



Conversations with Toni Morrison

Danielle K. Taylor-Guthrie (Editor)

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Without apology Nobel Prize author Toni Morrison describes herself as an African-American woman writer. These collected interviews reveal her to be much more. She has shared space in her creative life for her career in publishing, in teaching, and in being a single parent. Writing, however, is one thing she "refuses to live without." These interviews beginning in 1974 reveal an artist whose creativity is intimately linked with her African-American experience and is fueled by cultural and societal concerns. For twenty years she has created unforgettable characters in her acclaimed novels - The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, Beloved, and Jazz. Morrison tells her interviewers that her goal as a writer is to present African-American life not as sociology but in the full range of its depth, magic, and humanity. "I want my work to capture the vast imagination of black people," she says. "That is, I want my books to reflect the imaginative combination of the real world, the very practical, shrewd, day-to-day functioning that black people do, while at the same time they encompass some great supernatural element." Though the scope and the magnitude of her art have brought her international acclaim, even some of her most ardent admirers have viewed her fiction mainly with a focus on class, race, and gender. In these interviews, however, she addresses the artist's concern with moral vision and with a resistance to critical attitudes that categorize black writing largely as sociology. From these interviews comes a greater understanding of Toni Morrison's purpose and the theme of love that streams through her fiction.

Conversations with Toni Morrison Details

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Salimah says

I felt that this book, more than any other, cemented my desire to become a professor of literature. Through this series of interviews with the author, I developed a real philosophy of literature.

Judy says

She is simply amazing! A must read for aspiring writers.

Demetria says

Toni Morrison is a genius. We all know this. This book is evidence that she is in fact a super genius. The interviews in this book are amazing and enlightening. I keep a scrapbook of great sentences from great works as well as bits of writerly advice. This book has given me a number of things to add to my scrapbook. Morrison talks about her writing process and how she loves the act of revising her work. She says she likes to re-work things until the "seams don't show." Stand-out interviews in the book are those by Marsha Darling--which includes great info on my favorite Morrison book, Beloved-- and the interview by the incomparable Bill Moyers.

One interview that stands out in a bad way is the 1979 interview conducted by Collete Dowling. Dowling clearly does not like Morrison as a person and she has these very brutal and strange observations throughout the piece. For example: "She will often put on an act in conversation, she might suddenly 'get down' and be very chicken-and-ribs, sucking her teeth, poking a finger into her scalp and scratching--a strange, primitive gesture that makes her hairdo rock back and forth on her scalp like a wig." What? Primitive? *sigh* Everything about that is just wrong and mean-spirited and just ugh.

Besides that odd interview, the book is quite good and something I would recommend to any Toni Morrison fan.

Brooke says

Perfect.

Nkcubeko says

This is an excellent meditation on the novels of Toni Morrison, her literary work and she, herself. Barred of academic discourse flying from page to the next, this books consists of numerous interviews between

Morrison and interviewers who manage to, holding the reader's hand, enter her realm. It enlightens on the themes in Morrison's language and the meanings she tries to convey. It also gives her a beautiful, almost beastly voice to say what her work is amidst what is said in literary criticism. Reading this I could nearly picture her, gracefully on a green couch with a cup of tea before her, looking out at the window and telling me why Song of Solomon was written for me, a young black person.

Salvatore says

Things I learned:

- *Toni Morrison is prickly. And if she doesn't like a question, she damn well won't answer it.
- *All stories come from a question. Makes sense. But an author must 'bear witness'. I like that.
- *Toni doesn't write for you, she writes for her characters. It's what they want to read. And above all, she writes what she (Toni) wants to read.
- *She won't talk about her marriage, which ended in divorce. So don't ask her.
- *She doesn't wine and dine people. The 70s-80s were about raising children and writing when she could. That's that.
- *Toni won't write when she doesn't feel like writing. If that means a couple of months go by without writing a word, so be it.
- *When she feels like writing, she'll drop everything.

Interesting and encouraging read, and I do feel like I learned a bit about the author - her writing, style, inspirations, and life.

BlackBookie says

Provides superb insight into the processes of writing, imagination and thematic properties in the world of Toni Morrison. Some text was a bit redundant but that's just the nature of the book.

Would read again.

Dana says

Toni is wise and knowledgeable, so for the most part I enjoy her interviews. The problem is that interviewers ask the same questions and write the same information repeatedly like it's an original idea or necessary. Therefore, this book is very repetitive and around page 170 becomes unbearable. It was torturous getting through all 287 pages and I do admit I very ineffectively skimmed the last 100 or so pages, but on the positive side I got some really good quotes from the first 130 or so pages and Toni made me think and reflect. One of my favorite interviews in the book is Toni Morrison by Charles Ruas on pages 93-118. Toni talks about a lot of relevant cultural topics and is very enlightening and honest.
