

despite their very different upbringings, were very much in agreement and a friendship was sealed that would last until Riis' death in 1914.

It was Roosevelt who called Riis New York's "most valuable citizen" and "the ideal American." In relation to this, it is, however, important to point out that Riis, as well as many other progressives, had no links to socialism (which some may be inclined to think given Riis' experiences and activities). Riis' contribution (a contribution still very much needed, it is worth pointing out) was to present the poor as being no different than those who had made it. His larger aim was thus to battle the perception of poverty as moral failure. His crusade was therefore not aimed at charity but rather at legislation preventing the exploitation of the poor, which is why much of his energy was directed towards getting rid of the worst slum tenements. As far as the poor themselves were concerned, the main road out of poverty was, according to Riis, still hard work. The moral foundation of Riis' commitment to give everybody, especially children, a fair chance derived partly from his upbringing in the small town of Ribe, in whose image he somehow tried to convert New York, and partly from a religious outlook through which people were seen as morally accountable individuals rather than as units prescribed into classes. Given this foundation, as well as Riis' own fervent struggles to succeed both personally and professionally, it is no wonder that Roosevelt called him an "ideal American." Ideal or not, Riis was indeed influential in the transformation of the way Americans perceived their country as it moved through a period of intense industrialization and eked its way towards modernity.

Riis' life was, like any other life, an intricate intersection of personal circumstances, traits and goals, and larger cultural, political, and economic developments and these "levels" (if we can talk of such) are – as the condensed retelling above hopefully indicates – admirably woven together in Buk-Swienty's biography of Riis. One may object, however, that a biography that explicitly sets out to trace the processes through which Riis became successful and influential may end up constructing a level of coherence – the book largely reads like a (19th-century) novel (with lots of photographs) – that is absent in lived life. On the other hand, it could also be argued that such narrative integrity is inherently related to the shape and commitments of the lived life, and that narratives and lived life thus at bottom are inseparable. In any case, students of American culture should be thankful that Riis managed to live, and Buk-Swienty was able to tell, this particular life-story.

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Lucille P. Fultz, *Toni Morrison: Playing with Difference*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003. 141 pages; ISBN: 0252028236 hardcover; \$34.95.

Although Toni Morrison scholarship has by now become something of an industry, there is always room for another innovative study that provides a fresh perspective on what we believe we already know. Lucille P. Fultz's 2003 book, *Toni Morrison*:

Playing with Difference – the winner of the 2005 Toni Morrison Society Book Prize – is precisely such a thought-provoking and penetrating work. As the subtitle (a riff on Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*) suggests, the book examines "the extent to which markers of difference influence Morrison's narrative decisions and how they enable and challenge readers' attempts to come to terms with her innovations" (6). Fultz's analysis operates on such categories as the ever-complex question of the role of the reader in Morrison's construction of her fictional texts (chapter 1), Morrison's literary representation of the subjectivity of alleged Others (ch. 2), the "pain of difference" and the "rhetoric of healing" in her oeuvre (ch. 3), the figurations of the reader within her refigurations of history (ch. 4), and the ways in which the need to redefine an "ethics of difference" recurs in her fiction (ch. 5). Fultz moves smoothly and competently among Morrison's novels from *The Bluest Eye* to *Paradise* and also comments on the seldom-discussed short story "Recitatif." Morrison's eighth novel, *Love*, was published in the same year as Fultz's book and is therefore not included in her source material.

While Fultz's approach is informed by questions traditionally posed by reader-response criticism, she avoids the pitfall of identifying herself too rigidly as the disciple of a single critical tradition. Instead, she allows her discussion to be guided by lines of inquiry that arise from a compelling combination of her specific interests and her profound familiarity with recent Morrison scholarship writ large. Fultz's deliberate decision to build on previous research rather than re-invent the wheel is clearly manifest in the way in which she organizes her chapters. Readers attracted to the "one novel per chapter" format may prefer such fine studies as, for example, Gurleen Grewal's *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle* (1998), J. Brooks Bouson's *Quiet as It's Kept* (2000), and John N. Duvall's *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison* (2000). Unlike these volumes, Fultz's book breaks away from the paradigm of proceeding chronologically from one novel to the next; most of her chapters consist of fluid discussions that draw on multiple sources – although the fourth chapter emphasizes *Paradise*, perhaps because critics have not yet exhausted this complex 1998 novel.

The conceptual apparatus drawn from reader-response criticism is at its heaviest and most recognizable in Fultz's first chapter. *Toni Morrison: Playing with Difference* opens by arguing that Morrison's vision of her writing as a "cooperative venture" between reader and writer is an integral element of all her fiction (1). The analysis then rapidly moves from this assertion to a discussion of how Morrison has, in dialogue with her readers, gradually altered her views on the significance of racial and gender differences, on freedom and individualism, and on evil. The thesis emerging from these brief and extremely dense musings is that much of Morrison's fiction is self-referential in that her later works refer to her earlier novels; Fultz argues, in keeping with her pivotal term "play," that Morrison invites and urges her readers to make such intertextual connections within her oeuvre. Fultz suggests, in the process, that Morrison plays narrative games with us which are simultaneously ludic and serious, and which serve the author's literary as well as political goals and visions.

While the thread of Fultz's prose is not always easy to follow, she does, to her credit, work towards articulating and demonstrating *how* exactly the co-operation between author and reader takes place in Morrison's fiction.

The second chapter looks at how Morrison "construct[s] race as a discursive subject and simultaneously create[s] individual subjectivities and the possibilities for inter-subjective relations" in her fictional texts (21). Here Fultz studies the conundrums of racial discourse, racialized identity formation, and racially attuned discourses of belonging by examining how Morrison wrestles with these issues in "Recitatif," *Beloved*, and *Tar Baby*. Of particular interest is Fultz's discussion of how "Recitatif" reveals, tests, and contests the (intended) reader's tendency to make assumptions about a given character's race on the basis of class-related signals. The third chapter, in turn, moves from the intersubjective to the intrasubjective by exploring the inner "psychodrama[s]" (46) that dominate the fictional lives of so many of Morrison's characters. As Fultz suggests, Morrison repeatedly portrays dramas of the psychological interior as consequences of societal dramas that arise from racist and patriarchal attributions of ontological significance to racial and gender differences.

While Fultz in the third chapter moves elastically among *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and *Jazz*, her fourth chapter focuses on *Paradise*, especially on the function of Patricia's narrative as "a textual strategy mobilized to engage readers intimately in the narrative process" (78). In other words, Fultz views the sections of *Paradise* concerned with the novel's local historian Patricia, and with her difficulties in telling the story that she initially desires to tell, as providing vital clues for the reader on how to engage in a dynamic dialogue with *Paradise* – a challenging and multilayered novel that portrays a variety of differences based on race, gender, age, and religion, and depicts myriad forms of Othering in the process. The final chapter takes stock of the preceding ones by close-reading and rearticulating what Fultz calls Morrison's "poetics of difference."

In sum, in *Toni Morrison: Playing with Difference* Fultz successfully constructs a nuanced analysis of how markers of difference – in particular, of race, gender, and class – operate within Morrison's narrative strategies. This sophisticated study expands our understanding of the complex, dynamic, and powerful ways in which literary form is placed, in Morrison's oeuvre, in dialogue with a rich and diverse content that sheds light on African American life from a variety of angles.