

JOSEF PESCH

Beloved: Toni Morrison's Post-Apocalyptic Novel

The uneasy relation of Toni Morrison's Pulitzer-Prize¹ novel to the American apocalyptic tradition has been noted (Bowers 1992), but does it fit into a category of work described as post-apocalyptic? No doubt there are more obvious examples: Peter Freese, who seems to be the first to use the term, writes about Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace*. Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* are discussed elsewhere (Buehrer; Spencer; Dorris). Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*, Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale*, Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, perhaps Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, and certainly Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* are novels one may think of. But *Beloved*? And: what does "post-apocalyptic" mean?

Apocalypse is generally understood to be the final catastrophe, and apocalyptic literature usually closes in a cataclysmic climax. However, post-apocalyptic literature tells us that this catastrophe might not have been really final — and tells us of the story after. In post-apocalyptic writing the apocalypse has happened before the narration sets in. For example, in *Riddley Walker* or in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* an apocalypse has destroyed a civilisation but humanity somehow survived. Had it been an apocalypse, there would not be a story to tell. Thus, the story of the post-apocalypse can be told in fiction. In this way writers mourn the loss of something — our culture, our civilisation — which we may not have lost yet; but which we will no longer be able to mourn when humanity has become extinct — and there will be peace on earth at last.

"Post-Apocalypse" in this sense is a fictional construct presenting a reality that we may not perceive as ours, though it could be ours. Many of the novels of this type are called elsewhere "nuclear fiction," "dystopias," "fiction of the remade world," "post-holocaust novels," even "science fiction," although the

1 This paper is a revised version of a public lecture held in the University of Alberta Department of Comparative Literature & Film Studies on October 8, 1993, a few hours after the announcement of Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize for literature.

latter is only one aspect of post-apocalyptic writing (e.g., Schwenger; Brians; Dowling; Yoke).

In the *Webster's Third International Dictionary*, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and in the *Duden*, we find the following definitions of "apocalypse":

a) [ME] apocalypse Revelation of St. John (book of the New Testament), revelation, vision, fr. LL. *apocalypsis*, fr. Gk. *apokalypsis*, lit., uncovering, revelation, fr. *apokalyptein* to uncover, reveal (fr. *apo-* + *kalyptein* to cover, to conceal) + *-sis* — more at HELL] 1: a writing professing to reveal the future; esp.: such a pseudonymous writing in Jewish or early Christian circles between about 200 B.C. and A.D. 150 predicting the future shape of eschatological events by means of a symbolism understandable to the faithful but hidden from others 2: something viewed as a revelation: Disclosure (*Webster's* 100);

[ad.L. *apocalypsis* ... *apo-* off; *-kalyptein* to cover]
1. The "revelation" of the future granted to St. John in the isle of Patmos. The book of the New Testament in which this is recorded.

2. by extension: Any revelation or disclosure. (*Oxford English Dictionary* 97);

[Kirchenlat. *apocalypsis* < griech. *apokalypsis*, eigd. = Enthüllung]: 1. (Rel.) Schrift, die sich in Visionen, Träumen, Abschiedsreden, Weissagungen mit dem kommenden Weltende befaßt. 2. < o. Pl. > (Bildungsspr.) Untergang; Unheil; Grauen; (*Duden* 131).

These definitions appeared surprising and confusing to me at first. No doubt, the books mentioned above do reveal eschatological events (and often in rather symbolic and obscure ways) — and they do contain visions of the future. Hence, this kind of writing "after the end" should properly be termed "apocalyptic." Unfortunately, this term is commonly used for novels ending in climactic cataclysm. "Post-apocalyptic" is therefore proposed and used here to differentiate cataclysmic writing from novels in which this cataclysm is but a distant memory.

However, there is more to "post-apocalyptic" than suggested and this is where the notion becomes interesting. For what if the "future," revealed in apocalyptic writings, has already begun; what if the revelation is so cryptic that only a few realize or want to realize what has taken place? When Paul Auster's novel *In the Country of Last Things* was described as "grounded in the dystopian or post-holocaust tradition of science-fiction," Auster complained, "As far as I'm concerned, the book has nothing to do with science-fiction. It's quite fantastic at times, of course, but that doesn't mean it's not firmly anchored in historical realities. It's a novel about the present and the immediate past, not about the future" (Auster 1992, 306). What if Auster were right, and we are no longer in perpetual crisis, waiting for the end — as Kermode suggested in "The New Apocalyptists" and in *The Sense of an Ending*; what if we are past that end — without noticing or acknowledging the uncomfortable truth? Holding on to the

great tradition of literature and the order of Western values, Kermode, for instance, evades facing the disruption he has before him. With his concept of "crisis," even perpetual crisis, he fights off ideas of a break in that tradition with all means at his disposal, to the point of conceding that "our own epoch is the epoch of nothing positive, only of transition" (1966, 345). Transition to what? Kermode does not see what Benjamin had observed earlier: "The concept of progress is to be grounded in the idea of the catastrophe. That things 'just go on' is the catastrophe. It is not that which is approaching but that which is" (Benjamin 50). The notions of historic "progress" — religious, economic, political — towards an abstract and ideal state of affairs, which a concept of "transition" would seem to suggest, are significantly absent from post-apocalyptic texts. Here catastrophe is indeed a (timeless) presence before which characters often literally "just go on," becoming wanderers (as well as wonderers) like Riddle Walker (a walking riddle to himself and others), Paul D., Billy Pilgrim (Vonnegut 1983) — or Slothrop (Pynchon).

Despite early modernist claims to the contrary, Kermode simply incorporates early Modernists such as Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and Joyce into his continuous great tradition (cf. Materer; Pesch). Wherever writers deviate into anything disruptive, this is linked to their fascist, Catholic, etc., creeds. As this does not work with Joyce, who always kept his distance from wars, politics, and religion, Kermode has to put forward a reading of *Ulysses* which is reductive (at best); what is more, his reading of Joyce is telling: Joyce's last book, *Finnegans Wake* is not even mentioned. Yet this book, a post-apocalyptic WAKE, a book beginning with a great fall on its first page, is a book of disruptions, death, and mourning; it alone is enough to falsify much of what Kermode has to say. Here not one history, but stories of all ages and of none are told; here it is not one voice, but voices; no master narrative, but a plurality of narration; and no linear, but cyclical structures; no end (and thus no "Sense of an Ending") — or beginning, but a circular closure, completing the first sentence.

Kermode ignores all that, turning instead to Beckett — Joyce's friend and companion through much of *Work in Progress* (Ellmann 563 and *passim*) — and calls Beckett "the perverse theologian of a world which has suffered a Fall, experienced an Incarnation which changes all relations of past, present and future, but which will not be redeemed" (1966, 355). Here Kermode touches upon something central to "post-apocalyptic" writing: for what is "an Incarnation which changes all relations of past, present and future" if not an apocalypse? Kermode, however, drops the subject almost immediately to write about order, which he perceives as "the Christian paradigm" (1966, 355). To Kermode, "it is this order, however ironized, this continuously transmitted idea of order, that makes Beckett's point" (1966, 355).

There may be order here, but it is the kind of order to be found in the *Wake* — hardly that of Christian theology or the great tradition. Kermode touches

upon what is now addressed as Postmodernism, but which I would rather call the "post-apocalyptic phase of modernism." In less extreme cases than the *Wake*, the features referred to appear in a variety of techniques and variations in other novels. Cut off from their past and with no bright future in sight, protagonists or narrators, or arrangers, often use a multiple narrative in which one line follows the on-going narrative development of the novel's present, into which other narratives of past events intrude disruptively; there often are several narrators or voices, and intertextual incorporations of documents or tales and myths of the pre-apocalyptic and apocalyptic past. These tell their own story and supply their own view of things.

The recent Nobel Prize Winner of literature, Toni Morrison, is one of these writers of the "new apocalypse," who have taken apocalyptic writing a step further, into post-apocalypse. Her writing is not oriented towards the future, but towards the past, a past not connected in a linear fashion to the present, as it has been painfully disrupted by an apocalyptic event which questions "the justification of ideas of order," in ways Kermode only hints at (1966, 361). To Kermode, "our order, our form, is necessary" to keep the Great Tradition going (1966, 361). Post-apocalyptic writers, however, have had to develop their own ideas of orders to find forms that will suffice in accommodating the narration of "unspeakable horrors." These are integral parts of another Great Tradition of Western order and culture that is disregarded by Kermode, but traced through the history of philosophy by other scholars, for instance in Ulrich Horstmann's *Das Unier* (1985). This aspect of the Great Tradition is hardly ever acknowledged by proponents of that tradition: wars (the legalized ritual mass-slaughter of mostly innocent human beings by skilled, but otherwise civilised human beings, perfected in our century), racism, persecution, pogroms, concentration camps, the elimination of animals and plants, the poisoning of water and soil, the wasting of natural resources — and all this often in the name of "Enlightenment," of rationality — and rationally and lawfully calculated private profits.²

The fact that Morrison's *Beloved* is apocalyptic has already been commented on by Susan Bowers. In her essay "Beloved and the New Apocalypse," she places Morrison's novel within the American apocalyptic tradition, but makes important observations questioning *Beloved*'s relation to that tradition. Bowers's assertion that in *Beloved*, Morrison creates "a revised apocalyptic which

principally looks backward, not forward in time" is a first indication that, although part of an apocalyptic tradition, *Beloved* is indeed different:

The narrative does not drive toward the apocalyptic moment, but recounts the struggle of living through and beyond the reign of the Anti-Christ and of surviving the "numbing of the black and angry dead." *Beloved*'s focus on the past may seem contrary to the forward-looking spirit of apocalypse, especially in American literature, where the apocalypse is considered fundamental. (60)

What Bowers is describing here is a significant deviation from the traditional apocalyptic mode of writing, a writing in which the apocalypse has already taken place and which should thus properly be called "post-apocalyptic." After all, the specific apocalypse of *Beloved* has happened eighteen years before the novel begins, "When the four horsemen — schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff" arrive (*Beloved* 148). The story is told from a point of view in which the apocalypse is a (distant) memory. Thus, it can hardly be surprising that there is very little drive towards apocalypse. How could there be, when it has already happened?

The apocalypse itself is strange, too. A mother killing her baby to save her, another "dead black." Here, the reference to apocalypse seems arbitrary. One dead person hardly counts. Yet, this is the fictional convention in post-apocalyptic writing, the end of the world is never total because there would be no story-telling if it were. Furthermore, this is a matter of perspective, but from *Beloved*'s point of view, the schoolteacher's coming indeed signals the end of the world.

The apocalypse is also an apocalypse of Enlightenment's rationality. This is presented in its primitive form in the schoolteacher who empirically and rationally constructs reasons for his idea of racial superiority, using a "scientific" method. The integrity of this rationality is questioned, however, when Sethe finds herself in the position of having to make a decision which forces her beyond its limits.

It should have become clear by now that life in the post-apocalypse is not what Christian (or Jewish) ideology wants us to believe. There is judgement — although not divine — but, and this is another convention of post-apocalyptic writing, no return to organic wholeness, no War-to-End-All-Wars and no paradise waiting on the other side, either. Bowers has aptly noted this feature of Morrison's novel:

Biblical scholars read the four horsemen of the apocalypse as agents of divine wrath; Morrison's four horsemen are only emblems of evil. Her revision of the classic apocalyptic image suggests that she does not share with many apocalyptic writers a belief in a moral force at work in history, the invisible presence of a god who will come again to judge sinners and rescue and reward the oppressed. (69)

2 As an addendum to this attempt at defining the "post-apocalypse," let me say that even architects coining the term postmodernism may have had post-apocalypse in mind.

Postmodern architecture very often is an architecture of fragments, of debris, of disrupted structures. Comparing photographs in a book on postmodern architecture with pictures of the bombed out cities in Germany after World War II, I found surprising resemblances: In these pictures, postmodernism is post-apocalyptic *Trümmerarchitektur* (cf. Jencks 197, 223, 225; Nossack).

It is not that history is rejected — and there is little point in rejecting it. It is rather that the belief in the moral force at work in history has been shattered. From a post-apocalyptic perspective traditional morality is no longer credible. The post-apocalyptic novel picks up the debris, assembles the fragments, and shocks in juxtapositions of difference. It aspires to unity, knowing full well — as Modernists do — that while unity may be constructed by the artists in their works, it is a unity of fragments, of debris, of shreds and patches. It opposes concepts of a unified History by proposing histories — which present voices unheard, and, in oral tradition, often unrecorded. For proponents of the concept of a unified History, this must indeed suggest something like *post-histoire*, in so far as it presents a dissolution of history into stories.

Morrison's novel also revises another myth, that "the Bomb-fueled vision of a possible material end of history" is at the root of this deconstruction (Gitlin 353). Morrison reminds us that the effectiveness of destruction — physical, mental, and spiritual — does not necessarily depend on nuclear missiles. Even before the bomb, man was the worst enemy of man. In this and other post-apocalyptic novels the moral force supposedly at work in history (or apocalypse) is revealed to be little more than a cover for common self-righteousness, creating totalitarian ends for the killed, and hell on earth for the survivors. In Morrison's novel the "traditional messianic age — the time of freedom and redemption — is missing among these slaves and ex-slaves for whom hope has come to seem a cruel trick" (Bowers 63); it is missing because — as post-apocalyptic experience teaches us — there is no such age.

Baby Suggs's advice, "Lay them down ... sword and shield. Don't study war no more. Lay all that mess down. Sword and shield" is foolish and wise (*Beloved* 86). War and killing are no solution, but simply putting sword and shield aside without reflecting on what one is doing, is no solution either. Baby Suggs's statement, "There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolk" and her subsequent capitulation marks the collapse of a world of absolutes (*Beloved* 89). After all, "we are left with the frightening realization that Sethe, by trying to destroy the monster that had deprived her and her family of their humanity, had herself become one" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 111). Thus Sethe's absolute mother-love is placed against Paul D.'s relativistic insight: "The best thing was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back ... well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one" (*Beloved* 45). This is not a view arrived at on the basis of a theory or philosophy — or rational argument — as it often is in modernist or postmodernist thinking; it rather is sheer necessity, sheer pragmatism, if one is to survive in a post-apocalyptic world.

Nonetheless, there is moral significance to an apocalypse in which "the only moral agency is human" (Bowers 69). Metaphysical agencies, powers beyond human control can no longer be blamed for what has taken place. Responsibility

rests — for better or for worse — on human shoulders. This is the unbearably heavy burden of living in post-apocalyptic times.

The dilemma is focused on Sethe, who "had murdered Beloved to save her from the future, [...] and who] raises Denver by 'keeping her from the past'" (Moble 194). Both past and future, it seems, are fraught with danger: time is clearly out of joint in *Beloved* and Morrison comments on time as one of the features notably absent from this novel: "especially no time because memory, pre-historic memory, has no time" (Morrison 1990, 229). It is this shell-shocked timelessness that generates the postmodern "blankness" in which "everything takes place in the present, 'here'" (Gitlin 350). If time is eliminated, past, present, and future become one and death no longer is the barrier to communication. A deliberate free play can begin, in which ghosts are simply accepted as facts of life.

One vexing problem, however, remains. How can there be memory, how can there be history, if there is no time? On the one hand, the timelessness is not universal: there is progress in the story line of the novel from Paul D.'s arrival at the beginning of the book to his return to Sethe at the end. There is progress also in Paul D.'s and Sethe's stories from Sweet Home to 124 Bluestone Road. On the other hand, timelessness implies a different concept of time. An apocalypse that "is repeatable and survivable" does indeed suggest a notion of cyclical time, as Bowers states (61). This view stands against the teleological concept of a singular apocalypse at the end of time in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Cyclical concepts, however, are not as unknown in Western philosophical or literary tradition as Bowers, for instance, seems to think. They are basic to the mythical cycles of birth, death, and rebirth Carl B. Yoke identifies in "the literature of the remade world" (Yoke 2 ff.). They are typically found in post-apocalyptic literature, most prominently perhaps in Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Furthermore, cyclical concepts are also the basis of Giambattista Vico's *The New Science* which in turn was utilized by Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*. Post-apocalyptic writing is unthinkable without notions of an apocalypse that is survivable and repeatable. In *Beloved* there is the double cycle of Paul D.'s departures from Sethe and his returns, of Beloved's departures from and returns to Sethe. Most prominently, the second coming of "Whiteman" (262) recalls the coming of Schoolmaster (163). This time Sethe does not turn against her own children, but against the (innocent) white intruder and is stopped by Denver and the black community. History is here repeating itself — with a difference (see *Ulysses* 16.1525):

At this moment, the cycle has rolled around to begin again. When the women take a step back to the beginning, they touch the eschaton, the boundary, and momentarily escape from the flux of time to the place where clear vision is possible. They remind us that apocalypse is not a synonym for disaster or cataclysm. Rather, it is linked to revelation.

Seeing clearly into the past, the women can take hold again of what they had lost in forgetting. (Bowers 71)

In other words, a second incident of timelessness occurs. Whether there is hope in this — redemption and opening up of the future through the past, as Bowers thinks (69-70) — seems debatable. The revelation is — as usual in such cases — double-edged. On the one hand, the intervention of the community exorcises the ghost of the first apocalypse, but on the other hand Sethe sets out to kill again — thus revealing the potential for new cataclysms. This is particularly telling as the second incident is only a rather weak echo of the first. Bodwin hardly qualifies even as a single horseman of the apocalypse, he is not even on a horse (*Beloved* 259). Sethe's reaction to him is not justified by any factual threat; she is reacting to a phantom threat of her memory, and if that is enough to turn a loving mother into a mad murderer, attempting to kill the very man who is "the main one [who] kept Sethe from the gallows in the first place" (265), what hope is there?

Bowers nonetheless tries to identify hope and considers only the positive effects of memory and knowledge: "What *Beloved* suggests is that tomorrow is made possible by the knowledge of yesterday, a knowledge that for contemporary African-Americans can be gained from imagining what it was like to walk in the flesh of their slave ancestors" (74). The dilemma is deeper here. If the knowledge is preserved, if it becomes "rememory," there is the danger of forming a response pattern of the type Sethe shows in her attack on Bodwin. History would then be repeating itself. But forgetting is no solution either, as this would simply imply that one cannot learn.

Memory and knowledge recorded in *Beloved* are extremely painful and the novel also suggests that they are dangerous for that very reason. In a cruel paradox, they have to be recovered, remembered, and told as part of (personal) history, while they must be forgotten so that one may live in peace with oneself and with one's neighbours — regardless of race and/or colour. It seems doubtful whether "the experiencing of suffering and guilt can begin to be transformed into knowledge" (Bowers 74) on either of these levels. On the first level the experience is "resolved" in the telling, while on the second it is inscribed into the landscape, both physically and mentally. Only on a third level, at which the story "was/is not a story to pass on" has, on the final page, paradoxically just been passed on (*Beloved* 275). At this level — and only here, outside the story and the novel, and in an act of aesthetic distancing — is a transformation into an aesthetic knowledge possible. The unbearably painful experience is presented as a work of art.

The conflict of forgetting and remembering within Sethe is reflected in the novel's structure. "the text of *Beloved* moves through a series of narrative starts and stops that are complicated by Sethe's desire to forget or 'disremember' the past.... Thus, the early sections of the novel reveal the complex ways in which

memories of the past disrupt Sethe's concerted attempt to forget" (Mobley 194). We cannot ask a work of art to solve the problem; what we can ask of it is recording the dilemma as clearly as possible. The fragmentation of the text throughout *Beloved* keeps its readers aware of the conflict, involves them in a story that victimizes them in its own way, as Morrison points out: "The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign.... Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense" (1990, 228). This technique of pushing the readers into a situation in which they have to grope for meaning, where they are being displaced repeatedly, where they enter spheres of knowledge and experience completely alien to them, is typical for post-apocalyptic writing. In this way, post-apocalyptic writing "forcasts the common future as it colors the common experience of a society just at or beneath the threshold of awareness" (Gitlin 352). "Pre-apocalyptic" readers, in awe of and still oriented towards the (nuclear or racist) apocalypse will gain a perspective on the future. Indeed, many post-apocalyptic novels are set in a future. *Beloved*, and Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*, for example, may bring us to the threshold of the awareness that this future has already arrived; it is here already, and we are part of it (cf. Auster 1992, 306). Thus, it can hardly be surprising that anxiety is at work in the edgy debates about postmodernism (Gitlin 347).

Like many post-apocalyptic novels, *Beloved* is beyond the boundaries of the traditions it is rooted in. Although clearly a slave narrative, it does not quite fit into this category either: "while the slave narrative characteristically moves in a chronological, linear narrative fashion, *Beloved* meanders through time, sometimes circling back, other times moving vertically, spirally out of time and down into space" (Mobley 192). The post-apocalyptic dynamics of *Beloved* break through conventions of chronology, narration, language, reader's expectations, circle and spiral through time and space, almost leaving writing behind. Throughout the text readers are subjected to all kinds of delays, flashbacks. There are chapters in which the fragmentation enters language itself, disrupting the narrative and syntactic flow with gaps of whiteness (e.g., 210-13). The page can barely contain the cacophony of voices. Ordinary language cannot relate the horrors and pain of apocalypse: "unspeakable words unspeakable" (199) seem to vanish into and break out of the whiteness, before the memories can be "recollected" and reorganized, and the narration turns into poetic chanting (215-17). Although a written text, *Beloved* assaults the tradition of writing, aiming at something beyond, as Mobley points out, "the fragments constitute voices which speak to and comment on one another, the text illustrates the call and response pattern of the African-American oral tradition" (193). These traditions are not exclusively African-American; even Modernism — e.g., Dada — has taken up oral traditions, although one of the more prominent "oral" texts

is, perhaps, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, a post-apocalyptic text "pleasing to the ear," as Joyce put it (Eliemann 702).

Another post-apocalyptic text drawing on this tradition — perhaps in a more radical way than *Beloved* — is Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, a text derived from an oral culture on the threshold of literacy. Or, a literate culture on the verge of orality, closing the circle, faced with apocalyptic experiences that push a literary text back to the beginning, knowing full well that "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning there was the sound" (*Beloved* 259). It is this "sound that [breaks] the back of words" generating "a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water" (*Beloved* 261), pushing a literary text beyond itself, where it, in Walter Pater's words, "constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (86): "And the sound of the novel, sometimes cacophonous, sometimes harmonious, must be an inner ear sound or a sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can" (Morrison 1990, 228).

Musicality expressed in words is the highest development of post-apocalyptic writing in *Beloved* as in *Finnegans Wake* or *Riddley Walker*. It is a modern mode of finding structures, words, and forms which suffice when a post-apocalyptic work of art is to encompass haunting and horrifying apocalyptic experiences and truths.

"Something postmodern has happened," Gitlin writes, and he is right — although no-one seems to know what it is (347). Perhaps also, because no-one really wants to know what it is and this touches a fundamental problem of post-apocalyptic literature. Writing about traumatic experiences is all but easy. Bringing half-repressed, half-forgotten, painful memories to the surface again is disturbing. Realizing this, Morrison "expected *Beloved* to be the least read of all her books because 'it is about something that the characters don't want to remember, I don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember. I mean it's national amnesia'" (Bowers 74). Although no-one wants to remember, these memories are important; denying their existence will not make them disappear, for they will then surface violently elsewhere, as *Beloved* does in the novel.

These memories are of a post-apocalyptic quality. For Sethe they have become "my rememory" (36), a memory that is more acute, "a thought picture" which stays "not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world" (36). Her memory has taken on a universal timeless photographic quality in which nothing is lost, and in which what has happened once will happen again. A memory that has (potential) access to all horrors of history. A rememory speaking in impressions, pictures and sounds is notoriously hard to capture in words. Rememory: "mememormee!" (*Finnegans Wake* 628.14), flowing into the next cycle, which begins at the end of the *Wake* and at the end of *Beloved*.

Attempts to classify *Beloved* as a historical novel in the tradition of the slave narrative — see, for instance, Samuels and Hudson-Weems (95-96) — lead us astray. As Mobley has shown, *Beloved* clearly subverts this tradition (192). Despite its factual core, *Beloved* insists on its artificiality and so does Toni Morrison (1990, 228-30). She does not pretend to relate a "true" story:

I did research about a lot of things in this book ... but I did not do much research on Margaret Garner other than the obvious stuff, because I wanted to invent her life, which is a way of saying I wanted to be accessible to anything the characters had to say about it. Recording the life as lived would not make me available to anything that might be pertinent. (Qtd. in Samuels and Hudson-Weems 95)

Although based on fact, *Beloved* presents a fictional view. Objective facts, a mother becoming a killer, murdering her own child, are there, but the reality of the fiction takes us beyond those facts, makes us partake in her struggles to come to grips with her deed and her attempts at finding a *modus vivendi* in the post-apocalypse. They metamorphose her tragedy and suffering into a post-apocalyptic work of art which takes us beyond itself into a realm of timeless being where *Beloved*, killed, dead, and buried, comes alive as a rememory all readers share, alive forever in their minds, calling them to contemplation, removing them — particularly in its final pages — from reality, its political pressures for apportioning blame and calls for action, thus allowing them to let the rememory get to them where they might be repressing it or otherwise looking elsewhere, enabling them to acknowledge what has happened, to share the experience from the inside.

The baby is dead and nothing can change this. The apocalypse has happened and cannot be reversed, but *Beloved* remains, turned into *Beloved*, i.e., aesthetic knowledge, into a rememory which, though painful, will never be forgotten. She has become music, a symphony in words, our thought picture, rendering this fictional reality intensely ours. The aesthetic knowledge recorded here is beyond delivering simple messages of hope or doom; as post-apocalyptic art it makes us partake in a complex vision.

The breaking down of boundaries, the striving for an openness characteristic of modern works of art — as Eco defines it (27-59) — is also reflected in the closure of *Beloved*. The "climax" for which the novel seems to be heading — the second coming (261-62) — is not its end: "*Beloved* does not conclude with a climactic moment" (Bowers 73). This ending is rejected when Denver stops Sethe's attack on Bodwin. *Beloved* has a happy ending, in which Paul D. joins Sethe in her reclamation of self: "'Me? Me?'" (273), and again the book could have ended there. It does not, as it represents an ongoing post-apocalyptic work of art that is larger than Sethe's or Paul D.'s stories. The novel's central "character" never dies (*Beloved* 36). As *BELOVED* she is present before the novel begins, engraved on the novel's cover; as "Beloved" she remains

novel begins, engraved on the novel's cover; as "Beloved" she remains imprinted outside the story as the novel's final word (275).

Beloved has no end and the memory of Beloved cannot be exorcized. Her disembodied voice appears again in the post-narration on the final pages full of paradox: "Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her," yet she finally asserts herself in print (274-75). Thus, here is the essence of *Beloved*: Forget and remember; the necessity of forgetting all too painful "rememory"; the painful impossibility to forget; the necessity to remember in order to build up a fund of knowledge to improve on the reaction to threats to one's life; and the potential uselessness of this knowledge in different, if similar, situations.

"There is no hope in this," as Paul Auster pointed out in a different context, "but neither is there despair" (1992, 176). "Postmodernism [as] an art of erosion" has post-apocalyptically eroded both (Gitlin 360). Although post-apocalypse suggests no hope left, no paradise or perfect state to look forward to, there is more in it than total despair. After all, if you have survived one apocalypse, at least you know there is a chance of survival: "it will remember itself from every sides" (*Finnegans Wake* 614: 20). Thus the rest is definitely not silence, but — as the novel has it on its concluding page: "weather" (275). Everything is moving, everything is changing; and small butterflies may cause (unpredictably) large effects, cycling and recycling (cf. Gleick 9-31 and *passim*). To exorcise Beloved would be attempting to erase her completely, thus remembering by trying to forget. In whatever shape or form, she will always be part of the system (like any impulse remains in the weather system). No matter how minute the power of that memory will be, under the "right" circumstances effects may again be devastating. "Power was everywhere," but one never knows what input will produce which effect — and on what scale — in this highly complex system called humanity (Gitlin 358). A system, indeed, which is failed time and again by attempts at subjecting it to linear descriptions and systems. Once a deed is done, nothing can ever erase it, effects of apocalypses will never go away. The fact that in a very profound sense there is no end (*Beloved* 36) is aesthetically reflected in the closure of Morrison's novel, keeping "disorderly life in its flux against orderly death in its finality" (Gitlin 359). *Beloved* closes its own cycle, composing a work of "beauty out of discord," resting self-content (Gitlin 349). If "a knowing blankness results" (Gitlin 353; my emphasis), that is something, after all.

Universität des Saarlandes

Works Cited

- Atwood, Margaret. *A Handmaid's Tale*. Toronto: Seal-McClelland-Bantam, 1986.
- Auster, Paul. *In the Country of Last Things*. New York: Penguin, 1987.
- . *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1992.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Central Park," *New German Critique* 34 (1985): 32-58.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Toni Morrison*. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1990.
- Bowers, Susan. "Beloved and the New Apocalypse," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 18.1 (1990): 59-77.
- Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.
- Brians, Paul. *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1987.
- Buehrer, David. "'A Second Chance on Earth': The Postmodern and the Post-Apocalyptic in García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*," *Critique* 32.1 (1990): 15-26.
- Dorris, Michael, and Loise Erdrich. "Bangs and Whimpers: Novelists at Armageddon," *The New York Times Book Review* (March 13, 1988): 1, 24-25.
- Dowling, David. *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1987.
- Duden: *Deutsches Universalwörterbuch*. 2nd ed. Mannheim: Dudenverlag, 1989.
- Eco, Umberto. *Das offene Kunstwerk*. Günter Memmert, trans. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977.
- Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983.
- Findley, Timothy. *The Wars*. Toronto: Penguin, 1978.
- Freese, Peter. "Exploring the Post-Apocalypse: Bernard Malamud's *God's Grace*," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 32.4 (1987): 407-30.
- Gitlin, Todd. "Postmodernism: Roots and Politics," Ian Angus and Sut Jhally, eds. *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*. New York and London: Routledge, 1989. 347-60.
- Gleick, James. *Chaos: Making a New Science*. London: Cardinal/Sphere Books, 1988.
- Hoban, Russell. *Riddley Walker*. London: Picador/Pan Books, 1982.
- Horstmann, Ulrich. *Das Unier: Konturen einer Philosophie der Menschenflucht*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985.
- Jencks, Charles. *Architektur heute*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988.
- Joyce, James. *Finnegans Wake*. London: Faber, 1975.
- . *Ulysses*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986.
- Kermode, Frank. "The New Apocalypticists," *Partisan Review* 33.3 (1966): 339-61.
- . *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1967.
- Malamud, Bernard. *God's Grace*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982.
- Márquez, Gabriel García. *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Edith Grossman, trans. New York: Knopf, 1988.

- Materer, Tomothey. *Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1979.
- Miller, Walter M. *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. London: Black Swan, 1984.
- Mobley, Marilyn Sanders. "Memory, History and Meaning in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Harold Bloom, ed. *Toni Morrison*. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1990. 189-99.
- Morrison, Toni. "Unspeaking Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," Harold Bloom, ed. *Toni Morrison*. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1990. 201-30.
- . *Beloved*. London: Picador/Pan Books, 1988.
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1992.
- Nossack, Hans Erich. *Der Untergang: Hamburg 1943. Fotos von Erich Andres*. Hamburg: Kabel, 1993.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *The English Patient*. Toronto: McClelland and Stuart, 1992.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Compact Edition. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971.
- Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Pesch, Josef W. Wilde, About Joyce: *Zur Umsetzung ästhetizistischer Kunsttheorie in der literarischen Praxis der Moderne*. Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1992.
- Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. London: Picador, 1975.
- Rabkin, Eric S., Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander, eds. *The End of the World*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1983.
- Rushdy, Ashraf H. "'Rememory': Primal Scenes and Constructions in Toni Morrison's Novels," *Contemporary Literature* 31.3 (1990): 300-23.
- Samuels, Wilfred D. and Glenora Hudson-Weems. *Toni Morrison*. Boston: Twayne, 1990.
- Schwenger, Peter. *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding World*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.
- Spencer, Susan. "The Post-Apocalyptic Library: Oral and Literate Culture in *Fahrenheit 451* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*," *Extrapolation* 32.4 (1991): 331-42.
- Vico, Giambattista. *The New Science*. T.G. Bergin and M.H. Fisch, trans. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1984.
- Vonnegut, Kurt. *Cat's Cradle*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965.
- . *Slaughterhouse-Five*. New York: Dell, 1983.
- Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*. Chicago: Merriam, 1971.
- Yoke, Carl B., ed. *Phoenix from the Ashes. The Literature of the Remade World*. Westport: Greenwood, 1987.

SELJA PADDON

John Ashbery and Paavo Haavikko: Architects of the Postmodern Space in Mind and Language

Form isn't an overcoat flung over the flesh of thought; it's the flesh of thought itself. (Julian Barnes)

The question: "What is minor or marginal literature" continues to be the focus of much critical debate, partly, I would suggest, because the notion of a "minor or marginal literature" finds itself in a cross-fire between those who are politically motivated and anxious to discover what the dominant centre has trampled underfoot, and the poststructuralist ideologues who cannot give a literary nod neither to the notion of centre nor to that of margin without seriously compromising their theoretical stance. What is commonly known, however, is the fact that the traditional and highly political emphasis on system-building has designated the margins to be at areas perceived linguistically, culturally (that is, in ethno-cultural terms) and geographically as "minor." Thus Finnish poetry, for example, is seen to embody aspects of what Said called "Orientalism" (Said 25), that is, often appearing faceless within the Western mind-set and occupying the role of the Other while remaining imageless, if not representative of the notion of "anti-image." We might say, however, that Said's thought-provoking criticism of Western attitudes towards the Orient and everything "oriental" sees the Western stance as homogeneously expressive of a kind of blindness, when, in fact, the Occidental discourse and its attitudes towards its own "marginal" voices can be similarly challenged. It is interesting, therefore, to consider the views of current theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, for example, who sees "minor" literatures deriving from deterritorialized languages, their most notable representatives being Kafka who wrote in German while a native of Prague, also Joyce and Beckett both of whom wrote in French and English while living in Paris (Deleuze and Guattari 19). Within Deleuze's decentred perspective, the major/minor or centre/margin dichotomies