newspaper report)

Garner was arrested and put on trial for theft on the grounds that the child she had killed was the legal property of her owner.

Newspaper reports claimed that Garner would have killed her 4 and 6 year old sons and other baby girl rather than see them taken back into slavery.

*General Notes on Toni Morrison's **Beloved** page 10.*

Southern intellectuals and scientists in the 1840s and 1850s toiled to produce evidence for black inferiority.

Scientists variously asserted that the blacks belonged either to a different animal species from Europeans, or to a distinctly lesser sub-species; this issue was a matter for heated scientific controversy.

*The Origins of America's Civil War*, *Bruce Collins*

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**He was talking to his pupils and I heard him say, "Which one are you doing?" And one of the boys said, "Sethe." That's when I stopped because I heard my name, and then I took a few steps to where I could see what they was doing. Schoolteacher was standing over one of them with one hand behind his back. He licked a forefinger a couple of times and turned a few pages. Slow. I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him say, "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up."**

***Beloved***, *page 193.*

Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity-driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of

minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek—it must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind.

*Toni Morrison, **The Nobel Lecture in Literature, 1993** Chatto & Windus, London 1994.*

## The black feminist voice is writing the fragmented self.

I too became lost in the net and the boundaries of myself stretched out for ever. In the beginning I had known at some level that this could happen. It had frightened me then. I had seen it as a chaotic principle and I fought it tooth and nail. I had given myself the structures of habit and routine with which to fortify myself and these were very necessary at the time. Because if you are fragmented and uncertain it is terrifying to find the boundaries of yourself melt.

***Tracks**, Robyn Davidson, pages 190, 191.*

She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure.

She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it.

"Here," she said, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They

don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*! More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize."

***Beloved**, page 88.*

**There are too many things to feel about this woman. His head hurts. Suddenly he remembers Sixo trying to describe what he felt about the Thirty-Mile Woman. "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind."**

***Beloved**, pages 272, 273.*

## The finding of the self is only made possible by the support of the black community.

In Morrison's fiction, the black community attempts to compensate for the divisions fracturing American society by carrying out various functions aimed at achieving survival and cohesion. But such activities as nurturing, storytelling, and singing represent more than practical efforts to heal psychic fractures and create a united community. When they are collectively performed at public gatherings such as marriages or mourning ceremonies, the transition is imperceptible between functions accomplished by individuals and rituals celebrated for the benefit of the collectivity.

*from **A World of Difference: An Intercultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels**, Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin.*

> **They saw Denver sitting on the steps and beyond her, where the yard met the road, they saw the rapt faces of thirty neighborhood women. Some had their eyes closed; others looked at the hot, cloudless sky. Sethe opened the door and reached for Beloved's hand. Together they stood in the doorway. For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash.**
>
> ***Beloved**, page 161.*

The novel functions as the imaginative reconstitution of individual and collective history: Sethe's story, her "rememories" become not only the text of her interior life, but also a newly inscribed re-visioning of the deformed, incomplete, eclipsed narrative of black women's history during slavery and beyond.

Lynda Koolish, "Fictive Strategies and Cinematic Representations in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Postcolonial Theory/Postcolonial Text," in *Afro-American Review*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 1995, page 421.

**The black feminist voice writing self, writing history, is a counter hegemonic discourse for African Americans which resonates in the discourse of Aboriginal Australians.**

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INDEPENDENT MP Ms Pauline Hanson dramatically ditched her hardline stance on Aborigines and Asian Immigration yesterday

and disowned parts of her controversial manifesto, The Truth.

Ms Hanson said she opposed only massive immigration and that was on environmental grounds.

In contrast to her warning last September that Australia was in "danger of being swamped by Asians" who have "their own culture and religion, and form ghettos and do not assimilate," Ms Hanson said in a radio interview yesterday: "Asians have always had a presence in Australia and always will have."

She also claimed she was genuinely concerned about Aborigines and their living conditions, despite saying last year that she was fighting for "anyone apart from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders."

*Christopher Dove, "Hanson retreats on Asians and blacks,"* ***The Weekend Australian****, 31 May, 1997, page 1.*

Mr Howard repeated yesterday that he had no intention of making an official apology, and referred again to the legal advice that "an unqualified apology delivered on behalf of the Government and the people" could open the floodgates to compensation from Aborigines.

"I have an obligation to the Australian taxpayer to avoid using words that could give rise to ... compensation claims," he said on Radio 2UE.

*Tony Wright, "Coalition 'wrong' on apology,"* ***SMH*** *page 2.*

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