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## Booklover-Feminism

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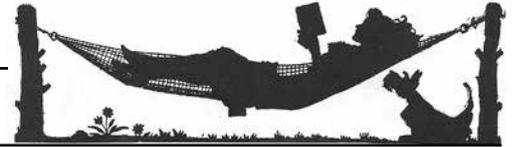
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## Booklover — Feminism

Column Editor: **Donna Jacobs** (Research Specialist, Transgenic Mouse Core Facility, MUSC, Charleston, SC 29425) <jacobsdf@musc.edu>



Feminism has been a subject I have wrestled with for my entire research career. My perspective on it would probably not be what one would expect and then I read this quote by **Toni Morrison** while researching for “**Booklover**.” She was asked the question: “Why distance oneself from feminism?” during an interview for *salon.com* in 1998. Her response stated beautifully exactly what I felt: “In order to be as free as I possibly can, in my own imagination, I can’t take positions that are closed. Everything I’ve ever done, in the writing world, has been to expand articulation, rather than to close it, to open doors, sometimes, not even closing the book — leaving the endings open for reinterpretation, revisitation, a little ambiguity. I detest and loathe [those categories]. I think it’s off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I’m involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don’t subscribe to patriarchy, and I don’t think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it’s a question of equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things.” This subject of feminism was on the table for discussion because of how the public viewed the characters in her stories. *Paradise* and *Beloved* were often referenced in the same sentence with the word feminism.

The choice of which novel I read by each **Nobel Literature Laureate** is many times random, often times based on availability or

sometimes an English version. I realize later that it was most times the perfect choice. I would not have connected *Beloved* with the subject of feminism, but after reading **Morrison’s** quote, I am intrigued. I read *Beloved* several years ago. It is a haunting, vivid story about the aftermath of slavery and its impact on a woman. What enchanted me about the novel was the non-linearity of the story as it moved between reality and the nightmarish struggle between freedom and slavery embodied in the character *Beloved*. From the haunting created by the ghost of **Sethe’s** daughter, **Beloved**, to the appearance of the young woman named **Beloved**, the story weaves an elegant tale of the impact of slavery, choices, and freedom on one woman.

**Morrison** was born **Chloe Anthony Wofford** in 1931. From an early age, she loved to read and thus pursued her higher degrees in English. This laid down the groundwork for her career in teaching, editing and writing, punctuated with faculty positions at **Howard University, State University of New York, and University of Albany** and accented by an impressive list of writing awards.

In 1993 **Morrison** was the first African-American woman awarded the **Nobel Prize in Literature**. Her citation reads: **Toni Morrison**, “who in novels characterized by

visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality.” It’s as if this citation was written as part of a review of her novel, *Beloved*.

In 1998 a Biennial Conference Series began “to provide interdisciplinary study of **Morrison’s** work at geographic locations that have meaning in her life and works and that enhance our understanding of her fiction.” Two of the series locations are worth noting in this discussion: 1) In 2005, the Fourth Biennial, *Toni Morrison and Sites of Memory*, featured a tour of the plantation in Maplewood, Kentucky where **Margaret Garner**, whose life story inspired *Beloved*, was a slave; 2) the Fifth Biennial Conference, *Toni Morrison and Modernism*, was held in Charleston, South Carolina in 2008. During this conference the first bench of the Bench by the Road Project was placed on Sullivan’s Island, a major port of entry for enslaved Africans in North America. I read about this conference when it was here in Charleston. It would have been amazing to have been able to participate.

One last note — I discovered an Internet site that provides quotes from famous people. I will end with this quote from **Toni Morrison**: “I’m not entangled in shaping my work according to other people’s views of how I should have done it.” 🌿