

# Toni Morrison Society

## Toni Morrison Society Panels

American Literature Association conference, Chicago, May 20-23, 2026

### Panel One: The Prefatory Voice of Toni Morrison

This panel seeks to explore Morrison's critical, contextual, and curatorial presence in the introductions she authored—whether to her own novels or to the works of others. Indeed, Morrison's introductions offer a distinctive register of her voice: reflective, interpretive, and charged with authority. Her prefatory writings to her own novels reframe the works for new audiences, offering critical hindsight and interpretive direction. In her introduction to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, she engages with the classic novel's layered silences as “expert technical solutions” to the narrative's complexities. In the introduction she wrote to Toni Cade Bambara's posthumously edited, *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions: Fiction, Essays, and Conversations*, she reminisces and captures the unmatched satisfaction of reading Bambara's “woven” writing. Her Foreword to the *Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton* is a call on Clifton scholars to scour her work beyond its humane elements and appraise, at last, the poet's “stone-eyed intellect”. Lastly, in her introduction to *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, Morrison situates the global writer within an ethical and humanist frame, foregrounding Levi's “glorification of the human” over evil. Taken together, these prefatory texts invite us to consider Morrison not only as novelist, essayist, and editor, but as a writer of “thresholds”—authoring the critical passages that shape how readers encounter texts.

We welcome papers that may consider (but are not limited to) the following:

- Morrison's introductions/thresholds to her own novels
- Morrison's introduction to other writers (i.e. Primo Levi, Mark Twain, Lucille Clifton)
- The two Tonis: Morrison and Bambara, Morrison on Bambara
- The introduction/preface as a genre
- Morrison's “prefatory voice” in relation to her editorial work at Random House

**Proposals** should not be more than **one page long** and should be submitted to [emmanuelle.andres@gmail.com](mailto:emmanuelle.andres@gmail.com) **no later than January 11th, 2026.**

### Panel Two: Reenvisioning the American Body Politic : Toni Morrison's fiction.

This panel seeks to address Toni Morrison's representation of trauma (physical, psychological, generational) as a national, as well as individual and communal, injury. While critiques of medical institutions and authority abound in her novels, traditional healing practices, herbal medicine, and communal rituals emerge as counter-narratives to state-sanctioned neglect or violence. Reflecting the symbolic function of midwifery, folk medicine, and other practices, Morrison's fiction is a site of medical humanities inquiry, highlighting the entanglement of health, justice, and citizenship, helping the reader reimagine the origins and futures of the American body politic.

Topics could include, but are not limited to :

- Representations of physical and mental trauma in Morrison's novels and their implications for understanding Black health
- Morrison's portrayal of healthcare systems, medical authority, and their interaction with racial and gender biases
- The role and cultural significance of traditional and alternative healing practices, midwifery and spiritual wellness within Morrison's characters and Black communities
- The intersection of medical humanities and literary studies in analyzing Morrison's exploration of the body and its care

- Toni Morrison and the Black Women's Health Imperative : assistance, holism and activism in Morrison's work
- Understanding Morrison's ecological vision : healing gardens in her novels

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