

RESPONSES TO TONI MORRISON'S OEUVRE IN SLOVENIA

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Abstract

Toni Morrison, the first African American female winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, is certainly one of the modern artists whose novels have entered the world's modern literary canon. She is one of the most read novelists in the United States, where all of her novels have been bestsellers. However, only *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* have so far been translated into Slovene. There have been several articles or essays written on Toni Morrison but most of them are simply translations of English articles; the only exception is a study by Jerneja Petrič.

This paper presents the Slovene translation of *Song of Solomon* by Jože Stabej and the articles written on Toni Morrison by Slovene critics. Jože Stabej is so far the only Slovene translator who has translated Toni Morrison. The author of this article uses some Slovene translations from the novel in comparison to the original to show the main differences appearing because of different grammatical structures of both languages and differences in the two cultures. The articles by Slovene critics are primarily résumés or translations of English originals and have been mainly published in magazines specializing in literature.

Jože Stabej is the only Slovene translator of Toni Morrison's work. Morrison's third novel *Song of Solomon* was translated as *Salomonova pesem*. Regarding the possibilities offered by English vocabulary and grammar in comparison to the Slovene language, Stabej's translation mostly corresponds to the original. If characteristics of the Slovene language do not offer the possibility of identical translation or if the translation is important to understand the idea, the translation does not correspond to Morrison's version. Such is the case already in the dedication »Daddy« at the beginning of the novel where Toni Morrison leaves out the word »for« or »to« typical in a dedication. Because of the endings indicating the grammatical case, such a dedication would sound wrong in Slovene. That is why it is necessary to decline the word »očka«, so that the dedication reads »Očku« (»To Daddy«). But for Slovene readers this is a typical dedication and it is not easy to recognize other ideas hidden in the English dedication. If in English the word »for« or »to« is left out, readers might wonder why that is so. Toni Morrison tries to show the formation of manhood in relation to fatherhood that is not noticeable in »Očku«. Anyway, the epigram following the dedication calls the reader's attention to the central themes of the novel in both languages:

The fathers may soar
And the children may know their names (Morrison 2)

Očetje naj letijo
In otroci naj poznajo njihova imena (Stabej 1)

The translations of some personal names are very interesting. Toni Morrison ascribes a great importance to the names of the main characters, namely they have a certain connection to or meaning for the lives of the characters. Names, which are important for the understanding of the novel, have been translated into Slovene, others remain unchanged: Milkman – Mlekar, Guitar – Kitara, Empire State – Nebotičnik, Moon – Mesec, Railroad Tommy – Železničar Tommy, Hospital Tommy – Bolničar Tommy. There are some other important characters whose names have not been translated even though the meaning of their names is crucial for the development of the narrative. In such cases Jože Stabej gives an extra explanation of the names, such as First Corinthians – »Prvi list Korinčanom v novi zavezi biblije.« (First Corinthians in the New Testament of the Bible) or Pilate – »Pilāt, ki je ubil Kristusa« (Pilate, who killed Christ). The note to the name Sing does not appear until Milkman realizes that his grandfather's ghost wanted to tell Pilate the name of his wife and not to »sing«. The name Macon Dead has not been changed but it has a Slovene translation »Mrtev« attached to the original because the meaning of the word »dead« is of great importance in this case. The same rules were accepted for the geographical names – important ones have been translated (No Mercy Hospital – Bolnišnica brez usmiljenja, Lincoln's Heaven – Lincolnova nebesa, Solomon's Leap – Salomonov skok etc.). I would like to draw attention to the place called Shalleemone where Jože Stabej uses the phonetic transcription of the name (»Šelimon«). It is important for the reader to hear the similarity between the personal name Solomon and the pronounced Shalleemone.

A problematic issue for the translator were certainly African American and English colloquial words, expressions and phrases where Jože Stabej used Slovene dialects or looked for the most suitable word, expression or phrase in Slovene. Here are some examples: »Oh, Lord.« - »Sveta nebesa.«, »cake« - »potica«, »right alongside« - »čisto vštric«, »itty bitty teeny tiny tub« - »male micene drobne drobčkane banje«, »backwoods« - »rovte«, »I was broke as a haint.« - »Bila sem revna kot cerkvena miš.«, »Mr. Tommy, suh« - »Mr. Tommy, gspud«, »healer, deliverer« - »padarka, babica«, »storming Pilate« - »furjasta Pilate«, »Y of a sycamore« - »vereja sikomore« etc.

Toni Morrison's novels deal mainly with African American mythology, culture, and life; in short, with a world that is less familiar to a Slovene reader. Nevertheless, in Stabej's translation there are no additional explanations about their culture, mythology or way of life. The fact is that such information is given throughout the original text. However, it is questionable whether that is enough for a Slovene reader who has not experienced discrimination in a way the citizens of the United States did. The most important myth is without any doubt the myth of flying Africans which forms the central song of the novel and deals with Solomon's flight to freedom. There have been made some changes in the translation by Jože Stabej but they do not effect the meaning of the whole song:

Jake the only son of Solomon
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Whirled about and touched the sun
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee

Left the baby in a white man's house
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Heddy took him to a red man's house
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee

Black lady fell down on the ground
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Threw her body all around
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee

Solomon and Ryna Belali Shalut
Yaruba Medina Muhammet too.
Nestor Kalina Saraka cake.
Twenty-one children, the last one Jake!

O Solomon don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
O Solomon don't leave me here
Buckra's arms to yoke me

Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon
Gone home.

Jake, edini Salomonov sin,
daj buba jale, daj buba tambi,
vrti se in sonce prim',
daj konka jale, daj konka tambi.

Spusti otroka v belo hišo,
daj buba jale, daj buba tambi,
vzame ga Heddy v rdečo hišo,
daj konka jale, daj konka tambi.

Je črna ženska na tla pala,
daj buba jale, daj buba tambi,
telo okrog je razmetala,
daj konka jale, daj konka tambi.

Salomon in Ryna Belali Šalu
Jaruba Medina Mahomet tu.
Nestor Kalina Saraka cake.
cel kup otrok in zadnji Jake!

O, Salomon, ne pusti me tukaj,
kjer me bombaž duši,
O, Salomon, ne pusti me tukaj,
me belec k tlom tišči.

Salomon ne zleti, Salomon, ne hodi,
Salomon, nebo presekaj, Salomon
ostani.

(Morrison 303)

(Stabej 312)

As a whole the song can be considered as a rather identical translation of the original song, so that even a Slovene reader gets to know the legendary song about Solomon, the flying African. Differences in the translation, which mostly do not have an effect on the meaning of the song, have been made because of certain characteristics of the song. The first line of the second stanza »Left that baby in a white man's house« has been translated as »Spusti otroka v belo hišo«. Such translation is acceptable because the reader is aware of the fact that Solomon threw his son Jake in front of the house where white people lived. The reiteration of »Come booba yalle, come booba tambee« and »Come konka yalle, come konka tambee« in the first three stanzas have been left almost unchanged. Jože Stabej used the pronounced transcription of African words which even the English are not familiar with. The names of Solomon's children are transcribed in the same way. The translator even decided to use two English words for the sake of the rhyme – »cake« is »cake« and »too« is simply written in a Slovene way (»tu«). The last line of the fifth stanza sounds completely different in Slovene but the idea of slavery is recognizable even in the translation – »Buckra's arms to yoke me« - »me belec k tlom tišči«. In the last stanza there is an African American expres-

sion »done« meaning »don't« that is impossible to translate into Slovene, so Jože Stabej used the words which best suited the meaning of the last two lines.

If we read through the English original and the Slovene version of the novel, we can have a look at some fragments dealing with some African myths and legends or racial issues. There is a great deal of such fragments, so I would like to present those where the Slovene translations are rather interesting in comparison to the English ones. First there is the case where Guitar makes a white nurse aware of the mistake she made spelling the word:

»...It will say 'Emergency Admissions' on the door. A-D-M-I-S-I-O-N-S.«

...

»You left out a s, ma'am,« the boy said. (Morrison 7)

»Na vratih bo pisalo 'Nujni primeri.' P-R-M-E-R-I.«

...

»Izpustili ste i, gospa,« je rekel deček. (Stabej 13)

In comparison to her brother Macon Dead Pilate is not ashamed of her African roots and there is a revealing description of her appearance which shows a typical African American woman and has a great aesthetic value in English as well as in Slovene:

Her lips were darker than her skin, wine-stained, blueberry-dyed, so her face had a cosmetic look – as though she had applied a very dark lipstick neatly and blotted away its shine on a scarp of newspaper. (Morrison 30)

Njene ustnice so bile temnejše kot koža, popackane z vinom, take barve kot robidnice, tako da je bil njen obraz kot naličen – kot bi se bila skrbno namazala z zelo temnim ličilom, potem pa njegov lesk popivnala s kosom časopisnega papirja. (Stabej 36)

The cruel murder of Emmett Till is one of the historical examples of fierce discrimination:

A young Negro boy had been found stomped to death in Sunflower County, Mississippi. There were no questions about who stomped him – his murderers had boasted freely – and there were no questions about the motive. The boy had whistled at some white woman, refused to deny he had slept with others, and was a Northerner visiting the South. His name was Till. (Morrison 80)

V okrožju Sunflower v Missisippiju so našli mladega črnega dečka, poteptanega do smrti. O tem, kdo ga je poteptal, ni bilo nobenih vprašanj – njegovi morilci so se odkrito bahali – in tudi o njihovem nagibu ni bilo nobenih vprašanj. Deček je zažvižgal za neko belko, ni hotel zanikati, da je že spal z drugimi, in je bil severnjak na obisku na Jugu. Pisal se je Till. (Stabej 86)

Superstition and magic potions are parts of African culture. A reader can witness how Pilate prepares a special potion for Macon Dead and gives it to Ruth, so that she can seduce him into her bed.

»She gave me funny things to do. And some greenish-gray grassy-looking stuff to put in his food.« Ruth laughed. »I felt like a doctor, like a chemist doing some big important scientific experiment. It worked too.« (Morrison 125)

»Naročila mi je, naj počenjam hecne reči. Dala mi je nekakšno zelenkasto sivo, steklasto stvar, da sem mu jo dajala v hrano.« Ruth se je zasmejala. »Počutila sem se kot zdravnik, kot kemik, ki opravlja kak velik, važen znanstven poskus. Tudi delala sem.« (Stabej 131)

When Milkman has a conversation with the priest Cooper he realizes the truth about the lives of African American people in the south. They have been dying under the hands of white people but nobody wants to take the responsibility for their murders. The sentence »Besides, the people what did it owned half the county.« has been translated grammatically correct, which is not necessary in this case because Toni Morrison uses here the colloquial language of African American people and not standard English here.

»...White folks didn't care, colored folks didn't dare. Wasn't no police like now. Now we got a county sheriff handles things. Not then. Then the circuit judge came through just once or twice a year. Besides, the people what did it owned half the county. Macon's land was in their way. Folks just was thankful the children escaped.« (Morrison 232)

»...Belcem je bilo vseeno, črnici si niso upali. Ni bilo policije kot zdaj. Zdaj imamo okrajnega šerifa, ki ureja stvari. Takrat pa ne. Takrat se je po enkrat, dvakrat na leto oglasil okrožni sodnik. Poleg tega so bili ljudje, ki so to naredili, lastniki pol okraja. Maconova zemlja jim je bila napoti. Ljudje so bili samo hvaležni, da sta otroka ušla.« (Stabej 240)

It is an African American tradition to sing at funerals. Pilate and Reba sing for their Hagar. Especially interesting is the translation of the part of the lullaby they sing. »Sweet sugar lumpkin« has been translated as »sladkorček«. Instead of three words just one word has been used, and what is even more noticeable is that the alliteration in »sweet sugar« is lost in the translation.

At the end of the novel Jože Stabej probably faced some difficulties translating the final conversation between Guitar and Milkman. The last syllables of the words are echoes of the sentences they shout. The change of Guitar's name into »Kitara« results in the change of key words in the translation, but nevertheless providing an adequate impression.

»Guitar!« he shouted.

Tar tar tar, said the hills.

»Over here, brother man! Can you see me?« Milkman cupped his mouth with one hand and waved the other over his head. »Here I am!«

Am am am am, said the rocks.

»You want me? Huh? You want my life?«

Life life life life. (Morrison 337)

»Kitara!« je zakričal.

Tara tara tara, so rekli hribi.

»Tu sem, brat! Me vidiš?« Mlekar si je eno roko nastavil k ustom, z drugo pa mahal nad glavo. »Tu sem!«

Sem sem sem sem, je reklo skalovje.

»Me hočeš? Ha? Hočeš, naj ne bom več živ?«

Živ živ živ živ. (Stabej 345-346)

Translating the novel was surely not an easy task because the original contains many words, expressions and phrases dealing with African culture and society and it is not easy to present their culture and society to a Slovene reader who faces a completely different culture and society. However, the translator mostly succeeded in his attention and added some additional notes if necessary, so that a Slovene reader does not feel lost reading the novel. But if one really wants to become acquainted with the world of African American people, one should read the original.

As I have already mentioned there have been some translations of foreign essays on Toni Morrison or short summaries of her novels in Slovenia. There are few among Slovene authors who responded critically to the oeuvre of that African American novelist who does not receive as much attention in Slovenia as in the United States. Her real value has been recognized by Jerneja Petrič, who was the first to write extensively and critically about the novelist. One of the reasons is probably the fact that just two of her novels have been translated.

In 1991 the translation of *Beloved* was just to be published and Janez Krek reacted to that in his essays »Ni ženskih izjav« (»There are no female statements«). (*Eseji – Problemi* 145) He proceeds from the expression »woman's perspective« which has often been used when talking about Toni Morrison. As examples he presents two fragments from *Beloved* written from the perspective of Paul D. and wonders how a certain desire can be registered as feminine. Dealing with the Paul D. fragments the critic realizes that womanliness cannot be characterized by the content but by the difference towards manhood, that is the feminine in a certain culture can be restored only in the difference towards the masculine. According to that there are no natural feminine statements but there are masculine ones. The latter are natural statements and the former are the artificial ones. On the other hand a certain statement becomes masculine only when faced with the statement registered on the feminine side. At the end the critic stresses that statements would not be deemed either masculine or feminine, if we did not define human beings according to gender. Krek's essay is an interesting reading but I cannot completely agree with him. We have been defining gender for centuries but why should something feminine be characterized by the difference towards masculine – perhaps it is vice versa. Something feminine can exist without the presence of something masculine too and vice versa. So we cannot claim that a feminine statement is an artificial one because it derives from the masculine one which is natural. In a way Janez Krek acknowledges - perhaps even speaks in favour of – the

danger which Toni Morrison tries to warn us of in her writings and wants to change it, that is the double determination of African American women (because of race and gender). The author of the article meditates upon possibility of existing of something feminine without something masculine. His meditations are based on the fragments dealing with Paul D. from *Beloved*. In my opinion, he speaks in favour of masculine statements which are - according to him - rarely used by Toni Morrison.

In the monthly magazine for literature *Mentor* Nataša Hrastnik deals with the modern African American female authors Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Gayl Jones. Their special position in American society, defined by race and gender, is what they have in common. In their works they deal with old racial themes using new and fresh techniques. They portray African American women in their conflicts and relationships with their men and children breaking in pieces the old stereotype of an African American woman who is a fat, stupid housewife or an object of sexual abuse. Their heroines are usually lonely, vulnerable and victimized, especially if they move to the industrial North where they have to fight for their human dignity. They try to find their identity which differs from the one that American society imposes on them. The first part of the article is about Toni Morrison and it presents short summaries and fragments from the novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*. The author points out that Morrison's novels explore the relationship between an individual and society, good and evil, American and African culture stressing spirituality, religion and family history. Especially in *Song of Solomon* one can face the fact that culture, tradition and the past exist - you just have to admit that. The salvation for the African American identity lies in creating new cultures and considering the existing folklore. Nataša Hrastnik points out the importance of ancestors for the spiritual development of the characters because being linked with ancestors means being linked with the past that gives you a certain cultural identity. The article is a general description of African American female literature resting mainly on two novels of Toni Morrison. The author does not develop any new ideas about Morrison's work - she just sums up what is already familiar.

When in 1993 Toni Morrison received the Nobel Prize for Literature as the first African American female, Mitja Meršol published the article »Črno, žensko in doživeto - vrednote, ki osvobajajo« (»Black, female and experienced - values that liberate«) (*Delo* 5) in Slovenia's most read daily, *Delo*. Most of the article deals with the events of the day she received the prize and Toni Morrison's feelings. She was happy that her mother lived to see her receive the Nobel Prize. She sees herself as a woman from Ohio, New York and New Jersey; she sees herself as an African American woman as well and everyone should share the happiness with her. Her wish is also to share the joy with all these places, countries, people, nationalities and races. At the end she adds that to her as an American the prize means a lot, but for her as an African American the prize is a real knock out. In the second part of the article the author presents the Nobel Prize winner's life and closes the article with the quotation from *Song of Solomon* describing Hagar's African passion. If we compare Meršol's article to Krek's, we can notice that Mitja Meršol speaks about the values that liberate (values of females and black people) and are not dependent on anything else, especially not on the masculine - as Janez Krek claims in his article. Toni Morrison's statement that she is an

African as well as American and that she is aware of her role in the American society is rather surprising because the American society still refers to coloured authors as »African American« and not »American«. The author of the article reports about the first African American female to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Instead of writing about her work he only sums up her feelings and quotes an extract from *Song of Solomon*.

In November 1993 most of magazine *Literatura* was dedicated to the Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison but again the articles were just the translations of the English originals. It starts with the translation of the fragment from Morrison's sixth novel *Jazz* which was translated by Jože Stabej. (*Literatura* 61-66) What follows is the article »Dediščina: Prednik kot načelo« (»Legacy: Ancestor as principle«) whose author is Toni Morrison herself and the translator is Boštjan Leiler, who adapted the article from Mari Evans's book *Black Women Writers (1950-1980). A Critical Evaluation*. Toni Morrison explains in the article that the novel enlightens people about how to react in new situations and that autobiography gives an author a chance to become a representative of their generation. Music is very important in the lives of African American people but today's African American music is only a variety of modern music, so Toni Morrison believes that a novel is what African American people need nowadays. Reading a novel should have the same effect as the sermon of an African American preacher who stimulates his believers to speak up, participate, open up, cry out the pain, change and adapt. Toni Morrison points out the importance of reader's participation, the presence of ancestors and an omniscient narrator. This attention was best expressed in *Song of Solomon*. She concludes that estimating African American literature without considering men is as deficient as estimating it without considering women.

Nataša Hrastnik translated and arranged Bill Moyers's interview with Toni Morrison which was published in his book of interviews *A World of Ideas II*. They discuss race and class. There used to be no discussion about race, so it remained beyond the literary world. When Toni Morrison writes about African American people she never defines the race. She pushes them to the limits to see what they are made of. Her characters usually win because of love which can sometimes be too strong or even scary. It is important to make somebody else feel good but there is a danger to become a martyr. Toni Morrison starts writing a novel if she is not familiar with something. To her all novels are questions. In *Tar Baby* she was asking herself what the problem was with a couple that loved each other but were of different cultures. When she strated *Beloved* she was wondering about motherhood.

The chapter about Toni Morrison ends with the article written by Barbara Christian which has been translated by Katarina Jerin and was presented in Slovene under the title »Skupnost in narava: romani Toni Morrison« (»Community and nature: Toni Morrison's novels«). The author deals with the meaning of nature and community for the characters in Toni Morrison's novels. Nature helps Morrison's characters realize themselves. Even blood relationships and characters' relationships towards their community help them realize the fact. In Toni Morrison's worlds family relationships exist within dreams, legends and the subconsciousness of their inhabitants, where the soil participates in saving folk tradition. African American people moved from the agrar-

ian South to the industrial North and now they have to learn how to survive on the ground which does not offer enough for their tradition to be saved. To make these statements plausible, Barbara Christian uses some examples from Morrison's first three novels – *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*. All three novels include a consistent vision of the strong desire of human beings to be a part of nature but yet different. Morrison's characters have an instinctive wish to be fertile like soil, fluent like water, alive like fire and free like air. Unfortunately they live within the societies which are based on distinguishing among their members. These last three articles are translations of English articles presenting ideas about Toni Morrison's work as seen by Mari Evans, Bill Moyers and Barbara Christian. Nevertheless, the presented ideas are important for the understanding of Morrison's novels, so they needed to be translated into Slovene.

The newspaper for art, society and humanities *Razgledi* published on 12 November 1993 the critique »Afroameriška ženska literatura?« (»African American female literature?«) by Ženja Leiler (*Razgledi* 45). The occasion was the publication of the translation of *Beloved* in the so called *Collection of the 20th Century*. In her article Ženja Leiler ascribes to the novel the mastery of writing containing magical epic, long and mysterious passages, numerous magic, mystical, ethnic, ethnological and realistic elements which are used by its author to create a bleak and empty world on one side and fresh and colourful world on the other. Ženja Leiler also discusses the problem of the seventies when the Americans brought up the literature of marginal groups. If it is about the literature of African American people, Americans use the word »African« because their humanistic science can accept only the literature written by white people as their own. She stresses that the novel is mostly about the inferiority of women, which is common to all races. She realizes that life is incomprehensibly difficult and it becomes easier if we are prepared to put our stories and stories of other people side by side. What bothers her is the fact that we live in the 21st century and we are still not able to accept differences. The promised land with its democracy is not yet prepared to put its story and the story of African American people side by side and combine them into one story – the American one. The author writes critically about *Beloved* and points out some facts about the society nowadays which is yet not prepared to accept differences. She mainly discusses the differences between men and women. She is as well very critical towards American people who still have certain prejudices about everything that is African American.

Two pages of the 24th number of *Razgledi* (24 December 1993) were dedicated to Toni Morrison's oeuvre. There is the translation by Jože Stabej from Morrison's novel *Jazz* which is followed by the article »Kontrapunkt jezika« (»Counterpoint of language«) by Nataša Hrastnik. The occasion was awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to Toni Morrison. The prize does not surprise the author of the article because Toni Morrison is one of the key American novelists who managed to capture the beat of the times. Nataša Hrastnik presents Toni Morrison's life and work, which above all includes an African American woman. Her novels seek out and put together the pieces of the mosaic of African American identity. Worlds, inhabited by her characters, are usually bizarre and suppressed, wrapped up in the folk wisdom of African American communities. Like many other critics whom I mentioned, Nataša Hrastnik stresses the

importance of ancestors as well and writes about the narrative process where Toni Morrison leaves empty spaces, uses call-and-response technique, slave spiritual songs and in writing she leaves enough space for imagination and reader's emotions. The language she uses has its own magic power and it is the way for African American people to fight against the supremacy of white people. The experience of black slavery and suffering is used as a metaphor for all human experience. Nataša Hrastnik closes her article with Toni Morrison's words: »Art is political, artists are politicians. I write village literature for my tribe which loses its culture in this urban world.« (35) The article is an overall of Morrison's work and repeats so far known ideas about the Nobel Prize winner.

In 1998 Toni Morrison published her seventh novel *Paradise*. Miriam Drev reacted to the event and published her article »Zaseda v raj« (»Ambush in paradise«) in the daily *Delo* (30 December 1998). The novel is set in 1976 in the town called Ruby, in Oklahoma. The men of Ruby attack the Monastery inhabited by women who have been a thorn in their side for a long time. Witchhunt is just one of many themes in this multi-layered text where people in an isolated district want to recreate the biblical paradise idyll. In certain parts of the novel Miriam Drev sees the elements of a thriller that in spite of the book title places a reader on realistic ground. The town of Ruby was patterned on the all-black towns which were flourishing after 1890 and in the twenties and thirties of the 20th century. These towns were faithful to the tradition and religion and distrustful of anyone or anything that time could bring. Already at the beginning of the novel a reader finds out that the shot woman is a white woman and it is obvious that the novel is going to deal with the race problem. Toni Morrison presents the forms of intolerance between races and within one single race. Nevertheless, all characters are personalities with human virtues and frailties because the author wishes to stress human nature and not race. The language used in the novel is full of religious vocabulary and opens the question about the influence of religious images on the lives of people. At the end of *Paradise* a reader realizes why the attackers perform their actions. Throughout the novel a reader gets familiar with many historical facts as well. All the same, some things are left untold and left to be interpreted by a reader. Even if Miriam Drev's article is more or less only a summary of the novel, we can see the light in the fact that Slovene newspapers immediately reacted to Toni Morrison's new novel. Being aware of the fact that the Nobel Prize winner is still active and creative can encourage someone to start reading her novels. Although Miriam Drev's article is only a summary of the novel, it was at the time necessary to write about the novel because it was a new creation of Toni Morrison and it needed a presentation among Slovene readers.

In 2001 the student newspaper *Spekter* gave a short presentation of *Beloved* even though the novel has been on the market for quite some time. This might not be surprising because there are some, but unfortunately not many, schools in Slovenia where *Beloved* is discussed. The author Špela Debenak stresses the importance of Toni Morrison as one of the major literary figures in modern United States. She deals with already familiar facts about the novel. The novel is set in the time of reconstruction (the sixties and the seventies of the 19th century). Using mystical elements and symbols it turns out to be a poetically and lyrically colourful novel. The novel resumes

the motive of Medea's childkilling which is retrospectively presented through Sethe. Almost the whole novel takes place in house 124, which is inhabited by Sethe and her daughter Denver, who are later on joined by the ghost of the dead Sethe's child named Beloved. She demands her mother's love that she did not get at all. The whole novel points out the feminine concept of life – it presents the story of the life of an African American woman who constantly fights to restore her identity in a society where she is determined by gender and race. Špela Debenak claims that African roots, African ancestors and African legacy form the world by itself where a foot of a white man is not allowed to step because it is overly burdened with rational thinking. Špela Debenak characterizes Toni Morrison as one of the key American literary figures. She undoubtedly deserves the title, although she used to be called an African American author. I agree with Debenak's last statement as well: The white world is obsessed by rationalizing everything it exists and that is why it cannot comprehend the African culture which does not question the existence of their myths and legends. For them myths and legends are a part of their lives and they draw the power for living from them. The author of the article sums up familiar facts about *Beloved* although this might not be interesting after the novel has been on the market for 14 years. But since *Spekter* is a student newspaper some students might find some interesting and perhaps new facts about Toni Morrison and her novel.

The literary theory *Ameriška proza: od realizma do postmodernizma*, edited by Mirko Jurak and Jerneja Petrič and published in 2001, includes the essay »Starodavno izročilo v zgodnjih romanih Toni Morrison: *Sula* in *Song of Solomon*« (»Ancient tradition in the early novels of Toni Morrison: *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*«) written by Jerneja Petrič and deals mostly with mythology and the naming of characters and places in both novels. She points out that in her novels Toni Morrison delivers the history of African American people using magic realism and deriving the history from the oral heritage of her people that she has been carrying in her mind since her childhood. Jerneja Petrič ascribes the theme of invisibility especially of African American women, who have to find their ways in a male and patriarchal society, to the influence of Ralph Ellison. She makes a connection between Sula Peace and Roman general and dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla because in a male society Sula is forced to fight against being marked by her gender. The surname of Peace women suggests the opposite of the way they live their lives and fight their war. In contrast, Sula's best friend Nel carries the surname Wright which is pronounced the same as »right« and denotes Nel's life story because she adapts herself to the norms of society. The author of the essay notices that almost every name in the novel carries a symbolic meaning or it is an allusion to the Bible or classical myth – e. g. Shadrack's namesake was a Jewish prisoner in Babylon who was thrown in a burning stove and came out unharmed; in Ancient mythology Kasandra was only a sexual object to Ajax who then cast her off. Narrative tension is created by entangling the meanings in figurative sense and by reversing things, like a case of the village called Bottom. The same phenomenon can be seen in *Song of Solomon*, in Ruth's case, whose name means »beloved« in Hebrew. Nevertheless, she is not loved by her husband and even her children are usually humiliated or hurt. Even geographical names (e. g. Not Doctor Street or No Mercy Hospital) are ironic language swings. Jerneja Petrič discusses the African American myth

about flying which is the *leitmotiv* in the novel. In Toni Morrison's novels the world of African American people is presented in contradiction between war and peace. Milkman, who is leading the war against himself and his society, can find peace only if he returns to his origins – he comes the closest to this with Pilate, the flying woman, the one who was born into Solomon's house. Pilate can find her peace only when she buries her father's bones on Solomon's Leap. Both of them are able to believe in that part of the myth that is about flying and because of that they are the only ones in the novel who finally find their peace. This is not the only contrast in the novel – there is one between the North and the South that represent the present and the past; the other can be found in Macon and Pilate who are two contrary poles of one personality. The author of the essay closes her discussion with the following idea: Toni Morrison believes in mobility and thinks of people who insist on the old tradition being lost. Both novels arouse an idea which is usually central to Ernest Hemingway's novels and that is that a human being cannot escape their responsibilities, whatever they might be. The author of the article concentrates only on *Sula* and *Song of Solomon* where she points out the ancient tradition as presented in the two novels. There are certainly some ideas that have so far not been presented considering Toni Morrison's novels. Her article is certainly an important contribution to the Slovene literary critical work.

Responses to Toni Morrison's oeuvre among Slovene literary public are rather weak, especially if we keep in mind that she is the first African American female Nobel Prize winner for Literature and not just one of many authors on the market. Jerneja Petrič stresses clearly the aesthetic value of Morrison's novels, as is shown by her essay's introduction of facts that have never been discussed in other authors' critiques. Except for parts of the articles written by Janez Krek, Mitja Meršol and Ženja Leiler, other articles are simply summaries of Morrison's novels and translations of other critics. But on the other hand such summaries and translations are necessary for Slovene readers because there are just few individuals who are aware of Toni Morrison's artistic grandeur. The purpose of such critiques is in this case questionable; after all how can readers understand critiques if they do not know what they refer to? What is the reason for this lack of awareness of Toni Morrison's work? Perhaps the problem lies within the syllabus for the lessons of Slovene where pupils, among other things, get in touch with literature. Observing the work of my Slovene teacher colleagues I noticed that the authors of »non-white« races are usually not discussed. I am sure that many pupils would rather read a novel by Toni Morrison than a certain book they have to read. In this way we could develop a culture of reading – pupils would read what they like and not what they have to. But how could a pupil know who Toni Morrison is, if even in one of the biggest national libraries librarians do not know whether Toni Morrison is a she or a he? The solution might lie within the syllabus itself – it could be slightly changed, e. g. the Nobel Prize winners would be one of the themes; the extracts from her novels could be read during English lessons. One cannot even find anything about Toni Morrison on the Slovene internet pages. Many people fight against nationalism and racism, but unfortunately there are still some who refuse everything that is different. If we continue this fight, perhaps one day we could speak of one nation.

Velenje

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- Note: the article is based on the author's M.A. thesis, which was supervised by Professor Mirko Jurak.