Notes

Introduction

1. Morrison as editor was something of a chameleon. She said, “When I edit somebody else’s book no vanity is involved, I simply want the writer to do the very best work he can do. Now if that means letting him alone, I’ll do that. If it means holding hands, I’ll hold hands. If it means fussing, I’ll fuss” (Con II, 8). As she later wrote, “Editing sometimes requires re-structuring, setting loose or nailing down: paragraphs, pages may need re-writing, sentences (especially final or opening ones) may need to be deleted or re-cast; incomplete images or thoughts may need expansion, development. Sometimes the point is buried or too worked-up. Other times the tone is ‘off,’ the voice is wrong or unforthcoming or so self-regarding it distorts or mis-shapes the characters it wishes to display. In some manuscripts traps are laid so the reader is sandbagged into focusing on the author’s superior gifts or knowledge rather than the intimate, reader-personalized world fiction can summon” (Nonfiction 86–7).

1 Song of Solomon: One Beginning of Morrison’s Career

1. Toni Cade Bambara’s best-known novel, The Salt Eaters, illustrates the pervasive belief that white conquerors destroyed this ability. As Morrison said in an interview about the dangers of freedom, “The salt tasters ... They express either an effort of the will or a freedom of the will” (Con I, 164).

2 As Morrison explained, “I really did not mean to suggest that they kill each other, but out of a commitment and love and selflessness they are willing to risk the one thing that we have, life, and that’s the positive nature of the action. I never really believed that these two men would kill each other. I thought they would, like antelopes, lock horns, but it is important that Guitar put his gun down and does not blow Milkman out of the air, as he could. It’s important that he look at everything with his new eyes and say, ‘My man, my main man.’ It’s important that the metaphor be in the killing of this brother, that the two men who love each other nevertheless have no area in which they can talk, so they exercise some dominion over and demolition of the other. I wanted the language to be placid enough to suggest he was suspended in the air in the leap towards this thing, both loved and despised, and that he was willing to die for that idea, but not necessarily to die” (Con I, 111).
2  *Tar Baby* and Other Folktales

1. There are some overtones of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, with a Jadine who is a mere shade of Ariel set in opposition to a much more handsome Caliban. Valerian Street, however, does not even play at being Prospero.

7  Morrison and the Twenty-first Century: *Love*

1. The book of Romans appears just before 1 Corinthians, and some critics have connected the boy's name with this part of the Bible. As Paul instructs, “The just shall live by faith” (chapter 1); later in chapter 16 comes Paul’s promise, “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” With rape, either by teenaged boys or by Cosey, as the pervasive metaphor, even this incident has relevance.

2. Between 1998 and 2003, Morrison had received the Medal of Honor for Literature from the National Arts Club in New York, the Ohioana Book Award and the Oklahoma Book Award, the National Humanities Medal, the Pell Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts, the Jean Kennedy Smith New York University Creative Writing Award, the Enoch Pratt Free Library Lifetime Literary Achievement Award, the Cavore Prize (Turin, Italy), the Fete du Livre, Cite du Livre, Les Escritures Croisees (Aix-en-Provence, France), and the Docteures Honoris Causa, Ecole Normale Superieure (Paris, France). In 1998 the Oprah Winfrey production of *Beloved*, directed by Jonathan Demme with Winfrey as Sethe, premiered; in 2002 the opera *Margaret Garner*, for which Morrison wrote the libretto and Richard Danielpour the score, was produced, and later productions in Detroit, Philadelphia, and elsewhere were planned.
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