TONI MORRISON'S

BELOVED

A Casebook

EDITED BY

WILLIAM L. ANDREWS & NELLIE Y. MCKAY

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

A CASEBOOK

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Introduction

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> There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves; nothing that reminds us of the ones who made the journey and of those who did not make it. There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There's no 300 foot tower. There's no small bench by the road. There is not even a tree scored, an initial that I can visit or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence or, better still, on the banks of the Mississippi. And because such a place does not exist (that I know of), the book had to.
>
> —Toni Morrison,
> "A Bench by the Road"

Beloved, TONI MORRISON'S fifth novel, is "the book [that] had to" exist. The author's eloquent and serious justification befits its *raison d'être*. For Morrison, this publication was a conscious act toward healing a painful wound: a studied memorial to the great social wrong of the enslavement of Africans. Her powerful words, on behalf of millions, give voice to a profound lament: the absence of a historical marker to remind us never to let this atrocity happen again. For its absence has neither erased nor diminished its pain; rather, it reminds us only of itself: of what is missing. "I think I was pleading for that wall or that bench or that tower or that tree when I wrote the final words," Morrison told *The World* (Morrison and Richardson 4). It is also significant though not surprising that Toni Morrison accepted the responsibility for action to rectify the neglect. She often speaks of the role of the black novelist in the world as one to address and explore issues meaningful to the welfare of the whole world community. As if responding in kind to her expression of grief, and accepting her

offering, readers almost unanimously acknowledge the book as a major literary achievement of great purpose. The momentum it generated on its appearance has not abated a decade later. In the attention that they give to it, scholars, general readers, students, and critics alike continue to assess *Beloved* as one of the great books of this century.

By the time Morrison published *Beloved*, she had four previous successful novels to her credit and enjoyed wide national and international fame. By then, for years most readers had considered her one of the most significant contemporary American novelists and literary/cultural critics in this century. This, in spite of the fact that only one of her earlier works, *Song of Solomon* (1977), rivaled *Beloved* in the immediacy of the glowing public response it received. *Beloved* made its way onto the *New York Times* Bestseller List in the week of its official publication date, and within a month, after an initial run of 100,000 copies, it was in its third printing. There is little question at this time that of all her novels, this is the one most often taught and the one most written about across the world. A work recognized for outstanding literary worth, *Beloved* represents a signal achievement in African-American and American letters.

A native of Lorain, Ohio, Nobel laureate Toni Morrison is the daughter of Southerners (from Alabama and Georgia) who migrated to the North in the early part of this century. Born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931, she learned to read (still a devouring passion easily recognized in her own writing) before she entered the first grade. In the close-knit three-generational family in which she grew up, storytelling of all kinds, including ghost stories, animal tales, and yarns of magical happenings were an important facet of her home-life education. An honors student at Lorain High School, there she became acquainted with and developed great admiration for the craft of such writers as Jane Austen, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky. After graduation she went to Howard University, the first woman in her family to attend college. She was a member of the campus theater company and saw the South for the first time while on tour with a student-faculty group. Her family's roots in the region made that trip very important to her. In those years she also changed her first name, because, she said, most people did not pronounce it correctly. She followed up her 1953 B.A. as an English major and classics minor with an M.A. in English from Cornell University in 1955. Her thesis explored the theme of death in the writings of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner.

Morrison held a teaching appointment at Texas Southern University in Houston from 1955 to 1957, then one at Howard from 1957 to 1964. When her 1958 marriage ended in 1964, she joined a writers' group in Washington and

began to pay attention to that aspect of her creativity. Even so, she had no idea of making a career of writing. However, she resigned from Howard and, with her two young sons in tow, took a position in Syracuse, New York, as a textbook editor for a subsidiary of Random House. In Syracuse, she turned feelings of isolation from the loss of more familiar communities to the profitable end of writing much of the narrative that led to her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

In 1968, Morrison left Syracuse for New York City and a position as a trade book editor at Random House. Over time she rose to the rank of senior editor with that publisher, one of only a very few blacks and the only black woman until then to hold such high standing in that profession. Under her editorship, Random House published the work of many up-and-coming new black writers including Toni Cade Bambara, Claude Brown, Leon Forrest, Angela Davis, and Gayle Jones. She used her position to make it possible for a group, until then denied representative access to the mainstream publishing industry, to break through that barrier.

Nor did Morrison neglect her own budding writing career as she promoted those of others. In 1970, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston brought out her first book, *The Bluest Eye*, a success that, though long in coming (the manuscript was rejected many times before it was accepted), was quickly followed by Knopf's publication of *Sula* in 1973. *The Bluest Eye* explores issues of black identity, self-love, and self-hatred in a world in which the violence of race, gender, and class makes it extremely difficult for large numbers of people to find dignity in their lives. At the center of the action, a young black girl believes that what is most beautiful has the power to restore order and balance to the chaos she experiences in her world, but in a futile search for that beauty, the bluest eye, she eventually goes insane. At the time of its publication, most reviewers of this novel were white critics who approached its unsettling plot with caution but heaped praise on Morrison's fine evocative lyrical prose. However, black women critics like Ruby Dee engaged it both for its artistic qualities and for the ways in which the new writer captured the pain of young black female experience against a background of material and psychological conditions that diminished her personhood.

Sula generated more negative and positive critical responses than *The Bluest Eye*. In this story, the focus is on the inversion of conventional systems of thought and values through oppositions between self and other, good and evil, social approbation and community rejection. The novel posits a binary structure centered in the relationship between two black female friends with opposite upbringings and behavior patterns, Sula and

Nel, and follows them from childhood through their adult years. As an alternate selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, *Sula* brought Morrison to larger public attention. As with *The Bluest Eye,* critics unanimously approved her literary skills, but some expressed impatience with her insistence (as they read it) on working on the small canvas of the lives of black girls and women instead of on larger subjects in American life.

Although there is no evidence in the text to indicate it, in 1974 Morrison took on one of the most important projects of her career: editorship of *The Black Book* (published under the names of Harris, Levitt, Furman, and Smith). A collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century black memorabilia woven into a complex documentation of the African-American experience in America, *The Black Book,* as Morrison perceived it, was a corrective to much of the rhetoric of the radical wing of the Civil Rights Movement, which she feared was disrespectful of the lived experiences of many who survived slavery and/or the oppressions that came in its aftermath. Over time she had heard fragments of stories of slave mothers who killed their children, but it was while researching *The Black Book* that she discovered a newspaper item that documented an actual incident. In the 1850s, Margaret Garner, a fugitive slave woman from Kentucky, was tracked to Ohio and caught by proslavery authorities in a small settlement outside of Cincinnati. Resisting the family's return to slavery, Garner killed one of her three children and would have killed all three had she not been stopped. Morrison was struck by the enormity of the mother's deed and filed the information away for almost a decade before acting on it. That news item was the kernel from which *Beloved* emerged in the late 1980s.

Meanwhile, in 1977 Morrison published her third novel, *Song of Solomon,* which immediately brought her into great acclaim. Unlike the two early novels, each set in a small Midwestern black community, *Song of Solomon* is panoramic in its geographical movement from North to South, the prominence of its African heritage, its complex cross-generational conflicts, and its cross-cultural mythological framework. Milkman Dead, the central character, is Morrison's first male hero. However, in spite of its differences from the earlier novels, *Song of Solomon,* much like them, also focuses on identity, fragmentation, alienation, and the merits and demerits of Western values. When Milkman, after many personal trials, finally recognizes and accepts his familial history, he comes to understand himself within a communal structure and claims his complicated collective identity. *Song of Solomon* was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, the first by an African-American since Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940. It also received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977. In 1978 the

American Academy of Arts and Letters named Morrison Distinguished Writer of the Year, and in 1979 President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the National Council on the Arts. At this time, Morrison's fiction began to be compared to that of writers such as Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner.

In 1981, when *Tar Baby* appeared, *Newsweek* featured Morrison on its cover, the first black woman to receive such notice since 1943 when Zora Neale Hurston (the first ever) did. In *Tar Baby,* Morrison further expands her geographical and racial reach by setting her plot in the Caribbean and including white characters who are central to the story. Divided and/or dysfunctional identities, fragmentation, displacement, materialism, and white hegemony are but some of the elements that Morrison explores in her fourth novel. Issues of class and cross-gendered conflicts are also at the core of the separation between the characters, not only in the division between the racial groups but also between Jadine, the beautiful African-American Sorbonne-educated pin-up girl heroine and Son, the uneducated, provincial, uncouth young black man who rejects the social ethic of the upwardly mobile black middle class.

Additional awards and important changes in Morrison's life occurred after the publication of *Tar Baby.* In 1981 she was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Writer's Guild, and the Author's League, and in 1984 she decided to leave publishing for the Albert Schweitzer Professorship of the Humanities at the State University of New York at Albany. In 1986, her play, *Dreaming Emmett,* commissioned by the New York State Writers Institute at SUNY-Albany, was performed and won the New York State Governor's Art Award. The play, which uses a dream motif and elaborate masks, is based on the murder of Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old Chicago boy lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly whistling at a white woman. This is Morrison's only venture into drama. The script has never been published.

Beloved appeared in 1987, almost two decades after Morrison discovered the record of Margaret Garner's story and began considering its adoption for a book. She wanted to explore the nature of slavery, not from an intellectual or slave narrative perspective, but from within the day-to-day lived experiences of the slaves themselves. Margaret Garner wanted to save her children from a fate she considered worse than death, to remove them from the clutches of slavery. On one hand, Morrison saw no moral justification for Garner's crime, even in the face of the brutality of the institution in question. On the other, she wondered if it were a worse thing for a mother to do to turn her children over to a living death. Therein was her dilemma. The Garner incident was well known when it occurred and was

taken up as a cause célèbre by abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass and by abolitionist newspapers. Was Garner the only slave mother who responded as drastically to slavery? No one knows how many women engaged in similar deeds or how many undetected or undetectable means such women surreptitiously employed to save their young from servitude. Infanticide (although not abortion) has always carried the marks of a taboo in our culture, and the real and imagined virtues and values of African mother-women, under all circumstances, have served as muse for many inspired bursts of creativity in diverse black cultures.

Set in 1873, roughly a decade after the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery, *Beloved* is the story of a former slave, Sethe, who eighteen years earlier had escaped from Kentucky to Ohio. Ahead of her she sent her three babies, one yet-unnamed girl and two little boys. On the way she gave birth to another daughter, Denver. Tracked to her new home by her slave owner, Sethe reacted by cutting the throat of her "crawling-already" older daughter and would have done the same with the other children had she not been stopped. For destruction of property (the child as slave), she served a jail sentence. By the time she is released, the ghost of the dead baby, Beloved (the name Sethe has inscribed on the headstone of her grave), has come to haunt the house the family occupies. Unresigned to the mischievous spirit and out of fear of their mother, the two boys leave home as soon as they feel they can take care of themselves, but Sethe and Denver accept the baby ghost and the disruptions she causes as part of their lives. This situation changes when Paul D, another former slave from Sweet Home, the plantation on which Sethe previously lived, arrives. First, with brute force, he rids the house of the ghost and he and Sethe become lovers. Soon after, an unknown young woman, who behaves strangely and appears to be the age that the dead baby would have been had she lived, arrives. She calls herself Beloved. Although she seems to know almost nothing else about herself that would usefully identify her, Beloved soon becomes a powerful force in the house. Against his will, she forces Paul D out, first from the house and then from Sethe's life. Meanwhile, Sethe, the target of Beloved's attention and the person from whom she seeks retribution, cannot keep from becoming completely enthralled by the intruder, for Sethe believes that Beloved is the reincarnation of the child she murdered. As a result, Sethe suffers physical and psychological deterioration until Denver, anxious for her mother's life, seeks help from the black women in the community. Under the gaze of the collective force of the women who respond to the call, Beloved disappears, and for the first time in her life Denver finds the courage to make life plans that promise positive

changes for the entire community. The story concludes with Paul D's return to a recovering Sethe, to whom he offers himself in a partnership for a life they might build together.

Morrison was not concerned with the social consequences Garner suffered as a result of her act. She admits to doing research to secure information to make her plot narrow and deep; for instance, she learned exactly what the bit, an instrument of slave torture, looked like, how it was obtained, and how it was used. But Morrison did not delve into Garner's life story, opting instead for the freedom to invent the lives of her characters. She wanted to be fully accessible to those characters and to choose her own place in the political, philosophical, and moral discourse surrounding her story. So she turned to her imaginative powers and wove together fragments from the Garner episode into a new creation that explores the complexities of the situations of the former slave mother and those around her and the return of her murdered "already-crawling baby." In plotting the action, Morrison has said that she came to a point where, after asking herself who had the right to judge Sethe's action, she knew that she did not, nor did anyone else except the child Sethe killed. Then Beloved inserted herself into the narrative.

Morrison claims she had many more difficulties in writing *Beloved* than with any of her previous books. For one thing, there was the problem of making the ghost-child believable. But, she noted, "everybody believes in [ghosts], even those of us who don't believe in them" (Morrison and Richardson, 36). Also, this book seemed to her very different from the others. She explains:

> For *Beloved*, . . . I could take nothing that I knew that I seemed sure of, nothing I could really use. All of my books have been different for me, but *Beloved* was like I'd never written a book before. . . . I knew that I was in the company of people whom I absolutely adored, in a situation which I absolutely abhorred. To stay in their company, to listen, to imagine, to invent—and not to write—was exhausting. (Morrison and Richardson, 40)

Fortunately, she stayed, listened, imagined, invented, and wrote to release that exhaustion.

Another difference for Morrison between *Beloved* and the previous novels was the sense of melancholy she felt over the story. For instance, in writing the scene in which the child is killed, she recalls getting up periodically to take long walks and returning to rewrite, "over and over again," the sentence written just prior to each walk. While she wanted the fact of infanticide to surface early in the narrative so that the information would

be known, the horror of the act was as difficult for her as it is for her readers. She was forced to struggle to find language in which the violence would not "engorge" her or her readers, or compete with the language itself. She struggled against producing either obscenity or pornography (Schappell and Lacour 110–11).

Again, more than with any of her other novels, the demands of *Beloved* made Morrison less confident that she could execute the book successfully. Still, she wanted to do it. Never having read a book that did what she wanted this one to do, she persevered. She felt only the highest regard for the lives of those who endured slavery, both its victims and its survivors, and the idea that the enormity of the institution of African slavery might be beyond the scope of art depressed her. Nevertheless, she kept going.

Much of *Beloved* is given over to the tortured internal lives of the former slaves: Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs (Sethe's mother-in-law, whose son Halle, Sethe's husband, worked years of Sundays to buy his mother's freedom but did not himself survive slavery), and Stamp Paid, a former slave and Underground Railroad conductor who ferried escaping slaves across the Ohio. So grotesque were many of their experiences, and so vulnerable did they feel, that for them the act of remembering was risky, shameful, and dangerous. In addition to the wrongs she suffered, Sethe was haunted by the memory of killing her child. She observed that much of her life was a struggle to "keep the past at bay." Always as concerned with process as product, Morrison focuses in *Beloved* on the healing process that returns dignity to a people from whom it had been unceremoniously stripped. But only in remembering, recounting, listening to, and accepting their individual and collective pasts does healing take place. In reclaiming and re-creating the lives of those who lived through slavery Morrison writes a new history that enables her characters and readers to reconsider the wounds of a shameful past in a manner that exorcizes the ghost of Beloved.

Beloved is a *big* book, not in its 273 pages (which disqualifies it for that sort of bigness) but in the depth of the feelings it invokes by way of what critic Ann Snitow calls "the terror of its material" as well as its spiritual richness; in the complexities of its layers of meaning embedded in meticulously crafted yet passionate prose; in the author's powers of imagination and mastery of language; and in its impact on readers. It is also a text that is part of a larger project: the first volume in Toni Morrison's trilogy of black life in America. In this novel, Morrison takes large steps beyond the genre of the slave narrative tradition to excavate, then to reclaim and re-create, the hitherto hidden lives of those who survived the ravages of the inhu-

man institution. Her goal, she said, was to translate the historical into the personal. She wanted her characters to move from the page into the imagination of the reader. "I don't want to write books that you can close . . . and walk off and read another one right away—like a television show, you know, where you flick the channel." She writes intending to be as understated as possible, as quiet, clean, and lean as possible to elicit a complex response from her readers (Darling 253).

As *Beloved* garnered many accolades, Morrison's reputation soared. Among others, critic John Leonard agreed with her that it fulfilled her intended purpose: "Where *was* this book that we've always needed? Without *Beloved,* our imagination of America has a heart-sized hole in it big enough to die from" (Leonard 46). In the year of the novel's publication, Morrison was named a member of the Helsinki Watch Committee and the Board of Trustees of the New York Public Library. She also became chairperson of the New York State Education Department's Committee on Adult Literacy and a regent's lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley. She received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the Robert Kennedy Book Award, and the Melcher Book Award from the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1988. The following year Morrison left Syracuse for the Robert Goheen Professorship in the Humanities Council at Princeton University, where she holds a joint appointment in African-American studies and creative writing. She also received the Modern Language Association's Commonwealth Award in Literature in 1989 and the Chianti Ruffino Antico Fattore International Award in Literature in 1990.

Jazz, which Morrison published in 1992, is her sixth novel and the second volume in her trilogy. Its characters are the children and grandchildren of Sethe's and Paul D's generation who left the rural areas and life on the land with dreams of success in the urban centers. In 1906, Joe Trace and his wife Violet, like many others of their group from across the South, rode the train north to Harlem and elsewhere. Seeking escape from poverty and white violence, they danced into the City (capitalized C), with high expectations. The action in the novel begins in 1926, in the jazz age. Ironically, by then, the dreams of the ordinary migrants no longer sparkled with hope, and Joe, now a fifty-year-old door-to-door beauty products salesman, traces his eighteen-year-old girlfriend, Dorcas, to a party in Brooklyn and shoots her. She dies without revealing the identity of her assailant. Then Violet, who already acts strangely and is angered by Joe's infidelity, disrupts the girl's funeral by attempting to mutilate the face of the corpse.

Just as *Beloved* interested Morrison as a result of her reading of the Margaret Garner story, so the plot of *Jazz,* as an extension of *Beloved,* suggested

itself to her from the photograph of a dead girl in her coffin in James Van Der Zee's *The Harlem Book of the Dead*. The story behind the picture reveals that Dorcas did exactly as this girl, who also refused to name her killer. Like Sethe, who considered her children her "best parts," Dorcas loved someone else so much more than herself that she was willing to bleed to death rather than reveal her lover's name. This willingness to replace the self with a love object outside of the self is, Morrison says, a way in which women sabotage themselves. The idea intrigued her. How Joe and Violet came to the place in which they find themselves at the time of Dorcas's death and where they will go from there is the burden of the narrative, which takes readers on a journey into black history and returns to many of the themes Morrison used in her previous novels. As always, the struggles with alienation, fragmentation, self, and identity are all present. This time Morrison explores them in light of the unfulfilled promises of the black migrant urban experience.

Toni Morrison received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. In the great hall of the Swedish Academy in Stockholm, in her acceptance speech she focused on language. She explained that having had a childhood full of stories, she had never thought of narrative as just a source of entertainment but rather as a conduit for the flow of knowledge. She spoke to the distinguished audience on the responsibility that writers, readers, thinkers, and speakers have to keep language alive and regenerative. For, she reminded them, a living language is vital, continually renewing itself in the imaginations of those who use it in any of its many ways. Without that continual regeneration, language dies.

Morrison's vast cultural knowledge is the source of the richness in her novels. She is also a gifted writer with a keen grasp of detail and the skills to invent compelling narrative. Nowhere are her talents more evident than in *Beloved*. In the many voices and memories in this text, Morrison explores and dramatizes the past and present of African-American history through the myth and folklore of many nations and peoples. Her themes revolve around the wish to forget and the necessity to remember, to reject and to reclaim; and to elide the boundaries between past and present. She imagines and fills in what was not written into the slave narratives. Who else writes a ghost story to re-create history and raise a monument? Where else do we find

> [g]host story, history lesson, mother-epic, incantation, folk and fairy tale . . . lost children and men on horseback; a handsaw, an icepick and a wishing well; Denver's "emerald light" and Amy's velvet; spiders and roost-

> ers and the madness of hummingbirds with needle beaks[;] . . . a devouring past of everything that is unforgiven and denied; a hunger to eat all of the love in the world[?]—*Beloved* belongs on the highest shelf of our literature. (Leonard 45)

The task of choosing seven essays for this *Casebook* was not easy. The large number of excellent essays already published on the novel presented a formidable challenge to the process. We could easily have assembled an anthology three times as large as the one we have created and not have exhausted the base of our resources. Readers are well advised to continue their explorations of *Beloved* by taking advantage of reading well beyond the titles of the suggestions we offer. Nevertheless, our goal here is to present teachers and scholars with a small group of essays that not only are worthy of inclusion but that also address some of the issues that readers often raise about the book. We believe they will be valuable to those who teach or write about the novel. Some degree of repetition of viewpoint within the group was unavoidable, but we tried to choose with an eye to the breadth of perspective among the individual pieces to lend as much variety as possible to the collection.

The seven essays are framed on one side by two prefatory items—a poem written by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper in the immediate aftermath of the Margaret Garner incident and a contemporary review of that incident by a white antislavery activist—and on the other side by a conversation on *Beloved* among Barbara Christian, Deborah McDowell, and Nellie Y. McKay. We hope that this unstructured exchange will contribute to the value of the whole by helping to keep open the larger ongoing conversation in which teachers in classrooms and scholars have engaged since the publication of the book in 1987. *Beloved* is truly one of the great novels of our time.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's poem, "The Slave Mother (A Tale of Ohio)," one of her best-known works, was written in reaction to Margaret Garner's murder of her child in 1856. Harper (1825–1911), a free black woman, was a successful novelist, poet, journalist, and essayist and was an outspoken abolitionist, women's rights activist, and temperance advocate for almost all of her life. "The Slave Mother" makes the point that the murder of the child manifests the great love this mother has for her children, who, she believes, will be worse off enslaved than dead. Harper concludes the poem with a call to her (white) countrymen and women to join the crusade for black freedom and end the dishonor of slavery.

A lengthy review of the Garner case in *The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims*

(1856), by the white abolitionist Samuel May, follows the poem. May was deeply concerned about the injustice of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), which enabled the apprehension of escaped slaves like Margaret Garner and her family, even when they were discovered in free states. May, who wrote his account from local newspaper articles and included an excerpt from an antislavery sermon delivered in Cleveland, Ohio, by the Reverend H. Bushnell, concluded the tract with a plea for the abolition of slavery, asking especially that special thought be given to the thousands of fugitives living in free states in great fear of becoming the next victims of the Act.

In the first essay in this collection, "Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Ashraf H. A. Rushdy studies *Beloved* from the perspective of its contribution to the African-American literary tradition based on the idea of the interdependence between the black past and present. Rushdy situates Morrison within revisionist historiography and contemporary fiction, creating daughters signifyin(g) history. The essay addresses five aspects of the way in which Morrison achieves her goal. "Raising *Beloved:* A Requiem That Is a Resurrection" posits *Beloved* as the story of an anonymous people who were slaves. As a character in the story and the embodiment of the past, Beloved must be remembered to be forgotten, reincarnated to be given proper burial. "Toward *Beloved:* Margaret Garner" briefly traces the history of the influence of Margaret Garner's murder of her child through nineteenth-century abolitionist agitations to Morrison's fiction. Also brief, "Signifyin(g) on History" reinforces Rushdy's argument regarding the multiple perspectives of the book's project, and "Reading *Beloved*" looks closely at how Sethe's killing of her child affects her and the rest of her community. Here Rushdy explores the development of relationships of understanding between Sethe and the other characters in the book as they discover themselves within a communal framework. Sethe begins to heal only after she accepts her action and takes responsibility for it by recognizing why it happened and by understanding it in a framework larger than one of individual concern. "Hearing *Beloved*," the final section of the essay, addresses the relationship between the orality of the text and the "aural being" in the text represented by the signifyin(g) daughter. Classifying *Beloved* as a "speakerly" text with Denver as its ideal "listener," Rushdy concludes that she will tell and retell the story that she comes to understand through the course of the narrative. Denver is the site of hope, the daughter of history.

In "*Beloved:* A Spiritual," Karla F. C. Holloway argues for the significance of *Beloved* as one of the most effective documents in contemporary efforts to revise the historical and cultural texts of black women's experiences.

She bases her claim on the effectiveness of Morrison's revision of the strategic devices within the structure of the novel. For example, with myth as a dominant feature of *Beloved,* Morrison not only reclaims the Garner story from those who interviewed her after her child's death and expressed enormous surprise at her calm but also, as mythmaker, achieves a complete revision of the episode. The oral and written history that Morrison revises, consciously and unconsciously felt, considers many aspects of each life and reflects an alternative perspective on reality. Morrison's skillful manipulation of such elements as the interplay between the implicitly oral and explicitly literary structures of the novel; the novel's dominant contrapuntal structure, which mediates speech and narrative, visual and cognitive, and Morrison's manipulation of time and space; and signals of "telling" as a survival strategy are topics of discussion in this essay. In addition, Morrison, like many other African and African-American writers, often defies the boundaries separating past, present, and future time. This allows her to free *Beloved* from the dominance of a history that would deny the merits of slave stories. As Morrison's creation, Beloved is not only Sethe's dead child but the faces of all those lost in slavery, carrying in her the history of the "sixty million and more." Holloway sees *Beloved* as a novel of inner vision: the reclamation of black spiritual histories.

"Toni Morrison's *Beloved:* Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text," Mae G. Henderson's contribution to the collection, examines the novel in the context of contemporary historical theory on discourse and narrativity and offers a reading that links historiography and psychoanalysis. She believes that, insofar as Morrison's relationship to the slave narrators and the slave narratives is one in which her intent is to resurrect buried stories and express repressed ones, the comparisons between historian and informant, and analyst and analysand, are valid.

Morrison faces the challenge of transforming Sethe's "rememories" of a dreadful past into a discourse shaped by her own narrativity. For both, the question becomes: how does one, from a cluster of images (rememories), create history that represents the unspeakable and unspoken in narrative? At the center of the novel is Sethe's burden, a past dominated by an oppressive master text. With no discourse of her own, she needs to create her fragmented images into a sequential, meaningful narrative of her own. As a black woman, with no voice or text, she has no history. She must find a way to gain control of her story, her body, her progeny, and all that belongs to her by dismantling the authority of the master discourse and constructing her own. Henderson's essay addresses Morrison's achievement in resolving the dilemma by bringing together the personal and the social,