

Nobel Prize in Literature 1993



Toni Morrison

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993 was awarded to Toni Morrison *"who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality"*.

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"My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world". These are the words of this year's Nobel Laureate in Literature, the American writer Toni Morrison, in her book of essays "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination" (1992). And she adds, "My project rises from delight, not disappointment ..."

Toni Morrison is 62 years old, and was born in Lorain, Ohio, in the United States. Her works comprise novels and essays. In her academic career she is a professor in the humanities at the University of Princeton, New Jersey.

She has written six novels, each of them of great interest. Her oeuvre is unusually finely wrought and cohesive, yet at the same time rich in variation. One can delight in her

unique narrative technique, varying from book to book and developed independently, even though its roots stem from Faulkner and American writers from further south. The lasting impression is nevertheless sympathy, humanity, of the kind which is always based on profound humour.

"Song of Solomon" (1978) with its description of the black world in life and legend, forms an excellent introduction to the work of Toni Morrison. Milkman Dead's quest for his real self and its source reflects a basic theme in the novels. The Solomon of the title, the southern ancestor, was to be found in the songs of childhood games. His inner intensity had borne him back, like Icarus, through the air to the Africa of his roots. This insight finally becomes Milkman's too.

"Beloved" (1987) continues to widen the themes and to weave together the places and times in the network of motifs. The combination of realistic notation and folklore paradoxically intensifies the credibility. There is enormous power in the depiction of Sethe's action to liberate her child from the life she envisages for it, and the consequences of this action for Sethe's own life.

In her latest novel "Jazz" (1992), Toni Morrison uses a device which is akin to the way jazz itself is played. The book's first lines provide a synopsis, and in reading the novel one becomes aware of a narrator who varies, embellishes and intensifies. The result is a richly complex, sensuously conveyed image of the events, the characters and moods.

As the motivation for the award implies, Toni Morrison is a literary artist of the first rank. She delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race. And she addresses us with the lustre of poetry.

For more details please visit:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/press.html