

Toni Morrison was born in 1931 as Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio. She studied at Howard University and later at Cornell. She worked as an English teacher, but in 1965 she became a senior editor at the Random House. Thanks to her, many African American works were published. As Henry Louis Gates observes, as a writer, Morrison was influenced by the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and by William Faulkner. Morrison published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970. *Sula* was published in 1974, followed by *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), and *Beloved* in 1987. In 1993, Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, becoming the first African American woman to win the prize.<sup>1</sup>

Morrison continues to publish until the present day; her most recent works include *Paradise*, *Love*, and *A Mercy*.

When putting Morrison's work into a wider context, we have to consider the difficulties of African American self-expression in literature. According to Barbara Christian, in the 1970s and 1980s, the time Morrison published most of her novels, African American women writers undertook an exploration of their history and community. They were finally able to express what the previous generations were not, as they were permitted to express themselves in limited ways, due to racism and sexism. Starting with Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* (1953), we can observe a certain shift in the fiction of Afro-American women writers, who began to put more emphasis on the process of self-definition. By the mid-seventies, as Christian further claims, writers like Paule Marshall, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, and Gayl Jones had defined their cultural context as a distinctively Afro-American one, and they were able to point out to the problems of racism and sexism in black communities.