

David Robbins, thesis opponent

M.A. thesis evaluation

Michaela Brzobohata

Community in Toni Morrison's Novels

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Though close reading and analysis of three of Toni Morrison's novels (*The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Paradise*), this thesis examines Ms. Morrison's evolving prescriptions for paideia (cultural medicine) by which African Americans in the U.S. can address various issues of cultural (and self-) marginalization.

In her thesis, Ms. Brzobohata addresses both the cultural diagnoses, remedies, and attitudes toward community presented in each novel, and the evolution of all three over the span of the novels' successive publication (1970, 1977, 1997)—respectively, rejection of white cultural hegemony; embracing of traditional African culture, traditions, and institutions; and adoption of ubiquitous racial, ethnic, and gender equality and diversity.

In the case of each of the three novels, Ms. Brzobohata presents a careful reading and interpretation of the characters, their attitudes and actions, and their socio-cultural context (their relation to the African-American and non-African-American *communities*, from which she draws the slightly misleading title of her thesis). Her analysis of all three is sensitive, plausible, and helpful to the reader in understanding both Toni Morrison's compositional art and the successive political-cultural agendas in service to which she puts that art.

The thesis begins with a chapter on community theory that substitutes imperfectly for a more precise and dedicated examination of the methodology that it will be employed in it. One wishes, at times, that a bit more explicit attention had been paid to outlining methodological paradigms and criteria, which might have helped to resolve some of the unclarities, gaps, and ambiguities in Ms. Brzobohata's explication, and which might also have allowed her to add more substance and conclusive resolution to her abbreviated and halting Conclusion. The thesis would probably have benefitted, as well, by a broader theoretical reach which extended beyond primarily African-American issues and provided more, more detailed, and more serious consideration of and comparison to, for example, post-colonial theory and the very different, but equally suggestive, work on construction of community done by Benedict Anderson (the latter of which Ms. Brzobohata touches upon but dismisses too facilely and too soon).

One might have also liked to see some acknowledgment that many of the ideas and recognition of the problems of community deployed by Morrison were (as is often the case with her work) deeply embedded in the American cultural paradigm and had received sophisticated attention previously from American cultural critics such as Emerson, W.E.B. DuBois, and James Baldwin, among others.

All of this said, the literary, character, plot, textual, and issue analysis in the three principal chapters (on the respective novels) is thoughtful, skillful, and reliable—in short, exemplary. The real substance and value of the thesis lies in these chapters, and so, despite the occasional shortcomings to be found

elsewhere within it, I believe that, overall, it is to be judged closer to "1, vyborne" than to "2, velmi dobre."

Thesis evaluation: "1-, closer to 1, vyborne, than to 2, velmi dobre."

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at drobbins22@netzero.net.