



Toni Morrison and the Classical Tradition: Transforming American Culture (Classical Presences)

Tessa Roynon

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In this volume, Roynon explores Toni Morrison's widespread engagement with ancient Greek and Roman tradition. Discussing all ten of her published novels to date, Roynon examines the ways in which classical myth, literature, history, social practice, and religious ritual make their presence felt in Morrison's writing. Combining original and detailed close readings with broader theoretical discussion, she argues that Morrison's classical allusiveness is characterized by a strategic ambivalence.

Adopting a thematic, rather than novel-by-novel approach, Roynon demonstrates that Morrison's classicism is fundamental to the transformative critique of American history and culture that her work effects. Building on recent developments in race theory, transnational studies, and Classical Reception studies, the volume positions Morrison within a genealogy of intellectuals who have challenged the purported conservative nature of Greek and Roman tradition, and who have revealed its construction as a 'white' or pure and purifying force to be a fabrication of the Enlightenment. Exploring the ways in which Morrison's dialogue with Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Virgil, and Ovid relates to her simultaneous dialogue with many other American literary forebears - from Cotton Mather to Willa Cather, or from Pauline Hopkins to F.Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner - Roynon shows that Morrison's classicism enables her to fulfil her own imperative that 'the past has to be revised'.

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