

Perhaps English departments (traditionally among the largest, if not *the* largest, on almost every campus) might consider splitting into three separate departments offering three different terminal degrees. (A fourth division, cultural studies, is sometimes cited. However, I do not think that a fuzzy line between cultural and literary studies ought to be drawn, since art has social and political effects that cannot be ignored.) Literary scholars would continue to offer the PhD. Creative writers would grant the MFA. A novel or a collection of poems for the PhD has always been oxymoronic, since such works offer no training in the scholarly rigors associated with the traditional dissertation. Moreover, instead of wasting years in cultivating those skills, creative writers might better leave the university and get on with their writing. Finally, specialists in the teaching of composition would offer the EdD and perhaps move from the college of arts and sciences to the school of education, where many of them already feel at home.

Describing the appropriate degrees for the three parts of Gaul is easy in comparison to finding names for the practitioners in each group. I leave to the creative writers and the specialists in the teaching of composition the search for their titles. But Lila M. Harper, in her letter to the Forum, clearly has literary scholars in mind when she suggests *philologist* as a title for the members of the English department. Her choice seems eminently sound and is already in use, as she points out, “in the titles of some scholarly journals.”

How could the usage she suggests be implemented? The Modern Language Association might take the lead by changing its name to something like the Modern Philology Association. Some regional associations already use variants of this nomenclature. Of course, English departments would have to be distinguished from those devoted to other modern languages. It would be least awkward, if perhaps a trifle arrogant, for Anglophones to preempt the generic term, and other practitioners in the MLA could then call themselves French philologists, German philologists, or whatever.

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### Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

To the Editor:

James Berger's interpretation of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in conjunction with the Moynihan report demonstrates that interdisciplinary scholarship is almost indispensable in the analysis of race relations (“Ghosts

of Liberalism: Morrison's *Beloved* and the Moynihan Report,” 111 [1996]: 408–20). Berger's examination of racist perspectives portrayed in *Beloved* magnifies the “historical trauma” of racism, which he defines as a “continuing apocalypse” (414). While I do not dispute Berger's interpretation or his critique of liberalism, his biblical allusion to the apocalyptic moment needs reconsideration. I am concerned by the dissociation of the term *apocalypse* from its religious roots in the Gospels, in general, and in the book of Revelation, in particular. When Berger describes “history and apocalypse” as the “site of trauma” (409), it is important to note that the apocalyptic trauma is merely a passing state that promises moral rectitude and change in the future. This is how I interpret Morrison's repetition of words in the conclusion of *Beloved*: “It was not a story to pass on.”

I agree with Berger that the language of the apocalypse becomes relevant to Morrison's novel with the arrival of the “four horsemen” in Baby Suggs's yard: “The reference to the book of Revelation makes the slave hunters' entrance into Baby Suggs's yard a sign and portent that transcends history . . . [because] [t]he apocalyptic event constitutes a pivotal moment that separates what came before from what comes after” (409). When used in a pivotal context, the word *apocalypse* captures the destruction and the suffering associated with the trauma, but the promise of change is inherent in this destruction. The popular use of *apocalypse*, which divorces it from its inexorable ties with the gospel of optimism, confines the term within an unjust context that severs all connections with poetic justice. In Revelation, apocalypse implies the ultimate victory of justice and the termination of all forms of evil, including racism. Therefore, it is not surprising that Morrison's concluding chapter emphasizes the promise of change through nature's cycles as “[j]ust weather.”

History records events, such as infanticide, in linear time as it correlates temporal logic with natural phenomena. The apocalyptic moment captures the essence of circular time (I am Alpha and Omega, states Revelation) and correlates change with the cyclic order of natural phenomena. The correlation between revelation and death has overtones of hope in the Christian tradition. Christ's death is recorded in the Gospels as a liberating and traumatic moment when the veil of the temple is torn. In this context, Baby Suggs's message to her congregation to love the flesh evokes the gospel of resurrection or faith that transcends the scars of traumatic experiences by revealing a change.

I agree with Berger that in *Beloved* the “apocalyptic unveiling is not deferred to an uncertain future” (410), because it connects the unending temporal logic of human

history or of natural phenomena with Christ's resurrection. Christian liturgy records, "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." In the Christian tradition, the apocalypse refers to the promise of a messianic kingdom as a final cause, as well as a chronological cause, of change in the cyclic order of natural phenomena.

Beloved's exorcism aims to get rid of an evil presence that makes Sethe's family dysfunctional. Beloved's resurrection bears no promise of eternal life even though she has a traumatic effect on communal relationships. Schoolteacher's visit to Baby Suggs's yard, when Beloved's infanticide takes place, marks an apocalyptic moment in the life of Sethe's community, and the community's visit to Sethe's yard marks another apocalyptic moment. In both instances, trauma arouses the conscience of the community. The first instance entails hostile reactions to the infanticide, which lead to Sethe's legal and social imprisonment; the second entails her liberation from social oppression and her inability to change the distorted concept of temporal logic.

Morrison's mention of the "devil's confusion" at the beginning and end of her novel points to a signifying system that crystallizes the overall meaning of the text. Her use of biblical allusions recalls Catholic writers like Flannery O'Connor and Graham Greene, who also present the complexity of temporal logic in natural phenomena through apocalyptic juxtaposition of destruction and reconstruction. However, unique to Morrison's novel is the contrast between "[j]ust weather" and unjust communal attitudes. She delimits time not only to resurrect the ghost of Beloved but also to bring about a conciliatory change in communal relations. The exorcism of the ghost implies a return to the cyclic order of natural phenomena, linking the traumatic moment with signs of hope. Perpetuating mourning for the ghost of Beloved means perpetuating the apocalyptic trauma with no hope for moral rectitude. Morrison's fiction poses the question of whether the temporal logic of history and human experience can be separated from the cyclic order of natural phenomena.

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To the Editor:

James Berger states that "slave infanticide was extremely rare" (417-18), but in working on my study of law and African American narrative, I have found evidence that establishes the practice. In *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (1992), Victoria E. Bynum writes,

[Angela] Davis, [Paula] Giddings, [Deborah Gray] White, and [Elizabeth] Fox-Genovese have noted slave women's propensity for arson, poisoning, the feigning of female illness and pregnancies to escape work, and occasional acts of abortion and infanticide. Because of slave women's responsibilities to children and family, they usually resisted enslavement by engaging in acts of individual rather than collective defiance. . . . In March 1836, for example, the superior court of Granville County charged Hannah, the slave of Col. John G. Hart, with murdering her son Solomon by slashing his throat with a knife she had obtained the night before from the plantation dairy. She also slit her own throat in an unsuccessful attempt to kill herself. As she lay bleeding, she called out to a black man passing by to "come there and put her away." Hannah survived to face trial and conviction on murder charges.

(5, 40)

In his "fugitive slave" account, G. W. Offley describes his mother's confrontation with her dead master's family over their refusal to allow her to purchase her children. Told that they would buy the children and kill her husband on the auction ground if he tried to stop them, she warned them, "[B]uy them and welcome, but you had better throw your money in the fire, for if you buy one of my children, I will cut all three of their throats while they are asleep, and your money will do you no good" (*A Narrative of the Life and Labors of the Rev. G. W. Offley, a Colored Man and Local Preacher* . . . [1860; 1971] 131).

It may be important to correct the record here because Berger seems to tie his neoliberal reading of *Beloved* to the idea of a repressed memory of black intrafamily violence apotheosized by slave infanticide. As best I can understand, while Berger believes that slave infanticide was extremely rare, its very exceptionality allows him, or Morrison, to extrapolate from it to the generalized notion of socially induced violence. In Berger's logic, it was because, except for the Garner case, infanticide didn't exist that Morrison could choose it.

Well, it did exist and was known enough to be recognizable as a trope of resistance to slavery. But it takes a considerable stretch to equate it with intrafamilial violence in a way that would serve Berger's argument. The record of antebellum family life among enslaved people must be read more carefully than Berger has done. An understanding of African American family life in the years between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century depends on knowledge of four narrative forms: fiction, history, law, and memory. The first three have been denied to African Americans for most of their sojourn in North America. As Mrs. N. F. Mossell put it in her 1908 advice book to black women, "As a rule, a race writes its history in its laws and in its records. Not so the Afro-American: he could make no law; deprived of the opportunity to write, he could leave no written