



Voices
from the
Gaps

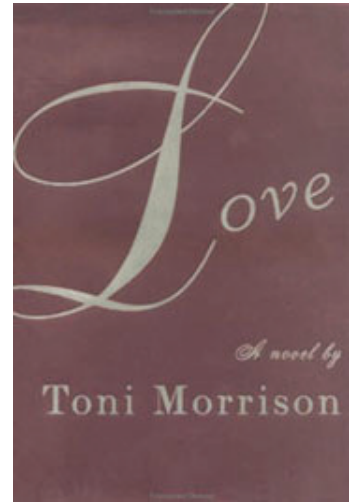
Love by Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison's novel, *Love*, published in 2003, is a story of just that: love's many faces and effects on those who love. This story talks of love as shadowed by greed, jealousy, insanity, and hatred.

Forty years ago, Cosey's Hotel and Resort in Up Beach was the escape for well-off colored-folk of the East Coast. In a time when segregation was still alive, blacks needed a place to socialize, have fun, and leave the rest of the world behind. Bill Cosey offered them just that. He ran a profitable business where all his guests felt they belonged. He was a rich black businessman, respected in the community, and above all else, a ladies' man.

The relationships of this ladies' man with the women that surround him are the guiding elements of Morrison's novel, both thematically and formally. While during his life these women--his wife, granddaughter, daughter-in-law, employees, and others--vied for his attention, following his death, their rivalries only grew stronger, as manifested by the arguments over his will. The novel's chapter titles, 'Husband', 'Lover', 'Father', 'Friend', and 'Benefactor' parallel the different ways these women characterize Bill Cosey. Even Junior, the young girl hired as Cosey's widow's companion seems to worship his memory, although she never knew him in life. These women idealize Cosey as their own "perfect man," only seeing what they wish, and blind to his duality. That is, they are all blind except L.

L's is the voice of this narrative. She has seen all of these relationships develop, watched some fall apart, and kept hidden the secrets she learned along the way about the infamous Bill Cosey. This is her story of the events that took place over forty years. She weaves her judgements of the women--Heed, Christine, May, Vida, Junior, even Celestial--through her series of recollections, all the while revealing her own infatuation with Bill Cosey. L's narration is the glue that holds the multiple story lines of *Love* together.



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Told as a series of flashbacks, Morrison follows the development of her characters through time, although she takes care to reveal their personalities slowly, keeping the reader eager for explanations of sometimes shocking actions. We have to wait for Morrison to explain Heed and Christine's rivalry, May's madness, Vida's scorn, and Junior's self-righteousness. By forcing readers to question, "Why?" Morrison ensures the page-turner quality of her novel. However, the incessant jumping from past to present may leave the reader quite confused.

As Morrison waits to reveal the relationships between certain characters and the forces behind their emotions, one may find it difficult to keep track of who's who and what's what. But in classic bring-it-home fashion, by the end of the novel Morrison ties up all the loose ends, bringing the past and present together. While I do view this novel as a page-turner, I must warn readers to not turn the pages too quickly. There are many characters and events to keep track of throughout this story, and paying careful attention to detail while reading will guarantee the novel's narrative force and full emotional impact when all the connections are finally made.

Morrison's *Love* is an ever-moving tribute to the past, all the while making evident the realities of the present. Morrison's characters are full of life, emotions, and perfect vehicles through which the complexities of human behavior are uncovered. Morrison does a fabulous job of navigating through the tale of a group of women all enamored with one man. As the novel suggests, love takes many shapes and can lead to an innumerable amount of reactions when confronted with adversity.

Reviewed by Katie Fraser