

SALEM PRESS

Published & Distributed by Grey House Publishing

For Immediate Release

January 29, 2016

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Salem Press Announces *Critical Insights: Beloved*

This volume brings together fourteen original essays which offer new ways of exploring Toni Morrison's Pulitzer award-winning novel, *Beloved*. Edited by Maureen N. Eke, professor of English at Central Michigan University, the essays in this volume aim to offer innovative (and needed) new perspectives about the novel and the author.

Beginning with four **Critical Contexts** essays, Kristine Yohe provides a historical background for Morrison's novel by returning to the informing story of Margaret Garner, the fugitive slave woman who murdered her infant daughter to "save" her from being returned to slavery. Yohe argues that Morrison's novel "demonstrates a deep concern with the legacy of slavery in the United States" by making "comprehensible for readers that dehumanizing person experiences of enslaved individuals." Through an extensive survey of several essays and reviews of Morrison's novel, Touria Khannous then looks at the reception of *Beloved* over several eras and across several disciplines, arguing that the "critical readings constitute a literary theoretical discourse" on *Beloved* that is still unfolding. Anne Herbert follows with an eclectic literary reading of *Beloved*, demonstrating how the novel can serve as a model for bringing together black feminist criticism and feminist archetypal theory through the use of cultural semiotics. It is well known that Morrison has been compared to other American and international writers of her generation and earlier ones. In the next essay, Herman Beavers sees parallels between *Beloved* (1987) and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Beavers argues that the former revises scenes from the latter, "in order to foreground the anxieties that occur at the intersection of race and masculinity, for both white male characters like Mr. Garner and black male characters like Paul D and Stamp Paid."

The next major section of the present volume, **Critical Readings**, offers a view of *Beloved* from various critical perspectives. Joseph McLaren begins by claiming that *Beloved* is a neo-slave narrative that retells the history of the "peculiar institution of slavery" using the historical Margaret Garner incident as the foundation for constructing Sethe's character. *Beloved* also reminds us of the African presence in America not only through references to the Middle Passage, but also through Morrison's invoking of a range of African folkloric, spiritual, healing, mythic, and performance forms-storytelling, songs-as when Baby Suggs gathers her people and performs before them in the woodland Clearing. Both Kokahvah Zauditu-Salessie and Sarah Berry underscore the presence of African spirituality and healing practices in *Beloved*. Zauditu-Salessie's reading from an African spirituality perspective connects Sethe's chokecherry tree to the tree of life and the Yoruba and West African spirituality through communion with the natural world. Sarah Berry examines the African presence in the novel from a pan-Africanist

perspective, suggesting that the novel “privileges the worldview of Sethe and her family” and in doing so, “preserves the folkways” that enable “the survival of individuals, families, and communities under slavery” and afterwards. Writers are storytellers and visionaries, who often serve as critics or truth-tellers in their societies. It is in this context that Khalilah T. Watson sees *Beloved*, arguing that the novel represents “a manifestation of Morrison’s prophetic utterances to the literary world and her intense study of history.” Lynne Simpson builds on this theme, pointing to the problems arising when history of slavery is studied through numbers. Other essays in *Critical Insights: Beloved* include:

- “Adoption and Persuasion: Raising and Reckoning with *Beloved*” by Sandy Alexandre
- “Supernatural Elements in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” by Blessing Diala-Ogamba
- “Exploring the LIST Paradigm: Reading and Teaching *Beloved*” by Durthy A. Washington
- “Literary Analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: An Introduction for Students” by Nicole M. Coonradt

Taken together, the essays presented in this volume give special attention to the traumatic horrors of slavery. Indeed, although their authors examine Sethe’s act of infanticide from various perspectives, it is evident that the recurring theme throughout the volume is not the question of rightness or the wrongness of the act itself, but the ways in which the characters contend with and survive a dehumanizing and absurd historical movement. *Beloved*, the narrative, and Beloved, the character, become Morrison’s conduits for confronting a story that is impossible to tell but needs to be told.

Each essay in *Critical Insights: Beloved* is 2,500 to 5,000 words in length, and all essays conclude with a list of Works Cited and detailed endnotes. Also included in this volume are **Appendixes** to provide readers with additional information and opportunities for further research, including a **Chronology of Toni Morrison’s Life**, a list of **Works by Toni Morrison**, an annotated **Bibliography**, biographies of the **Editors** and **Contributors**, and an alphabetical **Index**.

The *Critical Insights* Series distills the best of both classic and current literary criticism of the world’s most studied literature. Edited and written by some of academia’s most distinguished literary scholars, *Critical Insights: Beloved* provides authoritative, in-depth scholarship that students and researchers will rely on for years. This volume is destined to become a valuable purchase for all.

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Critical Insights: Beloved

Pub. Date: December 2015

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-61925-828-0

300 pages

\$95.00

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-61925-829-7