

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison

Edited by Justine Tally

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
TONI MORRISON

Nobel laureate Toni Morrison is one of the most widely studied of contemporary American authors. Her novels, particularly *Beloved*, have had a dramatic impact on the American canon and attracted considerable critical commentary. This *Companion* introduces and examines her oeuvre as a whole, the first evaluation to include not only her famous novels, but also her other literary works (short story, drama, musical, and opera), her social and literary criticism, and her career as an editor and teacher. Innovative contributions from internationally recognized critics and academics discuss Morrison's themes, narrative techniques, language, and political philosophy, and explain the importance of her work to American studies and world literature. This comprehensive and accessible approach, together with a chronology and guide to further reading, makes this an essential book for students and scholars of African American literature.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison

Edited by Justine Tally

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
TONI MORRISON

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison

Edited by Justine Tally

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
TONI MORRISON

EDITED BY
JUSTINE TALLY
UNIVERSITY OF LA LAGUNA



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison

Edited by Justine Tally

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521678322

© Cambridge University Press 2007

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2007

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison / edited by Justine Tally.

p. cm. – (Cambridge companions to literature)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-86111-3 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-67832-2 (pbk.)

1. Morrison, Toni – Criticism and interpretation. 2. African Americans in literature.

I. Tally, Justine. II. Title. III. Series.

PS3563.O8749Z58 2007

813'.54 – dc22 2007003520

ISBN 978-0-521-86111-3 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-67832-2 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	page ix
<i>Chronology</i>	xiii
Introduction: “All necks are on the line” JUSTINE TALLY	I
PART I TONI MORRISON’S FICTION	
1 <i>The Bluest Eye</i> and <i>Sula</i> : black female experience from childhood to womanhood ÁGNES SURÁNYI	II
2 <i>Song of Solomon</i> and <i>Tar Baby</i> : the subversive role of language and the carnivalesque JOYCE HOPE SCOTT	26
3 <i>Beloved</i> or the shifting shapes of memory CLAUDINE RAYNAUD	43
4 <i>Jazz</i> and <i>Paradise</i> : pivotal moments in black history SHIRLEY ANN STAVE	59
5 The Morrison trilogy JUSTINE TALLY	75
6 <i>Love</i> and the survival of the black community MAR GALLEGRO	92
7 The artistic impulse of Toni Morrison’s shorter works ABENA P. A. BUSIA	101
	vii

CONTENTS

PART II TONI MORRISON’S CRITICISM AND EDITING

8	Toni Morrison’s literary criticism	115
	HANNA WALLINGER	
9	Toni Morrison’s social criticism	125
	SÄMI LUDWIG	
10	Toni Morrison, editor and teacher	139
	CHERYL A. WALL	

PART III ESSAYS

11	Language and narrative technique in Toni Morrison’s novels	151
	JUDYLYN S. RYAN	
12	Toni Morrison, intellectual	162
	DWIGHT A. McBRIDE	
13	Morrison and the critical community	175
	DEIRDRE J. RAYNOR AND JOHNNELLA E. BUTLER	

PART IV FURTHER READING

<i>Works by Toni Morrison</i>	187
<i>Selected critical reading</i>	189
<i>Index</i>	192

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison

Edited by Justine Tally

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ABENA P. A. BUSIA, Associate Professor in the Departments of English, and Women's and Gender Studies, at Rutgers University, lectures and publishes extensively on black literature and curriculum transformation for race and gender. Her edited works include *Theorizing Black Feminisms* (1994) with Stanlie James, and *Beyond Survival: African Literature and the Search for New Life* (1998) with Kofi Anyidoho and Anne Adams. She also co-directs, with Tuzyline Jita Allan, and Florence Howe of the Feminist Press, *Women Writing Africa*, a multi-volume, continent-wide publishing project of cultural reconstruction. Her poems have been anthologized on three continents and her collection *Testimonies of Exile* (1990) was published by Africa World Press.

JOHNNELLA E. BUTLER is the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. As a scholar, Professor Butler specializes in African American literature, American ethnic literature, and multicultural studies. She has taught numerous courses in American ethnic studies and American ethnic literature and has written many articles and books on American ethnic literature and the theory and pedagogy associated with multicultural studies. She is the editor of and lead contributor to *Color Line to Borderlands: Ethnic Studies and the Matrix of Higher Education* (2001) and co-editor of the *Encyclopedia of American Studies*.

MAR GALLEGÓ is Associate Professor at the University of Huelva, Spain, where she specializes in African American studies and the African diaspora, with a special focus on women writers and gender issues. She has authored *Passing Novels in the Harlem Renaissance* (2003) and has co-edited several essay collections: *Myth and Ritual in African American and Native American Literatures* (2001), *Contemporary Views on American Culture and Literature in the Great 60's* (2002), *Razón de mujer: Género y discurso en el ensayo femenino* (2003), *El legado plural de las mujeres* (2005), and *Espacios de género* (2005). She is presently working on a monograph on women writers of the African diaspora.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison

Edited by Justine Tally

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

SÄMI LUDWIG was educated at the Universities of Bern and Geneva and did post-graduate research at the Kennedy Institut in Berlin, the University of California, Riverside, the University of California, Berkeley, and at Harvard. He wrote his master's thesis on Ishmael Reed's Neo-Hoodoo Aesthetic and his doctorate on intercultural communication in Ishmael Reed and Maxine Hong Kingston (*Concrete Language*, 1996). His second book is on the cognitive dimension in American realism (*Pragmatist Realism*, 2002). He lives in Switzerland and teaches at the Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, France, which is part of the European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities (EUCOR).

DWIGHT A. MCBRIDE is the Chair and Leon Forrest Professor of African American Studies and Professor of English and Communication Studies at Northwestern University. Author of *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (2002) and, most recently, of *Why I Hate Abercrombie and Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality* (2007), McBride also edited *James Baldwin Now* (1999) and co-edited both the 2003 Lambda Literary Award winning anthology *Black Like Us: A Century of Lesbian, Gay, and Bi-Sexual African American Fiction* (2002) and *A Melvin Dixon Critical Reader* (2006). He lives in Chicago, Illinois, and Saugatuck, Michigan.

CLAUDINE RAYNAUD is Professor of English and American Literature at the University François-Rabelais, Tours, France; she now heads the nationwide African American Studies Research Group created in 2004. She is the author of *Toni Morrison: L'Esthétique de la survie* (1997) and has co-edited with Geneviève Fabre *Beloved, She is Mine, Essais sur "Beloved" de Toni Morrison* (1993). Two of her most current publications are "Coming of Age in the African American Novel," chapter 6 in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel* (2004), and an anthology of articles on Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman* (2005).

DEIRDRE RAYNOR is Associate Professor at the University of Washington, Tacoma, where she teaches American ethnic literature and is the Faculty Co-ordinator of the Ethnic, Gender, and Labor Studies Concentration in the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Program. Her primary scholarly interests include African American literature, Native American literature, multicultural pedagogy, and diversity in higher education. She has written and published scholarly articles on the work of Ann Petry, Edward Christopher Williams, and Julia Collins, and the Harlem Renaissance. She is currently editing a book on race in the humanities.

JUDYLYN RYAN is an Assistant Professor of English at Ohio Wesleyan University, where she teaches courses on African American and other diaspora literatures and cinema. Her scholarly work has been published in *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Toni Morrison: Theoretical and Critical Approaches* (1997), *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Toni Morrison* (1998), *Women Preachers and Prophets through*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison

Edited by Justine Tally

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Two Millennia of Christianity (1998), *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, *Critical Voicings of Black Liberation: Resistance and Representations in the Americas* (2003), and *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. She is the author of *Spirituality as Ideology in Black Women's Film and Literature* (2005), and is currently at work on a second book, *Teaching Black Women's Cinema*.

JOYCE HOPE SCOTT is Associate Professor of American Studies at Wheelock College in Boston where she teaches African American literature, African literature and theatre, literature and history of the Caribbean, and American popular culture. Her writings and research interests include representations of African spirituality in African American women's literature, the carnivalesque in African American fiction, African theatre for social intervention, and iconographic representations of the American national narrative. Professor Hope Scott is a former Fulbright Professor and Regional Scholar to West Africa. Her publications include *Camel Tracks: Critical Perspectives on Literatures of the Sahel* (ed. Boyd-Buggs and Hope Scott, 2003); "Official Language and Unofficial Reality," in *The Real Ebonics Debate* (1998).

SHIRLEY A. (HOLLY) STAVE is Associate Professor of English at the Louisiana Scholars' College in Natchitoches, Louisiana. She is the author of *The Decline of the Goddess: Nature, Culture, and Women in Thomas Hardy's Fiction* (1995), the co-author of *Living Witchcraft: A Contemporary American Coven* (1994), and the editor of *Gloria Naylor: Strategy and Technique, Magic and Myth* (2001) and of *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities* (2006). She has also published articles on film and on authors as diverse as Wilkie Collins and Toni Morrison.

ÁGNES SURÁNYI is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Pécs, Hungary, where she teaches contemporary British and American literature and translation theory and practice. Her publications in English include articles on Toni Morrison, Angela Carter, and Virginia Woolf. She has research interests in writing by African American women, in magic realism, literary influences and exchanges, and has centered her doctoral work on "Reading between Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison."

JUSTINE TALLY is Professor of American Literature at the University of La Laguna, Tenerife, Spain, where she specializes in African American literature. She is the author of *Paradise Reconsidered: Toni Morrison's (Hi)stories and Truths* (1999) and *The Story of "Jazz": Toni Morrison's Dialogic Imagination* (2001). Her current work is on myth and regeneration in Morrison's *Beloved*, forthcoming from Routledge (2008). Having organized the first international conference for the Collegium for African American Research in 1995, she then went on to serve on the CAAR Board as treasurer for eight years and as a general editor of the FORE-CAAST series (*Forum for European Contributions in African American Studies*).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison

Edited by Justine Tally

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CHERYL A. WALL, Distinguished Professor of English at Rutgers University, is author of *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995) and *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition* (2005). She edited two volumes of writing by Zora Neale Hurston for the Library of America, as well as critical casebooks on *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and “Sweat.” Along with Linda Holmes, Wall has edited *Savoring the Salt: Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* (forthcoming, 2007). Her current project is a study of Toni Morrison’s career as editor.

HANNA WALLINGER is Associate Professor of American Studies at Salzburg University in Austria. She is author of *Pauline E. Hopkins: A Literary Biography* (2005) and has published essays on Hopkins, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Sutton E. Griggs, W. E. B. Du Bois, Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, and others. She is secretary of the Collegium for African American Research.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1850 Fugitive Slave Act: “Compromise of 1850” after which run-away slaves could be legally recaptured in the North and returned to slavery.
- 1855 In *Beloved*, Sethe escapes, Denver is born.
Celia, a slave, hanged for murdering her master in Missouri.
- 1856 Actual escape of Margaret Garner and other slaves (January 27).
- 1857 Dred Scot case.
- 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, which frees enslaved black people *only* in rebel states.
- 1865 End of Civil War (April 9).
Lincoln assassinated (April 15).
Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution – which ends slavery.
Ku Klux Klan created in Tennessee.
- 1865–1920 During this time, more than 50 identifiable all-black towns and settlements are established in Oklahoma. While all-black towns also appear in other states, no other state has as many of these towns as Oklahoma.
- 1865–1877 Reconstruction Period in the American post-Civil War South.
- 1867 Birth of Madame C. J. Walker: an illiterate poor woman turned into businesswoman in the beauty-cult industry (development of the hot comb and methods for treating black hair); accused of imitation of white Europeans; dies in 1919.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1872 Freedmen’s Bureau is abolished.
- 1882 ff. Lynching, massacres, and race riots resulting from reaction to Reconstruction; lynching peaked in 1892; the last lynching takes place in Alabama in 1981.
- 1882 ff. Great Migration – mass movement of African Americans from the American South to the North to seek employment in the far more industrially developed region of the US; numbers peak in 1919 but continue through and after World War II.
- 1894–1937 Bessie Smith, the “Empress of the Blues.” Enormously successful, travels widely in a custom-designed railroad car, allegedly trained by Ma Rainey.
- 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* establishes “Separate but Equal,” ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court; “one-drop” theory becomes law of the land.
- 1902–1974 Charles August Lindbergh is famous for the first solo flight (New York to Paris) across the Atlantic. He admires the Nazis and propagates the superiority of the white (Aryan) race.
- 1908 Madame C. J. Walker (Sarah Breedlove Walker) opens a college in Pittsburgh to teach her revolutionary hair-care procedure using products she herself developed. Her daughter, A’lelia Walker, inherits her mother’s fortune, and establishes a gathering place for the artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance.
- 1911 James Van Der Zee sets up a portrait studio; over the next several decades he was to record the lives of people in the Harlem area. In the 1940s, he puts together a series of photographs of African American funeral ceremonies, which is officially published in 1978 as *The Harlem Book of the Dead*; Toni Morrison is asked to write the introduction.
- 1914–1918 World War I.
- 1915 The “second wave” of the Great Migration of southern blacks to the North begins.
- 1917–1918 American involvement in World War I; around 400,000 African Americans serve in the US armed forces, but only 10 percent are assigned to combat duty.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1917 St. Louis race riots (July 1–3) – one of the worst race riots in American history; inaccurate statistics but somewhere between 40 and 200 people are killed and hundreds injured; 6,000 people are driven from their homes.
 (July 28) Silent Protest Parade (NAACP Protest March) held in Manhattan in reaction to escalating violence against African Americans.
- 1918 Okeh Records, an independent record studio, is formed; in 1920, it becomes a subsidiary of Columbia Records. It quickly realizes money is to be made recording what are then called “race records” and launches many major African American musicians, including Louis Armstrong and King Oliver.
- 1919 The 369th Infantry Regiment, an all-black military unit that fought in World War I, makes a triumphant return to Harlem (February). But the summer of 1919 is called Red Summer because of the extreme number and severity of the race riots.
- 1920s Harlem Renaissance (though critics differ as to specific dates).
- 1930s The Great Depression; the rise of Hollywood as fabricator of dreams, and the launching of Shirley Temple, child prodigy.
- 1931 Birth date of Chloe Ardelia Wofford (February 18th). Though most sources cite “Anthony” as Morrison’s second given name, John Duvall has published a copy of her birth certificate showing “Ardelia.” Morrison is the name she takes when she marries.
- 1941 Pearl Harbor is bombed (December 10); the United States enters World War II, sending troops to Europe and the Pacific fronts until the war is over in 1945.
- 1954 The Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, makes segregation of public schools unconstitutional, beginning the end of “Separate but Equal” mandate (May 17).
- 1955 Emmett Till is murdered in Mississippi (August 28). Beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (December 5). This year is often cited as the beginning of the Civil Rights era.

CHRONOLOGY

1960s	The Black Aesthetic (Arts) movement, which closely parallels the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Characteristics: art as political, anti-white, anti-American, and anti-middle-class; advocates the need for works of art that would be meaningful to black masses and promote racial pride. Outcome: emergence of black studies departments at various universities in the US in the mid-seventies.
1961–1975	US military involvement in the Vietnam War; disproportionately high number of black casualties.
1963	Assassination of civil rights activist Medgar Evers (June 12). Assassination of US President John F. Kennedy (November 22).
1964	Signing into law of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (July 2); creation of Equal Opportunity Commission, beginning of affirmative action programs.
1965	Assassination of Malcolm X (February 21). Race riots in the Watts district of Los Angeles (August). Morrison becomes senior editor at Random House in New York City.
1968	Assassination of civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King in Memphis, Tennessee (April 4). Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy (June 5).
1970	Toni Morrison’s <i>The Bluest Eye</i> published.
1971	Morrison becomes Associate Professor, English, at the State University of New York (SUNY), Purchase, New York (1971–1972)
1973	<i>Sula</i> Official end of US involvement in the Vietnam War.
1974	<i>The Black Book</i>
1975	Fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese.
1975	<i>Sula</i> nominated for the National Book Award.
1977	<i>Song of Solomon</i> ; receives National Book Critics Circle Award.
1981	<i>Tar Baby</i>

CHRONOLOGY

1982	<i>District Storyville</i> ; directed and choreographed by Donald McKayle.
1983	“Recitatif”
1986	<i>Dreaming Emmett</i> , produced by the Albany Repertory Theater.
1987	<i>Beloved</i> ; Morrison takes the Robert F. Goheen Chair at Princeton University, the first black woman to hold a named chair at an Ivy League university.
1988	Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for <i>Beloved</i> . Robert F. Kennedy Award for <i>Beloved</i> .
1989	“Unspeakable Things Unspoken: the Afro-American Presence in American Literature” (Hector Tanner Lecture on Human Values at the University of Michigan).
1991	Clarence Thomas Senate Hearings for confirmation as Justice of the Supreme Court. Anita Hill presents allegations of sexual harassment by Thomas during the time she worked as his assistant at the US Department of Education.
1992	<i>Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination</i> (the published version of the William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization at Harvard University). <i>Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality</i> , edited. <i>Jazz</i>
1993	Morrison awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1995	O. J. Simpson tried for the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman.
1996	National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.
1997	<i>Birth of a Nation’hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case</i> , edited with Claudia Brodsky Lacour.
1998	<i>Paradise</i>
2003	<i>Love</i>

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-86111-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison
Edited by Justine Tally
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CHRONOLOGY

- 2005 Libretto for the opera, *Margaret Garner*, music by Richard Danielpour, performed in May in Detroit and in July in Cincinnati; and in Philadelphia in February of 2006.
- 2006 Morrison retires from Princeton.