

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
UNIVERZITY KARLOVY
V PRAZE



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

B.A. THESIS

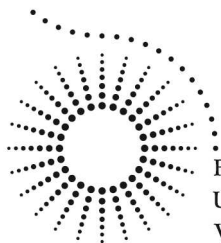
AMERICAN LITERATURE SPECIALISATION

Toni Morrison; Magical Realism Serving to Outline Cultural Experience

Kateřina Hůlková

Kateřina Hůlková's thesis contrasts Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) with two later texts, *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Beloved* (1987); her central argument is that while the "magic-free" text of *The Bluest Eye* provides a mere diagnosis of social ills, the supernatural elements in *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* point towards healing because they help the characters to "reveal and recreate their unique African-American identity" (8). In other words, it is argued that "by the application of magical realism, Morrison tries to re-humanize (to re-member) the black history by creating a picture different from and independent of the tendencies of the dominant culture regarding the depiction of African Americans and their slave ancestors" (5). In this way, the writer apparently manages to avoid two paths generally reserved for "minority writers": to glorify the previously vilified minority or to conform by accepting the standards of the mainstream (a goal outlined in Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*).

In my view the thesis is strong, although its strength is in separate insights rather than in the absolute persuasiveness of the central argument as it is not only magical realism that allows for the complexity of Morrison's world. For example, the character of Sethe counters both racist and anti-racist stereotypes, given the dilemmas regarding the murder of her child, and these ambiguities do emerge with the help of *Beloved*'s ghost, but is not the character of Cholly (and his rape of Pecola) in *The Bluest Eye* presented in a similar light—and without magic? Or, in *Song of Solomon*, supernatural elements provide alternative historical records, but do they not mythologize African-American struggles with racism? And what about magical realism in other works of Morrison, such as *Sula*, *Paradise* or *Love*?



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Leaving aside other smaller issues that I have mentioned to the student already—such as Ms. Hůlková’s relative disregard of African-American literature (“Morrison has no historical and literary annals to draw from, except those written by white people” [20]) or the fact that the third chapter mostly recapitulates the argument of the previous two—I think the thesis is well-researched, solidly written and worth an excellent grade (výborně). It raises many difficult questions and arguments that are repeatedly addressed by the critics of Morrison’s writing.

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June 12, 2011