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Final Thesis

Evolving Perspectives and Themes in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*:
Unraveling Spiritualism, Motherhood, and Memory

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ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* transcends its narrative boundaries to become a mirror reflecting the multi-faceted essence of human existence. This master thesis focuses on the novel's narrative landscape and explore three major themes: the spiritual and supernatural elements deeply rooted in African cultural traditions; motherhood and its complexities; the enduring impact of memory and trauma. The thesis thesis unravels the novel's thematic richness, showcasing how Morrison's storytelling encapsulates the African American experience while serving as a universal exploration of the human condition. *Beloved* emerges as a work that blurs the boundaries between reality and the ethereal, delves into the intricacies of mother-daughter relationships, and illuminates the dual nature of memory as both a source of pain and empowerment. Discussion argues that Morrison uses literature to provide a profound reflection of human experience.

Key words: Resilience, Trauma, Motherhood, Slavery, Memory

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INTRODUCTION

In the realm of literature, certain works transcend their narrative confines to become a mirror reflecting the multi-faceted essence of human existence. Toni Morrison's magnum opus, *Beloved*, stands as an embodiment of this transcendent power, delving deep into the layers of human experience while exploring themes that resonate across time and space. Morrison, a major writer known for her unflinching exploration of the African American experience, has masterfully woven a tale that reaches beyond the confines of its pages to touch upon the profound aspects of spirituality, motherhood, memory, and trauma. This master thesis focuses on the narrative landscape of *Beloved*, a novel that unearths the raw emotions and indelible scars left by the horrors of slavery, while simultaneously weaving threads of hope, resilience, and the unbreakable bond between past and present.

The thesis consists in an exploration of themes in Morrison's novels. The first theme comprises the spiritual and supernatural elements in the novel, these elements are not mere plot devices; rather, they constitute an integral part of the narrative's essence. Rooted in African cultural traditions and influenced by the complex history of African American spirituality, these elements intertwine with the characters' lives, forging connections between the living and the dead. The spiritual presence of the past lingers in the present, blurring the boundaries between reality and the ethereal. As the characters grapple with their own identities, the spiritual elements provide a lens through which the invisible threads of heritage, ancestral wisdom, and resilience come into focus. This thesis delves into the tapestry of these spiritual layers, discussing their symbolism, implications, and their role in shaping the narrative's larger thematic framework.

The second theme is motherhood, a quintessential facet of human existence, and a thematic cornerstone in *Beloved* Morrison examines the complexities of maternal love, sacrifice, and the ripple effects of intergenerational bonds. The characters' experiences of motherhood, ranging from Sethe's profound but conflicted love to Baby Suggs' nurturing presence, serve as windows into the broader cultural and historical context. The thesis navigates the spectrum of mother-daughter relationships, analyzing the impact of slavery on these connections, the challenges of motherhood in the face of brutality, and the power of maternal resilience as a force that transcends time and adversity.

The third thematic concern is the link between memory and trauma. Both memory and trauma serve as a haunting backdrop to the characters' lives. The scars left by the horrors of slavery linger on, manifesting as haunting memories that continue to shape the present. Morrison employs a nonlinear narrative structure, skillfully blending past and present, reality and memory, to illustrate the enduring impact of trauma. Through an exploration of the characters' traumatic experiences, the thesis sheds light on the mechanisms of coping, survival, and the quest for healing. It delves into how memory functions as both a source of pain and empowerment, a means of preservation and transformation.

The thesis offers a reading of *Beloved*, The spiritual and supernatural elements show the portrayals of motherhood are delved into, and the relationship between memory and trauma is unraveled in an attempt to uncover the layers of complexity that define the novel's thematic richness. The aim is to demonstrate how Morrison's masterful storytelling only encapsulates the African American experience but may also be read as the exploration of a universal human condition.

CHAPTER 1. CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON *BELOVED*: FROM BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING (1990s-2010s)

The aim of Chapter 1, Changing Perspectives on *Beloved*' From Blame to Understanding (1990s-2010s) is to provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the diverse range of critical perspectives and scholarly commentary surrounding Toni Morrison's iconic novel *Beloved* during the two-decade period from the 1990s to the 2010s. The narrative unfolds within the backdrop of post-Civil War Ohio, intimately tracing the lives of Sethe, a former enslaved woman, and her daughter Denver. Emanating from the pages are themes encompassing slavery's legacy, the haunting echoes of memory, the enduring scars of trauma, and a touch of the supernatural. The aim of this comprehensive literature review is to trace the evolution of critical approaches to Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* over the span of two decades leading up to 2017. The primary objective is to investigate how the initial tendency to blame the protagonist, Sethe, for the killing of her baby has shifted over time, giving way to more nuanced and empathetic understandings of her character and the novel's themes. By examining this transformation in critical perspectives, the chapter aims to illuminate the evolving landscape of literary criticism surrounding *Beloved* and its broader implications for the study of literature and society.

1.1 1990s

Elizabeth B. House 's 1990 article *Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved is Not Beloved*, stands as a beacon of critical analysis in the realm of Morrison's opus. At its core, House propounds the intriguing notion that Beloved, a central character within the narrative, is not, in fact, *Beloved*. Rather, House posits that Beloved serves as a corporeal

manifestation of the traumatic history endured by the protagonist, Sethe. To substantiate her assertion, House delves into the intricacies of the novel's figurative language and symbolism. She artfully contends that *Beloved* operates as a poignant metaphor, embodying the agony and tribulations borne by Sethe over the course of Morrison's masterpiece. House aptly points out the symbolic weight of *Beloved*'s association with "a tree on her back," a poignant reference evoking the tree from which Sethe's own daughter was tragically hanged. It is this recurring motif of a tree that House discerns as a linchpin of the novel's thematic architecture.

Intriguingly, *Beloved* is presented not as a flesh-and-blood entity, but rather as a specter—an ethereal projection stemming from the recesses of Sethe's psyche. House underscores the book's structural dynamics that call attention to the non-corporeal nature of *Beloved*. The apparition's emergence, as House observes, corresponds temporally with the resurgence of Sethe's suppressed reminiscences—a convergence that House asserts as deliberately orchestrated by the narrative to facilitate Sethe's reckoning with her traumatic history. Yet, it is House's reflection on the novel's denouement that commands our attention. She proposes a compelling interpretation that aligns the vanishing of *Beloved* with Sethe's newfound ability to relinquish the shackles of her sorrow-laden past and stride towards a more sanguine future. House encapsulates the transformation in her portrayal of Sethe's evolving perception: *Beloved* transitions from being a cherished offspring to a symbol of the anguish and torment woven into Sethe's life's fabric. In her meticulous exploration, House refines the understanding of the novel, inviting readers to discern the suffering, redemption, and catharsis woven into Morrison's narrative canvas.

Brian Finney's scholarly analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* follows from the discussion of House's interpretation by further delving into the novel's temporal elements and their significance. While House focuses on the non-corporeal nature of Beloved and its connection to Sethe's suppressed memories and eventual transformation, Finney extends the discussion by examining how the manipulation of time in the novel contributes to a sense of estrangement and its impact on the overarching themes of trauma, memory, and identity. In the realm of temporal exploration within Morrison's *Beloved*, the scholarly analysis conducted by Brian Finney (1990) casts a discerning light upon the manipulation of time and its temporal structures inherent to the novel. Finney's scholarly investigation surmises that Morrison's orchestration of temporal dimensions engenders an intentional sense of defamiliarization, thereby cultivating a distinct estrangement within the reader. This calculated estrangement, in turn, serves as a catalyst for a heightened resonance with the novel's overarching themes of trauma, memory, and identity. Finney scrutinizes the multiple facets of the novel's temporal architecture. The cyclicity of time, its discernible fragmentation, and the adroit incorporation of flashbacks and recollections emerge as paramount facets under Finney's scholarly lens. Notably, she discerns that the novel's cyclic structural framework, replete with its recurrent circular motifs, engenders a distinctive temporality that blurs the demarcations between the past and the present. This strategic manipulation, as elucidated by Finney, bequeaths an ethereal sense of timelessness, thereby affording the reader a vantage point that transcends conventional chronology, plunging them headlong into an intimately immediate and viscerally resonant experience of the characters' tribulations. Central to Finney's discourse is an exploration of the deliberate fracturing of temporal chronology within the narrative. She observes

instances where characters' experiences are relayed in a manner devoid of conventional logic, manifesting as a series of disjointed fragments. From Finley's perspective, this calculated disarray engenders a mirroring effect, conjuring bewilderment and confusion within the reader that mirrors the characters' own grappling with their haunting encounters with traumatic occurrences and the fragmented remnants of those memories. Furthermore, Finney delves into the narrative's utilization of flashback sequences and the rekindling of memories. Her analysis underscores these literary devices as instruments of temporal rupture, effectively severing the linear march of time to afford the characters an avenue to revisit and authentically re-encounter their harrowing pasts. This strategic dismantling of temporal progression, as Finney argues, serves as a conduit for a profound exploration of the interplay between trauma's lasting impact upon the psyche and the formulation of one's identity.

Holloway's (1990) reading adds to Finney's focus on Morrison's manipulation of time. But, while Finney focuses on the manipulation of time and its impact on the reader's engagement with themes of trauma and memory, Holloway delves into the spiritual dimensions of the novel, highlighting motifs such as water and trees as symbolic elements in the characters' transformative journeys.

What connects these two scholars is their shared dedication attention to the rich layers of meaning in Morrison's work. Finney's examination of temporal structures aligns with Holloway's exploration of how characters grapple with their haunting pasts and embark on spiritual odysseys. Both scholars contribute to a deeper understanding of the novel's complexities, enriching our understanding of the multi-faceted nature of *Beloved*.

Within the contours of her discourse, Holloway illuminates a compelling paradigm wherein the novel emerges as a conduit for a spiritual odyssey, wherein the characters grapple with the haunting specters of their past, embarking on a transformative trajectory marked by healing and redemption. Holloway's analytical endeavor manifests through her scrutiny of the spiritual motifs interwoven throughout the narrative. Among these motifs, the thematic prominence of water, trees, and the concept of "rememory" emerges as pivotal foci within her discourse. Her discerning gaze casts water as an emblematic leitmotif recurrently coursing through the novel's narrative currents. She cogently explicates water's dual role—on one hand, symbolizing nature's purifying force, and on the other, embodying its potentially destructive capacities. Holloway contends that water, within its narrative resonance, serves as an allegorical vessel for the characters's spiritual expedition. This voyage necessitates the confrontation of past traumas, akin to a cleansing process that seeks to absolve the pain and anguish deeply entrenched within their psyches. In parallel, Holloway directs her analytical lens toward the significance of trees within the narrative tableau. These arboreal entities transcend mere symbols of the brutality endured during the era of slavery, extending their metaphorical reach into the tenacity of the human spirit. Holloway discerns in trees a representation of the interconnectedness inherent to all living entities—a unity that lends unwavering strength and support to the characters' spiritual pilgrimage. As the characters navigate their arduous journey, these trees stand as steadfast pillars, emblematic of the indomitable resolve to endure and evolve.

Central to Holloway's discourse is the exploration of Morrison's term, "rememory." Holloway's discussion of "rememory" highlights the spiritual and personal aspect of

remembering, emphasizing its role in healing and self-discovery. Similarly, Finney's notion of "fractured time" acknowledges how historical events and trauma can disrupt conventional linear narratives and affect the present, creating a sense of dislocation. She integrates this concept into her analytical framework, asserting that remembrance is an innately spiritual process. Within her scholarly argument, Holloway posits that the characters' quest for healing and atonement is irrevocably linked to their ability to confront and reconcile with their past pain. The act of remembering, Holloway underscores, serves as a profoundly intimate and uniquely personal endeavor, ultimately facilitating a reconnection with historical narratives and a rediscovery of their individual identities. There is a connection between Holloway's exploration of Morrison's "rememory" and Finney's concept of "fractured time." Both concepts delve into the intricate relationship between personal and collective histories, as well as the impact of the past on individuals and communities.

In the critical literature on *Beloved*, Page's article "Circularity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1992) stands as a discerning exploration of the contours of the novel's narrative architecture. Page illuminates the nuances of circularity—a structuring principle underpinning Morrison's work. Her analytical purview extends to unveil the resonance of the circular motif, encompassing history, memory, and the echoes of trauma in the lives of African Americans. Page's inquiry privileges the multi-faceted dimensions of repetition, narrative configuration, and the role of memory. Her work unfolds within the orbit of the novel's structural framework—a mosaic composed of recurring motifs, both in events and linguistic expressions. Page proposes that the instances of repetition are emblematic of a cyclical dance of history and memory. These repetitions, for Page, crystallize the

inherent cyclicity of historical trajectories and memory's indelible resonance, coalescing to forge a stark depiction of characters ensnared within an unceasing spiral of trauma and affliction. Moreover, Page directs her analytical scrutiny toward the skein of the narrative's architecture. She discerns a deliberate deviance from linearity—a narrative that fluidly traverses time's continuum. Within this temporal non-linearity, Page discerns an intentional underpinning—a thematic resonance that echoes the novel's overarching circular motif. In her argument, Morrison's strategic employment of flashbacks and non-linear storytelling serves as a portal into the characters' reservoirs of past traumas, unwrapping the complexities of their journey towards catharsis and understanding. Page's scholarly analysis takes root in an exploration of memory's thematic significance in the novel's fabric. Memory, as Page asserts, emerges as a central theme reverberating through the narrative cadence. Her discourse encapsulates memory's dual role—a repository of suffering, as well as a harbinger of healing. Page interlaces the imperative of confronting past traumas as a prerequisite for the characters' forward progression. Her proposition converges with the novel's circular structure, magnifying memory's pivotal role in the characters' lives, underscoring the enduring reverberations of historical trauma. Her incisive analysis of circularity within *Beloved* augments the understanding of Morrison's artistry in unraveling complex narratives. The cyclical motifs, memory's profound impact, and the intricacies of non-linear narrative converge under Page's gaze, unveiling a mosaic of themes that resound within the lives of the characters and the broader African American experience.

In his work, Caesar, T. P. (1994) delves into the thematic intersections of slavery and motherhood within Toni Morrison's masterful novel, *Beloved*. This scholarly endeavor

is meticulously sculpted to unveil the profound symbiosis underlying Morrison's narrative woven with the threads of historical context, cultural nuances, and the manifold dimensions of the African American experience. contextualizing the novel within the historical and socio-cultural realm of African American heritage, Caesar sets forth a compelling premise. He posits that Morrison's narrative canvas is profoundly rooted in the crucible of slavery's harrowing legacy, deftly interweaving the trajectories of African American motherhood and the haunting shadows of enslavement. Anchored within this contextual frame, Caesar situates *Beloved* as a poignant commentary on the deepresonance of slavery, echoing through the prism of maternal bonds and familial structures.

Caesar unfurls his exploration of Morrison's treatment of slavery's specter within the narrative. The author contends that Morrison's lens is distinctively calibrated to capture the emotional and psychological contours of enslavement's impact on African American mothers. This unique analytical perspective resonates deeply within Caesar's exposition, where he asserts the originality of Morrison's approach—one that transcends the confines of mere physical brutality, delving unabashedly into the unspoken agony arising from the loss of kin and children. Moreover, within the sinews of his analysis, Caesar illuminates Morrison's portrayal of motherhood—a thematic cornerstone resonating within the African American social context. The author argues that *Beloved* stands as a platform where the significance of maternal roles is viscerally foregrounded, ensnaring the narrative with a web of trials and tribulations. This portrayal, in Caesar's incisive view, dismantles traditional paradigms of motherhood, propelling the reader into the crucible of enslaved

African American women's lived experiences—a lens unfettered by romanticism but rather resolute in encapsulating their indomitable spirit within the shadows of subjugation.

Caesar's interpretive gaze unearths the interplay of slavery and motherhood, both profoundly etched into the narrative's very fabric. Through his analysis, the thematic resonances of the novel transcend the page, forging an indelible connection between the reader and the historical, cultural, and emotional tapestry underpinning African American experience. In a scholarly exploration of Toni Morrison's literary oeuvre, Davis (1998) embarks upon a meticulous analysis of *Beloved* through the prism of postmodernism and the concept of the end of history. It is evident that Davis is engaging in a discourse that is related to the novel's treatment of time and history, particularly through the lens of postmodernism and the concept of the end of history. Brian Finney, as discussed earlier, delves into the manipulation of time within *Beloved* and its impact on the reader's engagement with themes of trauma, memory, and identity. He examines how the novel's temporal structures create a sense of defamiliarization, blurring the boundaries between past and present, and how this contributes to a deeper understanding of the characters' experiences. On the other hand, Davis's analysis approaches the novel through the prism of postmodernism and the concept of the end of history. Postmodernism often challenges traditional narratives and historical frameworks, and the concept of the end of history suggests a culmination or endpoint in historical progression. In *Beloved*, this perspective could be seen as a commentary on the legacy of slavery and its enduring impact on the characters and their sense of history. The connection between Davis and Finney lies in their shared interest in how *Beloved* disrupts conventional notions of time and history. While Finney focuses on the temporal aspects and how they relate to trauma and

memory, Davis approaches the novel from a postmodern lens, considering how it challenges historical narratives. Both scholars contribute to a nuanced understanding of the novel's treatment of time, history, and the complex interplay between past and present within the narrative. Davis's analysis focuses on how Toni Morrison's *Beloved* challenges conventional notions of history and narrative conventions.

Davis discerns *Beloved* as a quintessential embodiment of postmodernism within African American literature—a narrative archetype that audaciously traverses the contours of history, interrogating established norms. Central to his exposition is the interplay between Morrison's narrative and the postmodernist ethos—a thematic terrain meticulously contextualized within the broader spectrum of postmodernism. To underscore this linkage, Davis underscores the novel's distinctive attributes—a fragmented narrative and a non-linear structure that serve as hallmarks of postmodernist literature. In doing so, Davis substantiates his thesis, illuminating Morrison's strategic employment of these postmodernist devices to dismantle traditional narrative frameworks. These elements, as Davis asserts, attest to a broader trend within African American literature—an inclination toward postmodernist narratives that defy linear chronology and herald a new era of storytelling. Delving deeper, Davis excavates the ways in which *Beloved* disrupts conventional historical paradigms. Positioned within the milieu of African American culture's confrontation with slavery's enduring legacy, Morrison's novel defies sequential historical narratives. Instead, Davis cogently contends that *Beloved* conjures a fractured, non-linear narrative—an artistic choice mirroring the tumultuous construction and reconstruction of history in the contemporary milieu. The narrative's disjointedness becomes a mirror reflecting the complex of history's remaking—

a poignant comment on how historical events, especially as pertains to the legacy of slavery, undergo multifaceted reconfiguration in the present. Memory and storytelling emerge as additional thematic terrain traversed by Davis in his analysis. His discerning gaze captures the characters' engagement with their pasts—a struggle to encapsulate their experiences within a meaningful narrative framework. The intricacies of memory and storytelling's subjectivity, as Davis avers, find profound resonance within the novel's mosaic of fractured narrative structures and diverse narrators. This juxtaposition not only underscores the characters' grappling with their own narratives but resonates as a thematic corollary, manifesting the very essence of postmodernism's complexity. By the end of the 1990s, *Beloved* exhibit characteristics of a postmodern novel. The analysis of scholars like Brian Finney and Davis, as discussed in the thesis, highlights the novel's manipulation of time, its non-linear narrative structure, and its challenge to conventional historical frameworks—features commonly associated with postmodern literature. These elements suggest that *Beloved* takes on a postmodern dimension, reflecting the evolving critical perspectives on the novel during the 1990s.

1.2 2000s

In the 2000s, there is a notable shift in critical discourse towards a strong focus on trauma within *Beloved*. This concern with trauma becomes a dominant theme in the critical scene during that period, as discussed in the thesis. In her scholarly endeavor, *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Journey Through the Pain of Grief*, Pass (2006) undertakes a nuanced examination of Morrison's novel, situating it within the framework of grief and trauma analysis. Pass's scholarly investigation commences with a meticulous scrutiny of the novel's central protagonist, Sethe, and her engagement with loss. The underpinning tenet

of Pass's analysis rests upon the notion that Sethe's mourning is intrinsically intertwined with the traumas endured during her enslavement—a period replete with harrowing experiences that left an indelible mark upon her psyche. Pass y underscores Sethe's hesitation to confront her historical legacy and her ensuing emotional paralysis—a poignant articulation of the lingering trauma she has carried.

Furthermore, Pass's scholarly exploration delves into the thematic intricacies of motherhood—a facet notably resonant within the context of slavery. With acumen, Pass contemplates the symbiotic connection between motherhood and mourning, drawing attention to the intergenerational transfer of traumatic experiences. Pass's discerning analysis highlights the profound implications of traumatic losses traversing familial lineages—a dynamic that unearths the ways in which grief can be inherited and sustained across generations.

Central to Pass's inquiry is the role of community within the narrative. The scholarly exposition espouses the pivotal function of community as a conduit for post-traumatic recovery and the healing process. Pass underscores the narrative's emphasis on communal rituals and traditions—essentials that provide solace and facilitate collective coping mechanisms in the aftermath of traumatic events, engendering a journey towards closure and emotional restoration. Of profound import is Pass's scholarly approach, which inherently finds resonance within the contours of the academic discipline of medical humanities. Notably, her analytical methodology y amalgamates concepts from psychology and psychiatry—an interdisciplinary fusion that lends subtlety and perceptiveness to the exploration of trauma, loss, and communal dynamics. Through this multidisciplinary lens, Pass etches a scholarly landscape that weaves together strands

of trauma and community, thereby forging a nuanced comprehension of the human experience embedded within Morrison's narrative.

In the scholarly landscape, Martinez (2008) elucidates the novel's exploration of the enduring vestiges of slavery within American culture and society. Central to Martinez's thesis is the premise that the novel serves as a vessel embodying a collective trauma—a lingering specter that continues to haunt the American cultural ethos and the depths of the psyche. Employing a Jungian analytical lens, Martinez delineates her investigation of trauma, memory, and identity through the framework laid by Carl Jung's research. This analytical approach provides the underpinning for Martinez's assertion that the novel encapsulates a collective trauma that steadfastly reverberates within the American societal fabric and the collective unconscious. Martinez's analysis unfolds by scrutinizing *Beloved's* protagonists as conduits of the legacy of slavery's enduring impact. The narrative lens focuses acutely on the confluence of past and present—elucidating the ways in which historical wounds persistently echo through contemporary experiences. Martinez highlights the profound psychological resonance of slavery on both slaves and slave owners. The psychological toll, she contends, is emblematic of an indelible imprint left upon the nation's psyche, an imprint vividly rendered within the narrative tableau.

Like Pass, Martinez investigates the nexus between traumatic experiences and their enduring memory, a theme interwoven within the novel's characters. Martinez underscores the novel's portrayal of intergenerational transmission of trauma—an unfolding narrative that produces a collective memory, shaping individual and communal identities. Furthermore, Martinez's scholarly lens extends to the exploration of the supernatural—a thematic terrain that finds embodiment in the spectral figure of Beloved.

Within her discourse, Martinez emphasizes the significance of *Beloved* as a supernatural entity, emblematic of a collective unconscious. To compare both analysis; Pass's analysis focuses on grief and trauma analysis, with an emphasis on Sethe's character and the intergenerational transfer of traumatic experiences within the context of motherhood. On the other hand, Martinez adopts a Jungian analytical lens and explores the collective trauma embodied within the novel, emphasizing the psychological resonance of slavery on both individuals and society. This ethereal presence, in her view, mirrors the profound psychological scars inflicted upon American society by the institution of slavery, a dynamic that stands as a testament to the novel's layers. Expanding the scholarly discourse, Bloom (2009) compiles a collection of critical articles that traverse the novel's thematic dimensions of slavery, trauma, memory, and identity.

1.3 2010s

In analyzing the methodologies employed by Bloom, H. (Ed.), Ng, A. H. S. (2011), Vine, S. (2011), and Mayfield, S. (2012), a symphony of parallels and contrasts emerges. These scholarly endeavors collectively proffer fresh perspectives on the novel. Ng and Vine, for instance, delve into the portrayal of traumatic experiences and their reverberations on both individuals and society. While Vine's scrutiny pivots upon the portrayal of time and the sublime, Ng's exploration manifests through the lens of architecture and space as metaphors for trauma. In juxtaposition, Mayfield's scholarly contribution directs its focus upon the nuanced domain of motherhood. In tandem, Bloom's edited collection orchestrates a medley of diverse viewpoints, converging into a multifaceted chorus of interpretations. The divergence in approach becomes further pronounced when appraising the theoretical and disciplinary perspectives that underpin these scholarly

explorations. Bloom's collection testifies to an expansive vista. In contrast, Ng and Vine adopt a cultural studies lens, which unravels the novel's portrayal of social and historical undercurrents. Mayfield's study, on the other hand, adopts a psychological vantage point, excavating the novel's portrayal of motherhood and its profound interplay with traumatic experiences and memory. Ng's (2011) analysis delves into the architectural allegories employed within *Beloved* to convey the traumatic experience of slavery. Ng's discourse unfolds within the context of the novel's spatial and structural configurations, presenting them as symbolic representations of psychological wounds inflicted by the institution of slavery upon individuals and society. Vine (2011), through meticulous research, explores the novel's temporal and sublime dimensions. Simultaneously, Vine's discourse posits the novel's potential to evoke healing and transcendence through the evocation of the sublime—an thematic layer that resonates within the fabric of the text. Within the realm of literary inquiry, Sheryl Mayfield (2012) embarks on an exploration of parenthood within the narrative of *Beloved* situating it as a reflection of readers' psychological landscapes. Mayfield's discourse unveils the novel's nuanced depiction of motherhood as a multifaceted and phenomenon, profoundly entwined with themes of trauma, identity, and memory.

Further enriching the scholarly dialogue, the essay "The Study of Gender in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" by Shaheen and Nazir (2014) revolves on gender dynamics and the female characters within the narrative of Morrison's work. Shaheen and Nazir assert that Morrison's narrative subverts conventional gender roles, delving into the interplay among women in the narrative. The essay probes the experiences of characters such as Sethe, Baby Suggs, and Beloved, within a patriarchal cultural milieu, discerning how they

navigate identity and interactions. Zamalin (2014) emerges as a pivotal scholar who scrutinizes the novel's portrayal of racial inequality and its resonance with contemporary public policy in the United States. Within Zamalin's scholarly discourse, the novel becomes a vessel that unearths the historical continuum of systemic racism within the United States. He contends that the novel unequivocally advocates for reparations to ameliorate the enduring impact of slavery and discrimination, a perspective firmly anchored within the novel's narrative.

The literary terrain comes under the analytical lens of Perez (2014), as she delves into the concept of atonement for historical wrongs in Morrison's novel. Perez's interpretive framework underscores Morrison's artful use of memory and imagination—a thematic marriage that unearths the unpaid societal debt borne by black Americans due to the scourge of slavery and other forms of injustice. Perez's analysis, which delves into the theme of atonement for historical wrongs through memory and imagination in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, resonates with the themes of memory, trauma, and healing explored by previous scholars like Brian Finney and Holloway. Together, these scholars provide a comprehensive perspective on how Morrison's novel navigates the interplay between personal and collective memory within the context of historical injustices. Through meticulous analysis, Perez probes the traumatic crucibles traversed by the novel's characters, positing these individual experiences as reflective echoes of the broader collective trauma experienced by the black community. Perez advances the notion that the imperative of restitution becomes a vital step towards confronting this enduring pain and initiating a process of reconciliation with the past.

While Ferguson's focus is on the linguistic and psychological dimensions of the novel, it aligns with the broader thematic exploration of trauma, memory, and history present in the works of other scholars such as Ng, Vine, Mayfield, and Martinez.

Ferguson's examination of how history's echoes meld with the characters' psyche through language and memory complements the discussions of traumatic experiences, intergenerational memory, and the psychological consequences of slavery presented by Ng and Vine. While Ng explores the spatial and architectural allegories as metaphors for trauma, Vine examines the fragmented and nonlinear narrative techniques used to convey psychological trauma. These aspects of trauma and memory connect with Ferguson's focus on how language and memory are intertwined with historical trauma. Mayfield's exploration of motherhood within *Beloved* also intersects with Ferguson's analysis, as both scholars consider the psychological landscapes of characters. Mayfield's focus on motherhood as intertwined with trauma and memory aligns with Ferguson's examination of how language and memory serve as conduits for characters to confront their pasts. Gardner's scholarly scrutiny hinges on the character of Sethe, unraveled within the context of Morrison's broader literary universe, particularly *The Bluest Eye*. Gardner's contention resides in the subversion of patriarchal constructs of motherhood—an ideological undercurrent inherently challenged by Sethe's fragility. She navigates Sethe's portrayal as a contrasting figure, challenging the traditional archetype of a strong and selfless maternal presence prescribed by patriarchal norms. Gardner's analytical eye discerns Sethe's susceptibility to harm, a vulnerability engendered by her tumultuous history, encompassing the tragic loss of her child and her enslavement. The spectral embodiment of Sethe's daughter further amplifies the fragility that envelops her.

Gardner's discourse positions Morrison's strategic deployment of vulnerability as a narrative means to unravel and destabilize the patriarchal motherhood paradigm—a manifestation of motherhood endowed with emotional depth and fragility. Conversely, Ferguson's scholarly discourse, Ferguson contemplates Morrison's narrative alchemy—a masterful concoction that traverses history's tumultuous trajectory and resonates with the aftermath of African American emancipation. The textual canvas, as Ferguson asserts, becomes an arena wherein history's echoes meld with the characters' psyche. Within the characters' recollections, history's burdens and the enduring impact of slavery become palpable, as they echo across time and memory. Notably, Ferguson accentuates the seminal role of language—narrative currency that lends voice to experiences, emotions, and cultural reverberations etched deeply within the characters' collective existence. Ferguson's analysis centers on the interplay of history, memory, and language within the novel. He emphasizes how characters' recollections and the use of language in the text echo the enduring impact of slavery and historical trauma.

1.4 Evaluation of changes of perspectives from 1990s to 2010s

During the 1990s, a constellation of scholars including House, Finney, Holloway, Page, and Caesar focused on the novel's historical and cultural substrata. Their analytical gazes traversed the terrain of temporal structures, spiritual undercurrents, circular motifs, and the nuanced sphere of motherhood. This early investigation underscored the novel's resonance with the historical milieu and its subtle interplay with cultural and temporal dimensions. In the 2000s, Pass, Martinez, and Bloom shifted the focus to the thematic heart of the novel, unearthing its profound engagement with grief, the legacy of slavery. The 2000s also witnessed the incisive lenses of Ng and Vine, elucidating the spatial and

architectural dimensions of the narrative fabric. The 2000s' scholarly endeavors unveiled the novel's intricate explorations of grief's contours and the profound societal reverberations engendered by the scars of slavery. Moving to the scholarly landscape of the 2010s, Mayfield, Shaheen and Nazir, Zamalin, Perez, Gardner, and Ferguson build a nuanced critical network encompassing motherhood, gender dynamics, racial inequalities, public policy, vulnerability, and the complex interplay of language and memory. This epoch heralded a profound exploration of the novel's intrinsic connections to the multidimensional facets of the human experience.

Nurtured within each epoch, the central themes of history, memory, trauma, and identity within *Beloved* served as enduring beacons that captivated scholars' inquiries. The 1990s heralded an academic fascination with the novel's historical context, particularly the visceral aftermath of slavery that indelibly imprinted the narrative. In the 2000s, scholars were more interested in the novel's treatment of grief, the profound imprint of slavery upon African American identity and culture, and the intricate intersections of race, gender, and class. In the 2010s, the novel's examination of motherhood, vulnerability, and the intricate interplay of language and memory carved a distinct trajectory. In each epoch, scholars wielded a diverse array of interpretive lenses, crafting a mosaic of analytical methodologies. This intellectual mosaic, replete with varying viewpoints, lent the novel its enduring legacy as a seminal masterpiece within American literature.

In particular, the evolution of perspectives on the portrayal of the Ghost in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* from the 1990s to the 2010s is a testament to the novel's enduring impact on literary criticism and its ability to provoke nuanced interpretations. House's

1990 article, "Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved is Not Beloved," marked a significant starting point for the reevaluation of Beloved's role in the narrative. House's perspective challenged the conventional interpretation of Beloved as a beloved child, instead proposing that Beloved is a corporeal embodiment of Sethe's traumatic history. This initial analysis laid the foundation for a deeper exploration of the symbolic weight attached to the baby's memory. House's identification of the tree imagery as a linchpin of the novel's thematic architecture signaled a shift toward viewing Beloved as a metaphorical figure representing the enduring trauma of slavery. House's notion of Beloved as a specter—an ethereal projection from Sethe's psyche—further ignited discussions on the blurred boundaries between reality and memory in the novel. This interpretation encouraged subsequent scholars to delve into the psychological dimensions of the characters and their relationships with traumatic pasts. House's perspective also set the stage for examining the novel's denouement, where Beloved's vanishing was seen as symbolic of Sethe's transformation from cherishing her child to recognizing her as a symbol of torment woven into her life. House's analysis hinted at a critical stance, suggesting that Sethe's act of killing her child was a subject of scrutiny. Holloway's 1990 exploration of the spiritual dimensions within the novel emphasized the importance of water, trees, and the concept of "rememory." This perspective broadened the understanding of Beloved's spiritual journey and its role in the characters' healing and transformation. Holloway's nuanced analysis illuminated the spiritual journey of characters like Sethe, framing their struggles within the context of healing and redemption. In 2006, Pass's examination focused on grief and trauma within the novel, particularly Sethe's mourning process intricately linked to her traumas during slavery. Pass's perspective underscored Sethe's emotional

paralysis and reluctance to confront her historical legacy, leading to a more sympathetic understanding of Sethe's psychological struggles. Martinez's 2008 analysis linked the collective trauma of slavery to the characters' experiences, including Sethe's. Her perspective highlighted how historical wounds continued to affect the characters and American society as a whole, placing Sethe's actions in a broader context of systemic oppression and fostering empathy for her character. This evolution in scholarly interpretations reflects the novel's ability to provoke nuanced discussions and challenge conventional judgments. Scholars have moved from initially casting blame on Sethe to approaching her character with greater empathy, framing her choices within the traumatic context of slavery and its enduring impact. It underscores the complexity of the novel and its capacity to challenge readers' preconceptions about the characters and their motivations.

CHAPTER 2. SPIRITUAL AND SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS

2.1 The Ghostly Presence of Beloved

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the entwining of spiritual and supernatural elements unfolds in a mesmerizing fashion through the enigmatic character, Beloved. This sub-chapter delves profoundly into the mysterious and haunting essence that Beloved lends to the narrative. Here, we embark on a critical exploration of how her spectral presence serves as a potent metaphor, symbolizing the lingering specter of slavery's dark legacy, the indelible imprints of history's scars, and the enduring trauma endured by the characters. In this chapter, we will not only delve into the intricate web of supernatural occurrences but also engage in a critical discussion of Morrison's artistic choices and her underlying thematic intentions. We'll dissect how the supernatural elements intersect with the characters' lives and the broader societal context, shedding light on the profound insights the author conveys through this haunting narrative device. Beloved's entrance into the lives of Sethe, Denver, and Paul D is shrouded in mystery (Moglen 20). Beloved appears seemingly out of thin air, her origin uncertain and her presence ethereal. This very ambiguity is a reflection of the complex nature of history itself. The sudden appearance of Beloved is not just a narrative event, but a metaphorical unveiling of the suppressed and hidden aspects of the characters' pasts. Like the layers of an onion being peeled back, Beloved's arrival reveals the deeply ingrained trauma that continues to shape their lives. "What might your name be?" asked Paul D. *Beloved*, she said, and her voice was so low and rough each one looked at the other two. They heard the voice first--later the name. *Beloved*. You use a last name, Beloved?" Paul D asked her. "Last?" She seemed

puzzled. Then "No," and she spelled it for them, slowly as though the letters were being formed as she spoke them.

Beloved's status as a former slave, as a victim of the same system that has deeply scarred Sethe and the others, makes her a conduit for the collective pain of the past. The memories of cruelty, suffering, and degradation that Beloved carries are a haunting reminder of the enduring legacy of slavery. Her arrival is a manifestation of the emotional baggage that accompanies the characters, an embodiment of their unspoken sorrows and suppressed feelings. Through Beloved, Morrison magnifies the notion that the past is not a distant memory but a present force that shapes actions, perceptions, and relationships. Beloved's supernatural nature in the novel is far more than a literary device—it's a profound metaphor that encapsulates the lingering specter of history. The supernatural is often a realm of the inexplicable, the eerie, and the beyond-reality. In this context, Beloved's ghostly presence serves as a vehicle to emphasize the ways in which history's impact transcends logical comprehension. The supernatural aspects of her presence mirror the intangible but palpable ways in which history persists, influencing the characters' thoughts, decisions, and behaviors in ways that are not immediately visible (Correll). The past is not a closed chapter; rather, it's an ongoing narrative that shapes the present and future. Beloved's presence is a haunting reminder that the past cannot be erased, ignored, or forgotten. Just as a ghost lingers in a place long after its physical presence is gone, the traumas of the past—represented by Beloved—linger in the characters' lives, influencing their actions and choices. This poignant reminder aligns with Morrison's overarching message that confronting and acknowledging history is an essential step towards healing and transformation. Beloved's emergence as a former

slave and her subsequent bonding with Sethe and Denver extend beyond individual experiences. Her character functions as a microcosm of the broader Black experience during and after slavery. The trauma she embodies is not solely Sethe's or Denver's; it's a shared history of pain, struggle, and resilience. Morrison skillfully uses *Beloved* to bridge the gap between individual narratives and collective history, emphasizing that the trauma of slavery was not isolated but a communal wound that echoes through generations (Bičvić).

There is a presence of an unseen entity within the house, which appears to be the ghost of Sethe's deceased baby. This ghost is responsible for causing disturbances and unsettling the objects in the house. Another spectral presence, concealed in human form, is known as *Beloved*. It is suggested that *Beloved* is a reincarnation of Sethe's deceased child. When Sethe encounters *Beloved* outside her home, her behavior is childlike and reminiscent of her past. She exhibits an unsteady gait and surprisingly recalls the song Sethe used to sing to her when she was a child. *Beloved*'s skin appears rejuvenated, and she lacks control over her bodily functions. A conversation that takes place further confirms that the girl is indeed *Beloved*. Within Morrison's novel *Beloved*, a profound exploration of the supernatural unfolds, captivating readers with its symbolic depth and allegorical resonance. Morrison weaves elements of the supernatural throughout the narrative, notably in the spectral presence of spirits and ghosts that inhabit the characters' lives. These ethereal manifestations transcend mere apparitions; they become potent symbols that reverberate with meaning, symbolizing the enduring reverberations of trauma, the persistence of unresolved histories, and the interplay between the past and the present.

The spectral entities that haunt the narrative serve as poignant reminders of the indelible scars left by the cruel institution of slavery. They are neither confined to the realm of the living nor fully embraced by the afterlife, caught in a liminal space that mirrors the plight of the African American characters. This supernatural dimension represents the unresolved and unhealed wounds of the past, which continue to exert their influence on the present. Central to this supernatural is the invisible presence within the house, a presence that can be poignantly interpreted as the lingering spirit of the baby Sethe tragically killed. This embodiment of her past actions serves as a haunting specter, an ever-present reminder of the harrowing choices made under the specter of slavery. This baby ghost encapsulates the profound and lasting impact of Sethe's maternal sacrifice, a sacrifice borne of love and desperation in the face of an oppressive and dehumanizing system. Moreover, the supernatural elements in *Beloved* evoke a sense of collective memory and communal trauma. The spirits that inhabit the characters' lives are not isolated entities but manifestations of shared experiences, symbolic of the broader African American experience of suffering and resilience. These spectral figures transcend individual narratives, binding the characters together through a shared history of oppression and survival. Morrison's masterful incorporation of the supernatural adds layers of complexity to the narrative, inviting readers to contemplate the porous boundaries between reality and the metaphysical. The spectral presence serves as a conduit for exploring the characters' inner landscapes, their struggles with guilt, and their yearning for redemption. It underscores the notion that trauma leaves an indelible mark on the soul, and the past is not so easily exorcised.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison harnesses the power of the supernatural to craft a narrative that transcends time and space, beckoning readers to confront the haunting legacies of slavery. Through spectral manifestations, she explores the enduring impact of trauma, the weight of unresolved histories, and the dance between past and present. The invisible presence within the house stands as a testament to the novel's enduring resonance, a haunting reminder that the past is never truly buried but continues to shape the lives of those who bear witness to its indomitable presence. This presence's disruptive actions reflect the turmoil and unrest that the past can stir within the lives of the characters. It embodies the idea that history, even when concealed or denied, has a persistent and often disruptive impact on the present (Allegue Perales).

Beloved, on the other hand, is a multi-layered supernatural entity. She appears in a human form but is connected to Sethe's history, particularly the death of her child. Beloved's presumed reincarnation introduces a compelling notion of continuity and the cyclical nature of history. The fact that Sethe encounters her outside the house draws a parallel between the past and the present, demonstrating how the past can re-emerge unexpectedly, influencing current events. Beloved's childlike behavior signifies a form of regression, a return to an earlier state, which could be both literal and metaphorical. The recollection of the childhood song highlights the deep-seated memories that have been buried beneath the layers of time. Her lack of control over bodily functions underscores the vulnerability and rawness that the past can expose, bringing forth the unprocessed emotions and experiences that have been suppressed. The conversation that confirms the girl's identity as Beloved underscores the power of recognition and the impact of memory. Sethe's recognition of Beloved's identity is not solely based on physical

resemblance; it's a recognition of the intangible, of the emotional and spiritual connection that spans beyond the boundaries of life and death (House 17-26).

"We have a ghost in here," she said, and it worked. They were not a twosome anymore. Her mother left off swinging her feet and being girlish. Memory of Sweet Home dropped away from the eyes of the man she was being girlish for. He looked quickly up the lightning-white stairs behind her." (Morrison 8)

The presence of the supernatural, along with beliefs and superstitions surrounding it, constitutes a significant thematic element in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. This intertwining of the paranormal with deeply ingrained cultural beliefs serves as a compelling lens through which to explore the characters' responses to trauma, their connections with the past, and the broader sociocultural context of the story. The quote, "We have a ghost in here," uttered by one of the characters, encapsulates the novel's supernatural undercurrent. This declaration is not a mere casual observation but a profound acknowledgment of the presence of a supernatural entity. In the context of the novel, the ghost is not just a specter but a manifestation of the past, a traumatic history that refuses to be buried and forgotten. The idea of a ghost inhabiting the space serves as a metaphor for the lingering trauma of slavery and its enduring impact on the characters. It represents the persistent haunt of their past, a past filled with unimaginable horrors and injustices. The characters in *Beloved* grapple with the ghosts of their own personal histories as well as the collective trauma of the African American experience.

When the character says, "and it worked," it signifies that the revelation of the ghost's presence has a profound effect on those in the room. It disrupts the tranquility and normalcy of their lives, forcing them to confront the past they would rather forget. This

disruption is essential because it shatters the facade of normalcy that the characters have constructed to cope with their pain.

The mention of the mother ceasing to be girlish and the man's gaze shifting to the lightning-white stairs behind her highlights how the supernatural presence alters the dynamics between the characters. The mother's transformation suggests that the acknowledgment of the ghost has stripped away her pretenses and forced her to confront her own trauma. The man's quick glance towards the stairs reveals his fear and unease, hinting at the power and potency of the supernatural in the novel. In *Beloved* the supernatural is not just a spooky element used for shock value; it is a narrative device through which Toni Morrison explores profound themes. It is a representation of the inescapable past, the haunting memories that continue to shape the characters' lives. The ghost is a symbol of the unhealed wounds of slavery, the enduring legacy of brutality and dehumanization. Furthermore, the presence of the supernatural in the novel is intertwined with cultural beliefs and superstitions. In the African American tradition, there is a long history of spiritual practices, folklore, and rituals that incorporate elements of the supernatural. These beliefs are not only a source of comfort and solace but also a means of making sense of a world marked by oppression and violence. As readers, we are invited to navigate this complex terrain of spirituality, superstition, and the paranormal, much like the characters in the novel. We witness their struggle to reconcile their beliefs with the harsh realities they face, and we see how these beliefs provide a sense of continuity and connection to their African heritage.

The characters of Baby Suggs, Sethe, Denver, and Paul D all share a belief in the presence of the ghost that haunts 124 Bluestone Road (Finney). Sethe's suggestion to

move from their current residence prompts a conversation that lays bare their collective understanding of the haunting. Baby Suggs, a wise elder in the community, encapsulates the essence of this belief when she questions the feasibility of escaping the presence of grief and suffering that permeates the houses of the country. Her rhetorical question, "What'd the point?" emphasizes the ubiquity of pain and death in the lives of Black people during that time. The phrase "Not a house in the country ain't pack to its refer with some dead Negro's grief" underscores the haunting reality that sorrow and tragedy are woven into the very fabric of their existence. Baby Suggs' perspective resonates with a broader cultural consciousness wherein death is normalized for the Black community. The era of slavery had seen the brutal mistreatment and deaths of countless individuals, creating an environment of pervasive loss. Baby Suggs' assertion that the ghost could be someone's husband or child serves as a stark reminder of the frequent separations and destruction that occurred within Black families during that dark period. The haunting primarily takes root in 124 Bluestone Road, the house occupied by Sethe and her family. The ghost's presence within this dwelling becomes a potent metaphor for the lingering trauma of slavery. The departure of Sethe's sons, Howard and Buglar, due to their inability to cope with the ghost's terror, illustrates the extent of the psychological burden this haunting carries. This event underscores the idea that the trauma of the past is inescapable, even prompting young souls to flee from their home. The ghost itself represents not only the torment of the past but also the spectral remains of the innocence and lives that were cut short due to the brutality of slavery (Hashim).

The intertwining of superstitions and haunting in *Beloved* transcends the realm of the supernatural; it becomes a metaphor for the collective memory of a people who have

suffered immense pain. The haunting is an external manifestation of the internal struggles faced by the characters, who must navigate a world scarred by historical atrocities. Morrison's narrative artistry lies in her ability to weave the threads of the past, present, and supernatural that exposes the connections between the personal and the historical. Through these superstitious beliefs and the haunting presence, she encapsulates the legacy of trauma and resilience that continue to shape the lives and identities of the characters in the novel.

“124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old--as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). Neither boy waited to see more; another kettleful of chickpeas smoking in a heap on the floor; soda crackers crumbled and strewn in a line next to the door sill. Nor did they wait for one of the relief periods: the weeks, months even, when nothing was disturbed.” (Morrison 1)

The opening line, "124 WAS SPITEFUL," immediately sets a foreboding tone, personifying the house as a living entity consumed by spite. This personification is crucial as it transforms the house into a character in its own right, one with a sinister disposition. The phrase "Full of a baby's venom" is particularly striking. It conveys a sense of irrational, infantile malice, suggesting that the house's hostility is not only deep-rooted but also devoid of reason or understanding. This portrayal of the house's malevolence as childlike

underscores the idea that the trauma and suffering within it are pervasive and inescapable.

Furthermore, both the women and children residing in the house are acutely aware of its spiteful nature. This collective awareness suggests that the house's malevolence has persisted for a considerable duration, affecting all who have lived within its walls. It serves as a symbol of the enduring scars of slavery and the weight of history that African Americans carried even after emancipation. The year 1873 is mentioned, marking a significant point in the house's history. Sethe and her daughter Denver are portrayed as the sole victims of the house's malevolence at this time, as other family members have either died or fled. This temporal reference places the events in the post-Civil War era, adding historical context to the narrative. It suggests that the house's malevolence is intertwined with the broader societal shifts and challenges faced by African Americans during this period. The departure of Sethe's sons, Howard and Buglar, at a young age is notable. Their reasons for fleeing are peculiar and supernatural, indicating that the house is haunted or cursed. Buglar leaves as soon as he shatters a mirror by merely looking into it, while Howard departs upon discovering tiny handprints in a cake. These events serve as a stark manifestation of the malevolence within the house, compelling the boys to escape its influence. The mention of "relief periods" further adds to the mystery surrounding the house. These periods imply that there are times when the malevolent force within the house lies dormant. This cyclic nature of disturbance suggests that the haunting is not constant but occurs in unpredictable, sporadic bursts, deepening the sense of unease and dread associated with the house.

The appearance of two tiny handprints on a cake, yet without the visible presence of a child, immediately sets a tone of the uncanny and the mysterious.

“Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it--stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.” (Morrison 21)

The passage begins with the idea that "Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay." This opening sets the stage for a contemplation of the impermanence and permanence of human experiences. It encapsulates the duality of memory, where some memories fade away with time while others remain etched in one's consciousness. The concept of "rememory" is introduced, which is a term unique to Morrison's narrative and signifies the process of remembering and reliving past experiences. The narrator suggests that rememory is not a selective process, where one forgets some things and remembers others. Instead, it's a complex interplay of memories that persist, whether consciously recalled or not. The notion that "places are still there" introduces the idea that locations hold memories as well. Even if a physical structure, like a house, is destroyed or no longer exists, the essence of that place endures. The narrator goes on to explain that the "picture of it" remains, not just within their own rememory but also in the external world. This idea challenges the conventional understanding of memory as something purely internal.

We delve deeper this externalization of memory when the narrator states, "What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head." (Morrison 21)

This image of memory as a floating picture emphasizes that these memories are not contained within the individual's mind alone. They exist independently, almost as if they have a life of their own. This concept of memory transcending individual consciousness is both intriguing and haunting. Furthermore, the narrator suggests that these memories persist in the world even after their own demise. They assert that "even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there." (Morrison 21)

This idea challenges the conventional notion of death erasing one's experiences. Instead, it suggests that the impact of one's life continues to resonate in the physical world. This image is haunting, as it suggests the manifestation of a presence that isn't physically there. The absence of a child in conjunction with the handprints is paradoxical and unsettling. This occurrence defies the natural laws and rational explanations, amplifying the eerie atmosphere. The cake itself, often associated with celebrations and happiness, becomes a symbol of distortion, as it is marked by an eerie imprint. Furthermore, the movement of objects within the house by themselves adds another layer of supernatural intrigue. Inanimate objects coming to life, shifting and moving without a clear explanation, is a classic trope of ghostly encounters in literature. This phenomenon enhances the sense of an unseen force or presence, underscoring the pervasive nature of the haunting. The house, 124 Bluestone Road, emerges as a central character itself, one filled with its own malevolent intentions and memories. Its creaking floorboards and whispering walls become instruments of dread, as if they hold the secrets of generations past and are eager to share them with those who dare to listen. The motivation of the

ghost, as inferred from the text, is to inflict punishment. The ghost's actions seem to be driven by a desire for retribution, perhaps fueled by the trauma it experienced during its life. The haunting, then, becomes a form of vengeance for the injustices suffered, a relentless pursuit of justice that transcends the boundaries of life and death. This interpretation aligns with the broader theme of the haunting legacy of slavery. The suffering of enslaved individuals and their unresolved grievances reverberate through time, metaphorically appearing as ghostly specters seeking recognition and reckoning, as they claw at the conscience of a nation built on the foundations of their pain and suffering. In this way, *Beloved* becomes a haunting exploration of the past, a powerful reminder that the echoes of history continue to shape the present, and the spirits of the past cannot rest until their stories are told and their wounds are acknowledged.

Sethe's assertion that the ghost does not want to be forgotten adds a layer of complexity to the haunting. It reflects the idea that the past cannot be ignored or erased, regardless of how painful it might be. The ghost's insistence on reappearing and making its presence known is a manifestation of the unignorable scars of history. This theme resonates with the overall narrative of the novel, wherein the characters are forced to confront their traumatic pasts rather than suppress or deny them.

2.2 Spiritual Symbolism in *Beloved*

The symbolism of *Beloved* in Toni Morrison's literary masterpiece, *Beloved* reaches far beyond the surface of a mere character's name. In this exploration of the human experience within the context of slavery and its aftermath, *Beloved*'s name serves as a linguistic and emotional vessel that encapsulates a multitude of meanings, emotions, and implications. Every syllable carries the weight of history, echoing through the narrative to

convey the relationships, identities, and shared sufferings that define the characters and their experiences. The name *Beloved* is a linguistic woven with threads of both love and loss. The very utterance of the name invokes an emotional resonance that reverberates throughout the novel. Love and loss, two inherently contradictory yet inseparable emotions, intertwine in a dance of contradictions within the characters' lives. This duality is not just an abstract concept; it is a lived reality, a reflection of the characters' complex experiences of joy and agony, connection and isolation, hope and despair (Holloway).

The name's duality, in its encapsulation of love and loss, mirrors the multifaceted relationships the characters have with their past, their identities, and each other. Just as the name embraces contradictory emotions, the characters themselves are entangled in a web of conflicting sentiments. Sethe, the protagonist, grapples with her past as both a mother who fiercely loved her children and a survivor who made unthinkable sacrifices. Paul D navigates the complexities of his identity as a former slave and the loss of his sense of self. Denver, on the other hand, seeks to define herself in the wake of a suffocating isolation. *Beloved's* name becomes a touchstone for these complexities, an emblem of the emotional and psychological entanglements that shape their lives (Delagneau).

Beloved, much like a specter, embodies the paradox of absence and presence. Her return is a reunion sought by Sethe and Denver—a return that embodies the presence of a lost child, a sister, and a loved one. Yet, it also signifies the haunting absence, the gap of years, and the unbridgeable void left by her absence. The layers of meaning in *Beloved's* name are further amplified by her existence as an embodiment of the nameless horrors endured by slaves. She is a vessel for the unspeakable traumas, a representative

of the countless lives lost, the untold stories, and the struggles that have been silenced by history. As the embodiment of these complex emotions and historical realities, *Beloved's* name transcends the realm of mere nomenclature. It becomes a conduit through which Morrison conveys the deeply rooted psychological and emotional legacies of slavery. The characters' interactions with *Beloved* are laden with a tension born from the collision of love and loss, of hope and fear. Their attempts to reconcile with her presence, both physical and symbolic, mirror their attempts to grapple with their own histories, their traumas, and their desires for connection. In *Beloved* the name "Beloved" is a thread woven into the narrative's fabric. It is a thread that binds the characters' pasts to their presents, their sorrows to their joys, and their identities to their shared history. Through this name, Morrison masterfully crafts a bridge between the personal and the universal, the individual and the collective. *Beloved* is not just a name; it is a vessel of emotion, a mirror of humanity's capacity for love, loss, resilience, and redemption, encapsulating the heart-wrenching complexities of the human experience in the face of historical atrocity (Simpson). The novel opens with an epigraph that resonates with a biblical passage from Romans 9:25. This verse reads, "I will call them my people, Which were not my people; And her beloved, who was not beloved." This biblical reference carries significant weight, as it mirrors and foreshadows the journey of the characters in the novel, particularly the black slaves who were once marginalized and dispossessed but are now on a path towards reclamation and identity (Mörk).

The novel's characters exhibit various attitudes towards faith. While Sethe is depicted as praying, she later discloses that her prayers have shifted to conversations, signaling a sense of lost hope. Notably, there is no account of Sethe or Denver attending

church or engaging with the Bible. The character of Beloved has been subjected to varied interpretations. Some critics, like Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, approach Beloved from a psychological standpoint, viewing her as a manifestation of the past that must be acknowledged and then relinquished. She also draws religious parallels, with some seeing her as akin to Jesus Christ, given her death and supposed reincarnation. Beloved's entry into the novel is marked by Paul D's exorcism of the baby ghost at 124 Bluestone Road. She later appears as a fully clothed woman emerging from the water. Her lack of memory and her recollection of standing on a bridge serve as metaphorical representations of the transition between life and death. The image of Beloved triggers memories of childbirth for Sethe, connecting her to both the past and the idea of rebirth. Although Sethe struggles to recognize Beloved as her lost daughter, the reader's understanding of her birth is more evident. Denver's suspicions regarding Beloved's existence arise early on. She becomes convinced of Beloved's reality when she notices a scar on her throat while assisting her in undressing. This evokes thoughts of the biblical story of Thomas, who doubted the identity of Jesus after his resurrection until he saw the marks of the nails on his hands. In a similar manner, Beloved's scar functions as tangible proof for Denver, reinforcing the concept of recognizing through physical evidence (Schmudde).

Beloved provides Denver with a description of the place she came from, and her words reflect a realm of darkness, heat, and suffocation. This description conjures an eerie image of a place void of comfort, echoing the idea of a traumatic past or an afterlife marked by suffering. A particularly compelling indicator of Beloved's authenticity is her ability to sing the lullaby that Sethe used to sing exclusively to her children. This resonates

deeply with Sethe, as it was a private and intimate connection between her and her offspring. The fact that Beloved knows this song, something exclusive to Sethe and her children, underscores the intimate connection between the two (Lawrence).

At the core of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* lies a profound exploration of the human psyche, memory, and the complexities of trauma. Sethe's guilt, stemming from her painful past as a former slave, acts as a potent driving force behind the reemergence of Beloved. This perspective is closely aligned with Ashraf H.A Rushdy's interpretation, which views Beloved as not just a character but the embodiment of a past that demands confrontation in order to find release. Moreover, the application of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory further illuminates the narrative's layers, revealing how Beloved serves as a symbol of Sethe's past that she must confront and integrate into her identity. Sethe's guilt is a profound psychological burden, rooted in her act of infanticide, where she killed her own child to prevent her from enduring the horrors of slavery. This event has haunted Sethe, shaping her sense of self and her relationships. The recreation of Beloved can be seen as an external manifestation of Sethe's internal conflict. This concept is similar to Rushdy's notion of Beloved as a representation of a past that must be faced head-on in order to find liberation from its haunting grip. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which underscores the importance of confronting and reconstructing one's past to overcome trauma, is highly applicable in the context of *Beloved*. Freud believed that repressed memories and emotions have a significant impact on an individual's mental health, and the process of bringing them to light is essential for healing. Beloved, in this interpretation, acts as the catalyst for Sethe's psychoanalytic journey. Her presence

compels Sethe to engage with the suppressed memories, emotions, and guilt associated with her past actions (Osagie).

The relationship between Sethe and Beloved can indeed be viewed as a psychoanalytic process leading towards catharsis. Catharsis refers to the emotional release and purification that occurs when suppressed feelings are expressed and resolved. Beloved's presence serves as a conduit for Sethe to confront her guilt-ridden past, allowing her to transform it from a source of torment into an opportunity for growth and healing. Through this cathartic process, Sethe begins to grapple with her trauma, question her own actions, and ultimately strive towards self-forgiveness and acceptance (Morrison). The novel employs religious metaphors and the language of absolution to parallel the concept of catharsis. The idea of cleansing and purging the soul, present in religious practices, aligns with the emotional purification that Sethe undergoes through her engagement with Beloved and her traumatic past. Just as religious absolution offers a form of redemption, Sethe's journey towards confronting her guilt and reckoning with her actions leads her towards a form of emotional redemption and catharsis. The interconnected themes of doubt, recognition, confrontation, and catharsis run through the narrative, supported by religious and psychoanalytic symbolism. Beloved's role in Sethe's journey toward self-confrontation, resolution, and growth is complex, invoking religious parallels while also adhering to psychological principles. Through these layers of meaning, Toni Morrison crafts a narrative that delves deep into the human psyche, exploring the interplay between past trauma, identity, and the quest for healing and absolution (Mörk).

Sethe bears a heavy burden of remorse, and if Beloved's incarnation is present to absolve Sethe and alleviate her from culpability, it necessitates an examination of the manner in which this redemption can be achieved. According to Christian tenets, absolution is the optimal route to alleviate oneself from guilt and blame. In Christian tradition, Jesus sacrificed himself for humanity's sins; on the cross, he uttered the words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."(Luke 23:24) A crucial aspect is confessing one's sins and showing genuine remorse; only then can absolution be granted. Initially, Sethe appears to have lost her faith in God. She has carried the weight of her guilt for an extended duration. Her criminal act has been addressed in the legal realm, as she has undergone punishment in prison. Therefore, from a legal perspective, she has been granted forgiveness. However, the specter of the deceased baby continues to torment her, serving as an unending reminder of her transgression. Sethe remains entwined with her memories and consistently experiences a sense of unease, even though her genuine level of remorse is ambiguous.

When Sethe discloses her actions to Paul D, she asserts that her role is to protect her loved ones from the horrifying truth she knows. She states, "it's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that." It remains uncertain whether Sethe truly feels contrite and confesses her guilt. Her relief is palpable when she finally recognizes Beloved as her deceased daughter, realizing that she has been pardoned. Beloved craves Sethe's attention, endeavoring to reclaim her lost childhood. Sethe's fixation on Beloved intensifies, culminating in a monologue where Sethe declares, *"I am Beloved and she is mine"*. (Morrison 120)

In this context, Beloved's transformation from the deceased to the living becomes evident. Her primary focus is reuniting with Sethe: "I am not dead. I sit in the sun, close my eyes. When I open them, I see the face I lost. Sethe's is the face that left me. Sethe sees me. Her smiling face is the place for me. Doing it at last, a hot thing. Now we can join a hot thing."(Morrison 120). Sethe and Beloved's voices converge in a dialogue where they explore their connection. The discourse touches upon whether Beloved came from the other side and whether she was a result of Sethe's memories. While Beloved does not explicitly respond to these inquiries, she inquires about the whereabouts of the "men without skin," referring to the white men who sought to capture them. Sethe asserts that she halted them on one occasion and they won't return. The dialogue concludes with the refrain, "You are mine, You are mine, You are mine."(Morrison 122), suggesting a merging of their identities.

This merging of identities draws parallels to Jesus Christ within the framework of Christianity, where Jesus and God are considered one, just as Beloved and Sethe merge into a singular identity. This comparison highlights the thematic richness of *Beloved*, as it navigates the interplay between remorse, redemption, and the potential for spiritual transformation. Sethe exhibits a remarkable dedication to Beloved, which includes relinquishing her employment at the restaurant and crafting new garments for her. Demetrakopoulos characterizes Sethe's intense focus on Beloved as a harsh form of "remothering". As Beloved, who was initially frail and emaciated, gains strength and vitality, Sethe experiences a contrasting transformation, almost diminishing herself as a gesture of penitence. Demetrakopoulos further characterizes their bond as a form of

"psychic incest", contending that this deep connection between mother and daughter hinders the mother's engagement with the community.

The intertwining of their identities becomes a focal point of the novel's narrative, a symbol of the profound sacrifice Sethe is willing to make for the sake of Beloved's survival and well-being. Sethe's actions reflect a complex interplay of guilt, love, and the desire for redemption. Her devotion to Beloved is both a testament to her maternal instinct and a manifestation of her own inner turmoil. This dynamic also underscores the theme of isolation within the story. Sethe's fixation on Beloved leads her to withdraw from the world, severing ties with her community and even compromising her own sense of self. In a way, her relationship with Beloved becomes all-encompassing, a consuming force that isolates her from the healing potential of human connection. As the novel unfolds, the merging of their identities serves as a catalyst for exploring the depths of Sethe's trauma and the haunting legacy of slavery. It becomes a lens through which Morrison examines the profound psychological and emotional scars left by the institution of slavery, emphasizing how the past continues to exert its influence on the present. The merging of Sethe and Beloved's identities is not only a narrative device but a powerful exploration of the enduring impact of history on individual lives. This is particularly evident in Sethe's case, as she becomes increasingly isolated from society (Demetrakopoulos).

In the later stages, the household is left with scarce resources, leading Denver to assume responsibility and seek assistance from the community. A group of thirty black women rally to Sethe's aid, rescuing her from the corporeal manifestation of the haunting ghost. Sethe's role as a protective mother, defending her children from harm, positions her to receive a form of absolution through the assistance of Beloved. The specter of the

deceased baby, an alter ego of Beloved, plays a significant role throughout the narrative. It acts as a motivator, urging Sethe to escape the oppressive farm and avoid subjecting her children to further suffering under the Schoolteacher's tyranny. The death of the baby also serves as a symbolic sacrifice that secures the family's liberation. Sethe's fateful act of killing her child inadvertently convinces the slave owner of her presumed insanity, leading him to banish them from the farm. This metaphorical sacrifice, akin to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for humanity's salvation, spares her family from continued bondage. On a religious and metaphorical level, Morrison subtly implies Sethe's godlike attributes, which contrast with her tragic life circumstances. Sethe's name, derived from the biblical Seth, suggests a connection to divinity; however, her life takes an opposing trajectory. She endures loss, societal exclusion, and an appalling crime, causing her faith in God to dwindle (House). Morrison's selection of the name Sethe holds deeper implications. It suggests that Sethe transcends the ordinary, representing a poignant political argument against slavery. Her willingness to sacrifice her own child to preserve her family's freedom serves as a rallying point for her racial group's liberation, paralleling the concept of a chosen one, evoking allusions to Jesus Christ. Morrison's incorporation of positive West African cultural practices, such as naming traditions and connection to the supernatural, underscores Sethe's significance as a symbol of communal strength. The tree symbol becomes intertwined with Sethe's identity. She becomes the guardian of the symbolic tree, marked by scars on her back resembling a tree, an outcome of her punishment for escaping the plantation.

CHAPTER 3. MOTHERHOOD IN THE NOVEL

3.1 Maternal Sacrifice and Identity

Maternal Sacrifice and Identity are two central themes in Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*. This powerful and haunting novel delves deeply into the lives of its characters, particularly Sethe, a former slave, and her relationship with her daughter, Denver, as well as the specter of Beloved, the child Sethe killed to protect her from a life of slavery. The themes of maternal sacrifice and identity are woven throughout the narrative, creating a complex and emotionally charged exploration of the African American experience in the aftermath of slavery. Sethe's love for her children is both her strength and her downfall. She is willing to do anything to protect them from the horrors of slavery, even if it means committing a horrific act. This act of maternal sacrifice reverberates throughout the novel, haunting Sethe and shaping her identity as a mother. Sethe's identity is deeply tied to her role as a mother. Her sense of self is defined by her love for her children and her determination to keep them safe. However, this identity is also haunted by the trauma of slavery and the choices she had to make to survive. Sethe grapples with the guilt and the ghosts of her past, particularly the ghost of Beloved, who returns to haunt her. Beloved's return forces Sethe to confront her actions and the impact they had on her identity as a mother.

Identity is a complex and multifaceted theme in *Beloved*. Sethe's identity is not only shaped by her role as a mother but also by her experiences as a slave. She grapples with the trauma of her past and the scars it has left on her body and soul. Her sense of self is fragmented and haunted by the specter of slavery, making it difficult for her to fully embrace her identity as a free woman and a mother. Denver, Sethe's surviving daughter,

also grapples with issues of identity in the novel. She is isolated and lonely, having grown up in the shadow of her mother's traumatic past. Her identity is defined by her mother's sacrifices and the ghostly presence of Beloved. Denver's journey towards self-discovery and independence is central to the novel, as she seeks to forge her own identity separate from the trauma of her family's history. The character of Beloved herself represents a complex exploration of identity. She is a ghost, a specter of the past, and yet she longs for a sense of self and belonging. Her presence in the novel challenges the boundaries of identity, blurring the lines between the living and the dead, the past and the present.

In *Beloved*, Morrison explores the themes of maternal sacrifice and identity through rich and complex characters. Sethe's act of killing her child and the subsequent haunting by Beloved serve as a powerful metaphor for the enduring legacy of slavery on African American identity. The novel forces readers to confront the painful history of slavery and its impact on the individual and collective identities of African Americans. It is a poignant and haunting exploration of the lengths to which a mother will go to protect her children and the profound ways in which trauma shapes our sense of self. The nameless mother of Sethe stands as an exemplification of how the commodification of black women as mere instruments for reproduction compelled them to resort to extreme forms of retribution. Nan, the woman who raises Sethe, recounts the narrative of Sethe's mother, and this account unveils a woman who bore multiple children, encompassing both black and white offspring. Nonetheless, Sethe's mother opts to relinquish all her progeny except Sethe, who is of black descent.

Nan further discloses that both she and Sethe's mother underwent a harrowing ordeal of enduring repeated instances of assault and exploitation at the hands of the

ship's crew during their harrowing voyage on the slave ship—an unfortunately commonplace occurrence. These evocative recollections stand as potent exemplifications of how African mothers, driven by the urgency of their oppression, devised a strategy that can be best characterized as "love murder." The story of Sethe's mother underscores the profound psychological trauma and moral complexities born out of the institution of slavery. It sheds light on the agonizing choices that black women were forced to make in a world where their bodies and the lives of their children were often treated as commodities. The term "love murder" encapsulates the tragic paradox of a mother's love and her desire to protect her child from a life of unrelenting suffering, even if it meant taking their life. Sethe's mother becomes a symbol of the indomitable spirit of survival and resistance that defined the lives of many African Americans during this dark period in history. Through her story, Morrison delves into the depths of human suffering and the complexity of maternal love in the face of unimaginable cruelty. This deeply poignant action represented their assertion of authority and self-determination, allowing them to regain a modicum of control and autonomy by preemptively terminating the lives of their own offspring before they could be ensnared in the chains of enslavement (Caesar). In this context, Sethe's mother becomes a symbol of the indomitable spirit of survival and resistance that defined the lives of many African Americans during this dark period in history. It's a reflection of the immense strength it took to endure the horrors of slavery and the lengths to which mothers would go to spare their children from that same fate. Morrison's narrative dives deep into the depths of human suffering, painting a vivid picture of the brutality and dehumanization faced by enslaved people. At the same time, it explores the complexity of maternal love, revealing how it can lead to acts that seem

incomprehensible but are driven by a mother's fierce determination to protect her child. Sethe's actions, as tragic as they are, represented a form of assertion of authority and self-determination in a world where enslaved individuals had little control over their own lives. By making the agonizing choice to end her child's life, Sethe was, in a way, reclaiming some semblance of control and autonomy for herself and her child. It's a heartbreaking and deeply poignant aspect of the story that forces us to grapple with the profound moral and emotional dilemmas faced by those who lived through such a dark chapter in history.

The emergence of infanticide as a form of defiance within the realm of African American women's experiences is undeniable. In the face of their oppressive and predatory oppressors, this drastic measure evolved into a powerful tool of protest, emblematic of the lengths to which these mothers were willing to go to safeguard their children from the impending horrors of slavery. The decision to enact "love murder" through infanticide was undoubtedly a heart-wrenching one, reflecting the agonizing choices thrust upon them by their circumstances. This act symbolizes a rebellion against the systemic dehumanization inflicted upon them, presenting a paradox where maternal love and sacrifice intertwine with a painful necessity for liberation. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison astutely examines the theme of the mother-daughter relationship, delving into the core of motherhood. The reminiscences of Sethe are infused with a profound maternal sentiment, portraying the affection and apprehension of a mother compelled to commit homicide to shield her children from the clutches of slavery. Her intense sorrow over her lost offspring remains a prevailing thread within the narrative, underscoring the deeply rooted connection between mother and child.

Sethe's recollections of her unnamed mother are confined to an image of a woman in a field, her back stooped, donning a cloth hat. Sethe remains unaware of the rationale behind her mother's execution, yet she entertains the suspicion that it might have been linked to a bid for escape from the plantation. Sethe firmly rejects the notion that her mother would have forsaken her, as it would perpetuate the cycle of severed mother-daughter bonds that has afflicted their lineage for generations. Sethe's memories of her mother are inextricably entwined with sensations of painful abandonment, rendering it for her to recall her mother without invoking the belief that she was deserted. The mother-daughter dynamic between Sethe and her own mother—characterized by fusion, loss, betrayal, and recuperation—is mirrored in her current rapport with Beloved. In the beginning, Beloved presents as a solitary and affectionate girl, but soon transforms into a possessive and unrelentingly demanding presence, nearly driving Sethe to her demise. Sethe finds herself plagued by Beloved's existence, recognizing the inherently destructive nature of any form of human possession. The novel propounds an imperative ethical quandary: whether accountability for Beloved's demise rests solely with Sethe or if the institution of slavery bears the sole culpability (Mathieson).

Sethe's resolute love for her children radiates through the narrative. She articulates this sentiment in her own words, affirming her affection for each of her infants, herself included. Sethe takes pride in her capacity to bring forth her children and liberate herself from enslavement, with the assistance of others and her own resourcefulness. Her maternal devotion transcends mere caretaking; it constitutes a form of self-interest hitherto undiscovered. Sethe imparts to Beloved a myriad of narratives elucidating her unwavering devotion and affection for her daughter. She underscores her endeavors to

provide nourishing milk, her safeguarding against flies in the grape arbor, her anguish at witnessing her child's mosquito bite, and her readiness to relinquish her own existence for the sake of Beloved. Sethe strives to communicate the impact that the yoke of slavery exerted on her capability to fulfill her aspirations as a mother. In the beginning of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe, the maternal figure, conveys that she exists in every moment yet lacks a true sense of vitality. These poignant words capture the essence of Sethe's internal struggle, a struggle that reverberates throughout the narrative of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Sethe's voice rises from the depths of her soul, resonating with the pain of generations of enslaved individuals who were trapped in a world that denied them their humanity. Her cry is a testament to the relentless desire for freedom, individuality, and the opportunity to experience motherhood in its purest form. Sethe's yearning is a reflection of her deep-seated aspirations, the dreams she nurtures within her heart. She longs to be more than just a vessel for labor and reproduction. She aspires to embody the multifaceted roles of a nurturing mother, a protective guardian, a wise mentor to her children, and an unwavering shield against the cruelties of the world. These aspirations are universal, but for Sethe, they seem tragically unattainable due to the color of her skin, a fact that she finds unbearably unjust.

In a society that reduces her to a commodity, a mere possession, Sethe's longing for individuality and meaningful motherhood is an act of resistance. It is a call to break the shackles of dehumanization and reclaim her identity as a person with hopes, dreams, and the capacity for love. Her words resonate with the voices of countless others who suffered under the yoke of slavery, echoing their collective yearning for freedom and equality. Through Sethe's powerful words, Toni Morrison confronts the harsh realities of the past,

exposing the deep wounds inflicted by slavery on the African American psyche. The novel *Beloved* becomes a testament to the enduring spirit of those who fought for their humanity and the right to live life on their own terms, free from the burdens of oppression and prejudice. The words reflect a deep well of pain and agony within Sethe. Her desires are tied to a relentless pursuit of selfhood and maternal fulfillment. Her agony is rooted in the systemic and deeply ingrained racism that confines her aspirations. As an enslaved black woman, she is subjected to a world that unjustly denies her the fundamental rights of personhood and motherhood. The anguish she feels is not only about her inability to fulfill her own desires but also about the injustice of the system that prevents her from doing so (Mayfield). Sethe's cry for freedom and selfhood carries a weight of historical and personal trauma. The institution of slavery has stripped her of her agency and suppressed her most basic desires. Through her words, Morrison paints a vivid picture of the emotional turmoil and suffering that result from the denial of basic human rights. The pain in her words is a reflection of the broader pain experienced by countless individuals who were subjugated by a system that dehumanized and devalued them. Inner conflict reveals the depth of her emotions, hinting at her profound yearning for something beyond the ordinary facets of life. This yearning is particularly significant in the context of her role as a mother who has undergone immense trauma, making her relationship with her children and her understanding of motherhood all the more complex.

Sethe's desire for her child to be reborn is a powerful expression of her yearning for a second chance, a chance to rewrite the past and provide her children with a life untouched by the horrors of slavery. Her desperation to see her child reborn is rooted in her desire to undo the pain and suffering that she and her family have endured. This

yearning is also a manifestation of her guilt and a desperate attempt to heal the wounds of her past actions. The act of motherhood, in Sethe's case, is deeply entwined with notions of sacrifice, protection, and a desire for redemption. Her overwhelming love for her children is shadowed by the haunting memories of her own traumatic past. Her desperate wish for her child's rebirth is a plea for a new beginning, an opportunity to rewrite the story and provide her child with the life she believes they deserve. Furthermore, Sethe's words resonate with the broader themes of the novel, including the idea of rememory and the intergenerational impact of trauma. Her longing for rebirth speaks to the idea of breaking the cycle of suffering and passing down a better life to the next generation, a desire that is present in many of the characters' experiences throughout the narrative. Sethe's opening statement encapsulates the complex emotional landscape of motherhood in *BeLoved*. Her longing for rebirth reflects her desperation for redemption, her yearning for a chance to rewrite history, and her unrelenting love for her children (Beaulieu). Through these words, Morrison crafts a character whose motherly instincts are both deeply personal and universally resonant, inviting readers to contemplate the profound depths of maternal love and sacrifice in the face of unimaginable adversity. Sethe's maternal affection and enthusiasm for her children become evident when she arranges for them to travel in a wagon alongside Ella and other women to reach Halle's mother in Cincinnati, Ohio.

In the novel, every woman, starting with Sethe, is compelled to confront the reality that their maternal nourishment, symbolized by milk, has been tainted by the degrading forces of slavery. Milk, typically associated with sustenance and motherhood, becomes intertwined with blood, signifying the black women's resistance against their

dehumanization. Through the act of infanticide, they transform a source of nurturing into a symbol of defiance, reacting against their subjugation. By choosing to end the lives of their own children, these women endeavor to shield them from the horrors of slavery and prevent them from becoming mere commodities owned by their oppressors.

3.2 Maternal Bonds and Legacy

Maternal bonds are a prevailing and poignant theme throughout *Beloved*. Sethe's experiences as a mother are marked by both profound love and profound suffering. She endures the unimaginable horrors of slavery, including the trauma of having her own children taken from her. Sethe's maternal love is fierce and unwavering, as evidenced by her desperate act of killing her own child, Beloved, to spare her from the clutches of slavery. This agonizing act of maternal sacrifice speaks to the depths of a mother's love and the extreme measures one might take to protect their offspring. However, Sethe's maternal bonds are also marred by the legacy of slavery. Her love for her children is complicated by the trauma she has experienced, and her actions are haunted by the guilt and pain of her past. The novel explores how the legacy of slavery, with its brutal separation of families and dehumanization of enslaved mothers, continues to shape and influence the maternal bonds of the characters. The character of Denver, Sethe's surviving daughter, is a compelling exploration of maternal bonds. She grows up in the shadow of her mother's traumatic past, and her isolation and loneliness reflect the complexities of her relationship with Sethe. Denver's journey towards self-discovery and independence is intertwined with her quest to understand and navigate the depths of her mother's love and suffering. Her bond with Sethe is both a source of strength and a source of struggle as she seeks to forge her own identity.

Legacy is another profound theme in *Beloved*. The legacy of slavery looms large over the characters and their lives. The characters in the novel grapple with the enduring impact of slavery on their identities and their relationships. Sethe's actions, including the killing of Beloved, are a direct result of the legacy of slavery, and they continue to shape her life and the lives of her children. The character of Beloved herself embodies the idea of a haunting legacy. As a ghost and a presence from the past, she represents the unresolved trauma and pain of slavery that continues to haunt the characters. Beloved's return forces Sethe to confront her actions and the legacy they have created, leading to a reckoning with the past.

Toni Morrison's distinctive and complex artistic style is once again showcased through the singular connection between a mother and daughter portrayed in the narrative. Morrison's ethereal presence surpasses human limitations to portray the harrowing terrors of the Middle Passage, which Sethe's mother, known as the "woman from the sea," endured. While Sethe, her mother, and her daughter each experience moments of feeling abandoned by their maternal figures, the most poignant illustration of mother-daughter separation unfolds when Beloved asserts that Sethe entered the sea voluntarily, free from coercion (Mathieson). In a later part of the novel, as Sethe grows into adulthood and becomes a mother herself, the deep traumas of her enslavement haunt her to such an extent that she would rather take the drastic step of killing her own children than subject them to the horrors she endured as a slave. This unsettling choice is driven by her profound fear of her children experiencing the same torment she went through.

While her actions may seem monstrous instead of maternal at first glance, they can also be interpreted as a desperate expression of love. Her primary concern is ensuring

the safety and well-being of her children, sparing them from the agonizing ordeals she herself faced. Sethe's decision to take such extreme measures disrupts the conventional perception of motherhood. She is no longer conforming to the traditional maternal role, as she willingly takes part in what can be termed "love murder". This unexpected course of action is heavily influenced by her own traumatic experiences, particularly the harrowing image of her mother hanging during her childhood. This event fundamentally shapes Sethe's perspective on both slavery and motherhood. Denied the nurturing care and love of her own mother, Sethe is fiercely committed to providing her own children with the care she never received. Her determination to ensure they never endure the same hunger and emotional emptiness drives her actions. In fact, her children become her ultimate focus, and she asserts her ownership and role as their provider, even within the confines of their enslavement. The symbolism of "milk" takes on a profound significance, representing the nurturing sustenance she desires to offer them. When her milk is stolen, it deeply affects her, not only for herself but for the violation committed against her children. Her children's well-being becomes inseparable from her own. Sethe's dedication to safeguarding her children's physical and emotional needs underscores her determination to provide them with a life that she herself was denied. Sethe's actions challenge conventional notions of motherhood while shedding light on the brutal impact of slavery on both individuals and their maternal instincts. Her choices, while undeniably controversial, reflect her love and desire to spare her children from the suffering she endured, further illustrating the complexities of motherly love in the face of adversity.

Sethe's bond with her daughter Denver is undeniably distinct. While maternal protection is a fundamental aspect of motherhood, Sethe's commitment to safeguarding

Denver goes to exceptional lengths. Throughout her life, Sethe's determination to shield Denver from the harsh realities of the world leads her to isolate her within their home, an excessive form of protection that hinders Denver's freedom. It's crucial to underline that Sethe's dedication to her children is both fervent and radical, an act of rebellion against the systemic suppression of slave motherhood. Fearing the abandonment she experienced with her two sons, Sethe clings to Denver, resulting in Denver's confinement within the house, an environment that stunts her growth into an independent woman, a scenario her mother dreads. As Denver expresses her frustration,

“I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either”. (Morrison 9)

Denver's journey in *Beloved* is a poignant exploration of a daughter's resilience and determination to navigate the complexities of her relationship with her mother, Sethe. As circumstances evolve, Denver's life takes a transformative turn, compelling her to venture beyond the confines of her home and into the unfamiliar terrain of the outside world. This transition is not merely an external shift; it signifies an internal growth as Denver steps into a role that demands responsibility, independence, and the provision of care for her mother.

Sethe's psychological turmoil, stemming from her traumatic past as a former slave, casts a long shadow over their relationship. Her concealed history, marked by the harrowing act of killing her own child to spare her from the horrors of slavery, creates a chasm of secrecy and unspoken pain between mother and daughter. Sethe's actions, driven by her own traumatic experiences, inadvertently isolate and alienate Denver, leaving her to grapple with a mixture of confusion, anger, and unsettling emotions as she

gradually uncovers the truth. The revelation of Sethe's past deed further complicates Denver's perception of her mother. The unsettling discovery of her mother's involvement in a horrendous act of infanticide shatters Denver's previous notions of maternal protection and love. This revelation propels Denver into a complex emotional journey, where she must confront the duality of her mother's actions: the desperate act of a mother attempting to spare her child from slavery's horrors, and the monstrous act that stands in stark contrast to societal norms (Schapiro). However, as Denver delves deeper into her mother's past, she begins to grasp the layers of Sethe's motivations. Slowly, Denver comprehends the extent of Sethe's overprotectiveness and her fierce determination to shield her children from the cruelties she herself endured. This understanding serves as a catalyst for Denver's empathy, sparking a shift from resentment to empathy. Denver recognizes the deep love and maternal instincts that compelled Sethe's actions, even if those actions deviated from conventional norms. Throughout these challenges, Denver's admiration and affection for her mother remain steadfast. Sethe serves as Denver's anchor in a world that has long been characterized by isolation and fear. As the mysterious presence of Beloved enters their lives, Denver's commitment to ensuring Sethe's safety intensifies. Despite the specter of fear that Beloved brings, Denver steps up to protect her mother, embodying a newfound strength and determination to safeguard the person who has been her constant source of love and guidance.

Denver's journey from isolation to engagement with the world underscores her resilience and transformation. As she ventures into the outside world to work and provide for Sethe, Denver becomes a symbol of hope, breaking free from the confinements of their home and defying the traumatic legacy of her past. In her pursuit of empowerment

and agency, Denver's actions serve as a testament to her ability to rise above adversity, while also revealing the bond she shares with her mother. This portrayal underscores the love and compassion that persists even in the most mother-daughter relationships. Despite the challenges they face, Denver's trajectory in the novel is characterized by resilience and growth. Her journey stands as a beacon of hope, a testament to her survival amidst a troubled upbringing and difficult life circumstances. Though she herself isn't a slave, Denver grapples with psychological and emotional struggles stemming from her isolation within their home. This ordeal fortifies her, enabling her to surmount her fears and adversities.

Denver's transformation is further evidenced by her efforts to engage with the community and seek assistance, leading to her healing process. As the narrative places Denver on a path toward empowerment, her experiences are emblematic of the novel's overarching themes of resilience and triumph over adversity. Ultimately, Denver's journey encapsulates the capacity for growth and transformation, illustrating that even in the most challenging circumstances, a glimmer of hope and the potential for empowerment can emerge. While Howard and Buglar may not have a prominent presence in the majority of the novel, their connection with Sethe still bears examination. The narrative implies that Buglar and Howard left 124 due to a haunting apparition that invaded their home. Given their older age, Buglar and Howard possessed a deeper comprehension of the situation compared to Denver, who was merely an infant at the time. Their maturity allowed them to grasp the implications of Sethe's actions, which they viewed as profoundly wrong. Witnessing their mother's act instilled a fear that she might repeat it, prompting them to seek refuge in a place where they could feel safer. This underscores the notion that Sethe

did not share an affectionate bond with her two sons; instead of perceiving her as a nurturing and sheltering figure, they regarded her as a source of potential harm.

Moreover, the dynamics among Sethe, Howard, and Buglar underscore the enduring devastation slavery wreaked upon families. The repercussions of racial cruelty were not confined to mothers alone; even children, though not direct victims, bore the emotional burden and enduring impacts of slavery. Consequently, the relationship between Sethe and her sons reveals that the profound trauma of slavery had the capacity to irreparably rupture familial ties. The suffering tied to skin color-based oppression extended beyond the maternal figure, with its consequences seeping into the lives of the younger generation. The decision made by Howard and Buglar to depart stemmed from their mother's circumstances as a victim of slavery, driven by her attempt to shield her children from the same dismal destiny. Their departure became a poignant reflection of the sacrifices and defensive measures enslaved individuals undertook to safeguard their loved ones from the horrors they themselves endured. This interplay of personal choices and historical context not only unveils the layers of relationships within the novel but also serves as a microcosm of the broader societal impacts of slavery. Expanding further on these ideas, the characters of Howard and Buglar in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* are emblematic of the multilayered themes of trauma, familial bonds, and the long-reaching legacy of slavery. Despite their limited appearance in the narrative, their departure from 124 Bluestone Road holds significant symbolic weight that is deeply intertwined with the experiences of Sethe and the broader context of American slavery.

The departure of Buglar and Howard can be seen as a reaction to the haunting that pervades their home, which serves as a powerful allegory for the unresolved traumas of

slavery. The ghost that infiltrates their lives can be interpreted as a representation of the past that refuses to be buried, a reminder of the horrors their family endured and the inescapable chains of history. This traumatic presence disrupts the conventional notions of domesticity and stability, pushing Buglar and Howard, who are old enough to comprehend the implications, to confront a reality that they can barely understand, much less reconcile with. Unlike their younger sister Denver, who was shielded from the worst aspects of their past, Buglar and Howard have a cognitive awareness of their mother's actions and the reasons behind them. Sethe's desperate act of killing her child is an act of both love and tragedy; she seeks to protect her child from the horrors of slavery while simultaneously perpetrating a deeply traumatic act. For Buglar and Howard, witnessing this act shatters their perception of their mother as a source of security. They are forced to grapple with the complexities of her choices, perceiving her as both a protector and a potential threat. The departure of Buglar and Howard can be viewed as a manifestation of the generational impacts of slavery. Even though they themselves might not have experienced the physical horrors of enslavement, the psychological and emotional weight of their family's history is palpable. Their decision to leave is not just a reaction to a singular event but a response to a legacy of suffering that has been passed down through generations. Morrison deftly illustrates how the scars of slavery are not confined to those who directly experienced it but are imprinted on the collective psyche of families and communities.

In a broader context, the fractured relationship between Sethe and her sons speaks to the broader theme of how slavery ruptured familial bonds. The institution of slavery dehumanized individuals, tearing them away from their loved ones, and rendering

traditional family structures vulnerable to separation and destruction. Sethe's inability to provide the nurturing and loving environment her sons needed is not a reflection of her personal shortcomings but an outcome of the systemic dehumanization that slavery inflicted on her. Baby Suggs, a central character in the novel, presents a distinct perspective on motherhood when compared to Sethe, the protagonist. Baby Suggs' role as a mother figure offers a unique lens through which to examine themes of loss, acceptance, community, and self-love. One notable contrast between Baby Suggs and Sethe lies in their approach to motherhood in the face of separation from their children. Sethe's inability to let go of her dead child, referred to as Beloved, exemplifies the profound impact of loss and the enduring grip of trauma. Sethe's act of killing Beloved is both a desperate act of protection and a reflection of the haunting legacy of slavery. On the other hand, Baby Suggs stands as a contrasting example. Though her own children have been taken from her, she exhibits a remarkable acceptance of this fact. Her acknowledgment of the likelihood that she will never reunite with her children illustrates a form of resilience that acknowledges the reality of her circumstances, even while it acknowledges her pain. This difference in their responses to maternal separation reflects the nuanced ways in which individuals cope with the irreparable wounds inflicted by slavery. Baby Suggs' role as a positive force within the community underscores her significance beyond her immediate familial relationships. Her gatherings, sermons, and "Clearing" rituals provide a space of healing and empowerment for the black community. In a world scarred by the brutality of slavery and the subsequent struggles for freedom, Baby Suggs offers a beacon of hope and spiritual rejuvenation. This sense of communal

motherhood expands the traditional understanding of maternal bonds, emphasizing the broader impact a motherly figure can have on a collective group.

The relationship between Baby Suggs and Sethe is particularly compelling. Baby Suggs steps into a motherly role for Sethe, offering the care and love that Sethe lacked from her own mother. This dynamic highlights the complex interplay of maternal figures and the ways in which motherhood can be nurtured and sustained even when biological ties are severed or strained. Baby Suggs' nurturing presence becomes a source of solace for Sethe, contributing to her ability to navigate the trials of her life. Unlike Sethe, Baby Suggs adopts an emotional detachment from her children due to her awareness that they will inevitably be taken away from her. Despite having eight children, she has experienced the loss of each one through various circumstances. The act of investing emotional energy into understanding the features of her children seems futile to Baby Suggs, as she recognizes that their futures are not within her control. She recalls examining the physical attributes of her infants, like their small feet and chubby fingertips, but these details never solidified into the recognizable features of grown individuals. The inability to witness her children's development into adulthood becomes a poignant symbol of the tragic separation and loss that defined the lives of slave mothers.

Baby Suggs' emotional disconnection from her children can be seen as a coping mechanism to shield herself from the heartbreak of losing them. The pain of repeatedly losing her offspring has led her to a state of self-preservation, where she actively limits her emotional investment to safeguard herself from the anguish of recurring loss. This emotional distancing becomes her means of survival within a deeply oppressive and traumatic context. Among her children, only Halle, Sethe's husband, survives to

adulthood, and Baby Suggs witnesses his transition into maturity. In a world characterized by the exploitation of black women by both black and white men, Halle's existence takes on a special significance. He is the offspring of a black man, which differentiates him from many children born to enslaved mothers who were conceived through relationships with white men. This distinction allows Baby Suggs to feel a sense of connection and love for Halle that is often denied to other slave mothers. His origin as the product of a consensual relationship rather than one steeped in exploitation offers a glimmer of hope and humanity in a bleak landscape.

However, even this source of hope is not immune to the brutal realities of slavery. Despite being able to keep Halle with her for a time, the inhumanity of the system eventually forces their separation. Halle purchases his own freedom, highlighting the twisted dynamics of a world where the basic human right to remain with one's family can be bought and sold. This separation stands as a testament to the heartrending choices and sacrifices made by enslaved individuals seeking autonomy and liberation. Baby Suggs' approach to love, particularly in regard to her children, stands in stark contrast to Sethe's own experiences. Baby Suggs loves all her children without regard for who their fathers are, exemplifying an unconditional and inclusive form of maternal love. This stands in direct contrast to Sethe's own experiences with her mother, whose coldness and detachment had a lasting impact on her. Baby Suggs' ability to love without condition or prejudice becomes a powerful commentary on the transformative potential of love to challenge and dismantle the dehumanizing effects of racism and slavery. As Baby Suggs imparts her wisdom to Denver before her death, the theme of self-love and empowerment takes center stage. Baby Suggs, who herself endured discrimination and dehumanization,

serves as a source of strength for Denver. She instills in Denver the importance of self-worth and self-acceptance, urging her to resist the pervasive messages of inferiority that society seeks to impose. Denver's potential for growth and self-empowerment symbolizes a progression beyond the historical indignities faced by black women and mothers. Through its exploration of maternal bonds and legacy, *Beloved* provides a searing and powerful commentary on the enduring impact of slavery on African American lives. It illustrates how the legacy of slavery is not limited to historical events but continues to shape the present and the future. The novel underscores the resilience of maternal love in the face of immense suffering and the profound ways in which the past continues to reverberate through the generations. Toni Morrison invites readers to grapple with the complexities of these themes and to confront the painful truths of America's history.

CHAPTER 4. MEMORY AND TRAUMA

4.1 Traumatic memories

The novel delves into the profound impact of slavery's horrors on the human psyche, revealing how memories of trauma can be both haunting and transformative. The characters' experiences, marked by suffering, dehumanization, and loss, become imprinted on their memories, dictating their behaviors, emotions, and relationships. The traumatic memories in the novel are not mere remnants of the past; they are living entities that continue to exert their influence on the present. Sethe, the central character, carries the burden of an agonizing past—a past that includes the brutal act of killing her own child to shield her from the clutches of slavery. This traumatic event becomes an indelible mark on Sethe's memory, shaping her identity, her relationship with her surviving daughter Denver, and her perception of motherhood. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe emerges as a character profoundly marked by traumatic experiences that have left an indelible imprint on her psyche. The reemergence of Beloved is far more than a simple reappearance; it is a resurrection of suppressed trauma that Sethe has been grappling with. This haunting presence of Beloved symbolizes the intrusive nature of traumatic memories, which can unexpectedly surface even after attempts to suppress them. Sethe's traumatic memories resurface forcefully through Beloved's physical presence, compelling her to confront her past and the agonizing event she had attempted to escape. "Then she did the magic: lifted Sethe's feet and legs and massaged them until she cried salt tears. "It's gonna hurt, now," said Amy. "Anything dead coming back to life hurts." (Morrison 20)

Beloved's reappearance showcases the persistence of traumatic memories and their ability to disrupt the delicate equilibrium of Sethe's present life. The traumatic experience of killing her own child, an act driven by the desperate desire to spare her child from the horrors of slavery, becomes a constant presence in her mind. Sethe's trauma is not merely an event of the past; it is a living memory that informs her emotions, choices, and relationships.

"Because even though it's all over--over and done with--it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what."
(Morrison 21)

Sethe's relationship with memory is complex; she does not strive to forget the trauma entirely, but rather seeks to navigate through it as swiftly as possible. This complex dynamic reflects the intricacies of trauma itself—how it hovers between the desire to remember and the urge to escape the pain it brings. Her intense focus on surviving her traumatic past highlights her strength and resilience, as she tries to shield herself from the relentless grip of the memories that threaten to overwhelm her. Throughout the novel, Sethe's traumatic memories are interwoven with her identity, influencing her roles as a mother, a survivor, and a woman. These memories not only shape her personal experiences but also illustrate the broader impact of slavery on individuals. Sethe's struggle is emblematic of the collective trauma experienced by African Americans as a result of slavery's horrors.

Sethe's memories are compartmentalized into different categories, revealing the ways trauma has shaped her psyche. Some memories she can consciously summon but chooses not to, while others, her traumatic recollections, surge as uncontrollable

flashbacks, while only a few have been completely repressed. The fragments of her memories stem from her inability to fully comprehend the horrors she endured, such as the brutality of slaveholders who violated her and stole her maternal nourishment. The fragmentation of her memories is a testament to her coping mechanism during her enslavement, as the mind's effort to survive often compartmentalizes and shields from full cognizance the most distressing experiences.

Upon her escape from physical slavery, Sethe believes she has claimed freedom, albeit fleetingly, but her past catches up to her with unrelenting force. The reappearance of her former slave master forces her into a traumatic act—an act driven by her desperate determination to retain agency and prevent her children from being subjected to the horrors of enslavement. This act, paradoxically both protective and devastating, spirals into haunting memories that grip her existence, confining her to a tormenting cycle of remembrance. Sethe's brief respite with her family after escaping slavery gives way to years of solitude and disapproval from the community. Her actions, including the tragic murder of her own child, are misunderstood as acts of pride and misdirection, concealing the deep-rooted trauma that drives her behavior. Like many survivors of trauma, Sethe resists mourning as a means of refusing victory to her tormentors. Her defiant stance against the past is her way of outwitting her oppressors, transcending the narrative of victimhood.

Despite her efforts, Sethe cannot entirely escape her past. Traumatic memories defy attempts to bury them, with psychologist Judith Lewis Herman asserting that denial is powerless against the force of remembering. Sethe's memories manifest not only as

verbal narratives but also as vivid symptoms, immersing her in the trauma all over again. Her past is an ever-present specter, infusing the present with its unrelenting weight.

One tragic consequence of remembering the atrocities of slavery is Sethe's drastic reaction when confronted by Schoolteacher, the embodiment of her past tormentors. In her eyes, an attempt to kill her children is an act of love, sparing them the agony of enslavement. Sethe's desperate act, driven by love and desperation, stems from the belief that death is a preferable alternative to the horrors of bondage. Yet, her act, though born out of love, only leads to more traumatic memories, entangling her further in the cycle of trauma. Sethe's experiences reveal the complexities of trauma—how it blurs the boundaries between past and present, memory and reality. Her traumatic repetition, triggered by the sight of Mr. Bodwin arriving, encapsulates the agony of reliving past horrors. This time, Sethe's response is different, choosing to confront the source of her suffering rather than the innocents who would become its victims. In this, Sethe's trauma is underscored not only by the initial experiences but also by the harrowing survival of those experiences, highlighting how trauma's grip extends even into the survival itself. Sethe grapples with her traumatic memories daily, striving to maintain a delicate balance between recollection and oblivion. She works diligently to erase the memories, yearning to forget, yet her mind deceives her, retaining partial control over the haunting past. The memories of her enslavement, the harrowing act of infanticide she committed, and the aftermath of her actions relentlessly haunt her. These memories intrude upon her consciousness unexpectedly, emerging as involuntary flashbacks, more vivid and tangible than the present moment itself. The memory of purchasing the engraving on Beloved's tombstone is an example of this, as those moments appear longer and more

alive than reality, evoking a visceral experience that is impossible to escape. Despite Sethe's resolute efforts to suppress her traumatic memories, they remain poised to surge forth, triggered by sensory perceptions in her current environment, whether through sight, sound, or scent. The vivid recollection of the surroundings at Sweet Home, despite the heinous acts that transpired there, showcases this phenomenon. The landscape of Sweet Home unfurls before her, with images of soothing trees overpowering even the memory of the lynched boys. This struggle between recalling beauty and horror reflects the complexity of Sethe's relationship with her memories.

The interpretation of Sethe's memories involves a nuanced perspective. Some argue that she represses the gruesome aspects, recalling only the pleasing imagery of Sweet Home. However, according to critic Jill Matus, the core of Sethe's dilemma lies in her consciousness of the moral ambiguity of her memories. Her recollections defy her attempts to impose judgment upon the events at Sweet Home. This internal conflict, between acknowledging the horrors and the innate allure of the place, is central to Sethe's experience. Sethe's struggle with traumatic memories showcases the paradox of memory itself. She grapples with the persistent return of memories she wishes to suppress, their vividness overpowering her present reality. The interplay between beautiful and horrifying recollections further illustrates the interweaving of trauma, perception, and the human psyche. Denver, a central character in *Beloved*, embarks on a profound journey, one interwoven with the traumas and memories that have defined her family's history. Her story is a testament to the enduring legacy of slavery, the weight of ancestral suffering, and the haunting memories that persist like ghostly specters. Born into a world scarred by the indelible marks of slavery, Denver is inexorably tied to the experiences of her

mother, Sethe. The profound impact of Sethe's trauma casts a long shadow over Denver's life, shaping her perceptions, fears, and desires. Denver's growth and development occur within the confines of her family's history, a history characterized by pain, survival, and the relentless pursuit of freedom.

As Denver navigates the treacherous terrain of her existence, she becomes ensnared in a cycle of isolation and yearning. The isolation stems from the legacy of slavery that has left her family fractured, disconnected from the larger community, and haunted by the horrors of their past. It is a solitude that seeps into Denver's soul, leaving her yearning for the warmth of human connection, for a sense of belonging that seems perpetually out of reach. The theme of identity and connection emerges as a poignant thread in Denver's narrative. She grapples with questions of selfhood, struggling to define herself in a world where her family's history is a heavy burden, where the specter of slavery casts a long shadow over her sense of self. Denver's journey is a quest to understand who she is in the midst of this pain and resilience. In *BeLoved*, Toni Morrison masterfully explores Denver's emotional landscape, plumbing the depths of her character with nuance and sensitivity. Through Denver's experiences, Morrison invites readers to confront the enduring legacy of slavery, the bonds that tie individuals to their past, and the profound human need for connection and identity. Denver's story is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, a reminder that even in the darkest of times, the search for selfhood and the yearning for connection can be a powerful force for change and transformation. Denver's formative years are profoundly influenced by the stifling atmosphere of isolation that envelops her. Sethe's deep-seated trauma and her unwavering resolve to shield her children from the unspeakable horrors she endured in

her past give rise to an unintentional but overbearing protectiveness. This protectiveness, while born out of maternal love and a fierce desire to safeguard her offspring, inadvertently constricts Denver's interactions with the outside world. The very walls of their home, initially constructed to provide a sanctuary from the malevolence of the world, become inadvertent barriers that enclose Denver within a suffocating bubble of solitude. What was meant to be a haven of safety transforms into a prison of sorts, separating Denver from the company of her peers and the broader community. This isolation that Denver experiences is a complex interplay of factors. On one hand, it is a direct consequence of Sethe's own traumatic past. Sethe's harrowing experiences as an enslaved woman, including her escape from Sweet Home and the indelible scars of her physical and emotional suffering, have left her deeply scarred. She carries with her the weight of unimaginable trauma and an unwavering determination to prevent her children from enduring the same horrors.

On the other hand, this isolation serves as a protective measure, a deliberate act to shield Denver from a world marked by the indelible scars of slavery. In a society where racism and prejudice persist, Sethe's actions are motivated by a genuine fear for her daughter's safety. She is acutely aware of the dangers that await outside their home, dangers that are not merely physical but also emotional and psychological. The theme of isolation, therefore, becomes a multi-layered exploration in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. It is a manifestation of the profound impact of historical trauma, the enduring legacy of slavery, and the lengths to which a mother is willing to go to protect her child. Denver's isolation is a poignant reflection of the complexities of maternal love and the desperate desire to create a haven of safety in a world marked by the shadows of a painful past. In this

confined environment, Denver's sense of self and identity is shaped by the traumatic memories of her family. She inherits a legacy of suffering that has been passed down through generations, and the weight of this legacy becomes an integral part of her own identity. The echoes of her family's past reverberate within her, forging a connection to her mother's trauma that she grapples with throughout the narrative.

Denver's longing for connection and a life beyond the confines of her home is palpable. Her isolation stunts her growth and prevents her from experiencing the world beyond her immediate surroundings. She yearns for a sense of normalcy and a chance to break free from the cycle of pain that has defined her family's existence. The desire for companionship, friendship, and community contrasts starkly with the reality she faces—a reality marked by secrecy, whispered conversations, and the weight of unspeakable memories. As Denver continues to grow and evolve, her ongoing battle with the enduring legacy of trauma and her ever-deepening longing for meaningful connections within her world only become more pronounced. This profound struggle becomes the crux of her personal odyssey towards self-discovery and the attainment of true autonomy, serving as a resounding narrative core that reverberates throughout the novel's pages. The novel navigates the labyrinth of Denver's internal conflict, as she grapples with the formidable challenge of reconciling her own profound desires with the weighty burden of a traumatic history that stubbornly clings to her very being. This perpetual duality, this constant tug-of-war between her aspirations and the painful memories that entwine her existence, relentlessly shapes her every decision and informs her every choice.

In her relentless pursuit of independence, Denver finds herself treading a perilous path, one that serves both as an act of self-preservation and as a courageous journey

toward the formidable task of confronting the harrowing and haunting memories that she carries deep within her soul. This multifaceted quest for self-reliance emerges as a profound crucible where her strength, resilience, and determination are tested, ultimately forging a compelling narrative that explores the profound complexities of human emotion and the indomitable spirit's capacity to transcend the darkest of shadows. Denver's life journey serves as a poignant and testament to the profound complexities of intergenerational trauma, offering a profound glimpse into the connections between past and present. In her narrative, the enduring echoes of this familial trauma resonate with a haunting persistence, providing an illuminating lens through which to examine the profound influence of generational suffering on the individual's path. Indeed, Denver's story serves as an indomitable testament to the enduring impact of trauma on the family dynamics. Her experiences shed light on the delicate interplay between personal desires and the weighty inheritance of suffering that courses through the veins of her lineage. As she navigates the tumultuous waters of her existence, we witness the profound ways in which the past, like an ever-present specter, casts its long shadow over her present choices and future aspirations.

Morrison, through the lens of Denver's perspective, invites readers to delve into the core of human resilience. It is a resilience that demands the forging of a unique and distinct identity, one that stands apart from the haunting specters of the past. Yet, simultaneously, Denver's story compellingly acknowledges the indelible imprint of history, an imprint that continues to mold and shape the contours of the here and now.

Denver's life journey unfolds as a powerful exploration of the relationship between personal agency and the collective burden of history. It is a journey of self-discovery, a

relentless quest to break free from the shackles of inherited trauma, and a courageous endeavor to carve a path towards a future unburdened by the weighty legacies of the past. Through her experiences, readers are invited to contemplate the enduring power of human spirit and the enduring struggle to transcend the shadows of history while navigating the complex terrain of one's own desires and dreams. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the character Beloved is an enigmatic and haunting presence, embodying layers of trauma and suffering that are both individual and collective. Her arrival in the novel is shrouded in mystery and her subsequent behavior raises questions about her identity and the depths of her trauma. The circumstances of Beloved's appearance in the novel are pivotal to understanding her character. She arrives at 124 Bluestone Road seemingly out of nowhere, a young woman who seems to have materialized from the past. Her sudden appearance is both unsettling and mysterious, and it immediately sets the tone for the novel's exploration of trauma and its lingering effects. Beloved's arrival is, in a way, the embodiment of the past returning to haunt the present. Beloved's general behavior is equally intriguing and disturbing. She is often depicted as childlike, possessing a mix of innocence and vulnerability, yet also exuding an unsettling aura of the supernatural. Her behavior is marked by a desperate need for attention and affection, particularly from Sethe, whom she believes to be her mother. This behavior hints at the profound emotional and psychological scars she carries, a result of the traumas she has endured.

The novel strongly suggests that Beloved is not just a figment of imagination or a random character but a manifestation of deep-rooted trauma. Her accounts of her experiences reveal the horrific journey she endured as an escaped slave woman. Beloved's narrative hints at the harrowing voyage across the Atlantic on a slave ship, a

journey known as the Middle Passage. This portion of her backstory speaks to the collective trauma of African Americans who were forcibly transported to the New World, enduring unimaginable suffering and witnessing the loss of countless lives. The memories that haunt Beloved encompass both her personal suffering and the loss of her mother during the Middle Passage. These memories are a haunting reminder of the dehumanizing effects of slavery and the violence inflicted upon African peoples. Beloved's trauma is a testament to the generational scars left by the institution of slavery and the horrors it encompassed. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison masterfully weaves together the individual and collective traumas of the characters, particularly through the character of Beloved. Her appearance, behavior, and backstory serve as a powerful exploration of the enduring legacy of slavery and its profound impact on the psyche of African Americans. Beloved's character becomes a vessel through which readers confront the horrors of the past and grapple with the complex and painful history of slavery in America. The novel underscores the idea that the past is not truly buried but continues to exert its influence on the present, and that the trauma of slavery is an indelible part of the African American experience.

Beloved's recollections are marked by their lack of coherence, ambiguity, and often, unintelligibility. Consequently, Sethe and Denver interpret these fragmented memories through the lens of their own desires and expectations, perceiving Beloved's recollections as glimpses of the afterlife. When Denver questions Beloved about her past whereabouts, she unknowingly alludes to her sister's supposed encounter with death. In response, Beloved recounts a chilling narrative of the slave ship: "*Hot. Nothing to breathe down*

there and no room to move in. [...] A lot of people is down there. Some is dead". (Morrison 44)

These memories, which appear to recount the horrors of the Middle Passage, continue to haunt Beloved, compelling her to relive the traumatic experience in the present moment. She expresses her anguish by declaring, "*All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too*". (Morrison 119). Beloved's inability to distinguish between past and present is a characteristic response to trauma, mirroring Sethe's own struggle with temporal boundaries.

Much like Denver's interpretations colored by her unique perspective, Sethe comprehends Beloved's accounts primarily in relation to her own experiences. She identifies the marks on Beloved's forehead as her own fingernail imprints from when [she] held [the baby's] head up, out in the shed after committing the unspeakable act of slitting her throat. This evidence, according to Sethe, serves as proof that Beloved is her resurrected daughter. Analogous to the scars on Sethe's back, Beloved's scars on her forehead and throat bear witness to her physical and psychological suffering. Notably, these scars are the sole defining features on her body, as she possesses no lines on her hands and feet, which remain "soft and new," akin to the tender skin of a newborn. Thus, these scars are a perpetual reminder of her profound anguish. In the words of James Berger, Beloved becomes a living scar who points toward the social and familial wounds.

Sethe's certainty regarding Beloved's true identity is solidified by the scars that mark Beloved's body. Initially, their unexpected reunion brings Sethe immense but fleeting happiness. However, as time passes, Beloved's traumatic memories resurface, fueling a

growing anger directed squarely at Sethe. Her relentless accusations center on Sethe's perceived abandonment of her, making it abundantly clear that the repeated loss of her mother stands as the most traumatic event in Beloved's life. This profound loss explains her ruthless dismissal of Sethe's attempts at self-justification, with Beloved insisting, "Beloved denied it. Sethe never came to her, never said a word to her, never smiled and worst of all never waved goodbye or even looked her way before running away from her" (Morrison 136).

Beloved's incessant blaming and vivid accounts of her traumatic experiences unwittingly expose Sethe's own deep-seated trauma, compelling her to relive her agonizing past. Sethe combs through her memories of Beloved's infancy, searching for examples that will substantiate that "that Beloved [i]s more important, mean[s] more to her than her own life" (Morrison 136).

Beloved's trauma manifests not only in her anger but also in her profound fear of disintegration. With the loss of her mother, she feels like she has lost a part of herself, as revealed through her fragmented memories: "I am not separate from her face is my own" (Beloved, Morrison). This overwhelming sense of loss and fragmentation is encapsulated in her anxiety over losing a tooth, symbolizing her dread of complete dissolution: "Beloved looked at the tooth and thought [next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once" (Morrison 76). Beloved's identity remains complex, multiple, and unstable throughout the novel, deliberately leaving room for various interpretations of who she truly is. At the conclusion of the story, an "insoluble ambiguity" lingers.

Krumholz characterizes Beloved as a "trickster figure," embodying the irrationality of the world by defying categorization and definition. Beloved assumes numerous roles throughout the narrative—sister, daughter, lover, and potentially even mother—depending on the needs and perceptions of those who interact with her. She transcends reduction to any single role. On a collective level, Beloved serves as a symbol of the traumatic past of African Americans, representing the countless voiceless victims of slavery who lost their mothers during the Middle Passage or perished while escaping from brutal white masters. Her namelessness further reinforces her role as a symbol for the countless "Sixty Million and more" to whom the novel is dedicated (Krumholz).

Despite the existence of multiple interpretations surrounding this enigmatic character, it is my assertion that Beloved simultaneously embodies Sethe's resurrected daughter and serves as the embodiment of the most traumatic memories of the past, shared by her and other African Americans. Consequently, she continually serves as a stark reminder of Sethe's guilt. Rushdy, for instance, contends that "she represents nothing but guilt, symbolizing an unyielding critique of the dehumanizing impact of slavery" (Rushdy, 1992). Nevertheless, I argue that this perspective is excessively constraining and simplistic. Beloved is, in fact, defined by her elusive identity. Beloved occupies a dual role as both an agent of victimization and a victim herself. She serves as the embodiment of repressed historical traumas, acting as an unconscious force that subdues the willpower of the characters. Additionally, she functions as a psychoanalytic catalyst, prying open suppressed memories and emotions (Krumholz).

Notably, Beloved possesses the uncanny ability to "unlock" individuals' personal and concealed memories, stored away in rusted boxes akin to Paul D's tobacco tin, which

were never intended to be accessed. Consequently, *Beloved* compels both Sethe and Paul D to confront and grapple with their pasts. Furthermore, due to the suffering she introduces into their lives, *Beloved* acts as a catalyst for transformative change within the confines of 124. Were it not for her unexpected arrival, Sethe would have remained trapped in a purposeless existence, isolated within the confines of her traumatic past, forever haunted by its specter. However, *Beloved* disrupts this stagnation, and over time, the deteriorating situation at home compels Denver to venture out in search of assistance. This reconnection with the broader community becomes a crucial prerequisite for rescuing her mother and ultimately exorcising the haunting past personified by *Beloved*.

4.2 Rememory

In the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, the term "rememory" plays a pivotal role in conveying the profound impact of traumatic memories on the characters. "Rememory" refers to the phenomenon where traumatic memories resurface and continue to exert a potent influence on individuals long after the events themselves have occurred. It is a concept that defies conventional boundaries of time and consciousness, serving as a lens through which the characters confront their painful pasts and grapple with the enduring trauma of slavery. Sethe, the central character in the novel, is particularly afflicted by "rememory" (Rody). Her traumatic experiences as a slave, including the agonizing act of killing her own child to protect her from a life of slavery, continue to haunt her long after she escapes to freedom. These memories are not neatly confined to the past but persistently resurface in her present consciousness, often in the form of vivid and distressing flashbacks. Sethe's inability to control or contain these traumatic memories underscores the inescapable grip that the past holds on her psyche. The concept of

"rememory" challenges the conventional understanding of memory as a linear and chronological process. Instead, it highlights the nonlinear and cyclical nature of traumatic recollections, where the past has an uncanny ability to intrude upon the present with overwhelming force. Morrison skillfully portrays how these memories are not mere mental constructs but rather tangible and palpable entities that take on a life of their own, haunting the characters with relentless persistence. "Rememory" is a central theme in the novel, illustrating the enduring trauma of slavery and its profound impact on the characters' lives.

Sethe, the novel's central character, is particularly afflicted by "rememory." Her traumatic experiences as a slave, including the unimaginable act of killing her own child to protect her from a life of slavery, continue to haunt her long after she escapes to freedom. These memories are not relegated to the past but persistently resurface in her present consciousness, often in the form of vivid and distressing flashbacks. Sethe's inability to control or contain these traumatic memories underscores the inescapable grip that the past holds on her psyche. The concept of "rememory" challenges the conventional understanding of memory as a linear and chronological process. Instead, it highlights the nonlinear and cyclical nature of traumatic recollections, where the past has an uncanny ability to intrude upon the present with overwhelming force. Morrison skillfully portrays how these memories are not mere mental constructs but rather tangible and palpable entities that take on a life of their own, haunting the characters with a relentless persistence.

Moreover, "rememory" serves as a powerful narrative device through which Morrison conveys the idea that the legacy of slavery is not confined to historical events

but continues to shape the lives and identities of African Americans. The trauma of slavery leaves an indelible mark on the characters, seeping into their daily existence and influencing their actions and decisions. "Rememory" becomes a symbolic representation of the collective trauma of an entire community, where the past is inextricably linked to the present and the future. The communal aspect of "rememory" is also a central theme in the novel. It is not limited to individual recollections but extends to encompass shared memories and experiences within the African American community. Sethe's traumatic past is not hers alone; it is a reflection of the broader history of slavery and its enduring effects. This communal dimension of "rememory" underscores the interconnectedness of the characters and their shared history, emphasizing the collective struggle to come to terms with the past and find a path toward healing and reconciliation.

Within the narrative of *Beloved*, the exploration of the haunting impact of "rememory" unfolds as a crucial dimension, shedding light on the nature of shared or collective traumatic recollections. Even prior to the tangible return of the past through the resurrected Beloved, Sethe is acutely aware of the formidable presence of history in her life, along with the inherent perils it poses. She grapples with the relentless and uncontrollable emergence of traumatic memories, akin to flashbacks, into her conscious mind. Sethe herself labels this symptom of her trauma as "rememory," a phenomenon that exerts its influence upon her rather than one she can manipulate or control. It becomes an entity that imposes itself upon her psyche, a relentless image that hovers beyond the boundaries of her mind, as she eloquently puts it: "'rememory is outside the reach of her control: a picture floating around out there outside my head. the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there" (Morrison 21).

Sethe interprets these "rememories" as past events that persistently exist as objectified memories, an externalized testament to the pain and suffering she endured (Furman). Ashraf Rushdy astutely highlights the significance of the concept of "rememory," suggesting that it implies that memory transcends the realm of personal, subjective experience and extends into the domain of shared communal heritage. In other words, it is not solely the province of the individual but becomes a collective repository of emotions, experiences, and recollections, intertwining with the lives of friends, family, and even entire communities (Rushdy). He further posits that the communal aspect of "rememory" arises from its initial individual experience, where an individual grapples with their personal recollections before these memories eventually transform into shared, collective experiences (Rushdy). Communal dimension of memory and recollection underscores the interconnectedness of individuals within the broader context of a community or society. It is through Sethe's narrative that readers are made aware of the profound implications of "rememory," a concept that transcends the boundaries of the individual and highlights the shared experiences, suffering, and healing. In essence, *Beloved* provides a powerful exploration of the enduring nature of traumatic memory and its capacity to shape not only individual destinies but also the collective identity of a people.

Caruth (1996) further underscores the collective nature of trauma by emphasizing that a trauma is never confined to being solely the victim's own burden; it invariably ripples outward, affecting those in the victim's orbit. Sethe's "rememories," in this context, pose a tangible threat to her daughter, Denver. The fierce maternal instinct within Sethe drives her to shield her daughter from the painful remnants of their shared past. She ardently

believes that preserving Denver's innocence by keeping her insulated from the past's relentless grip is of paramount importance.

Ferguson (2017) illuminates Sethe's dual role in guarding the territory of her memory, emphasizing the deep responsibility and the underlying terror it represents for her. Everything within her memory exists as "rememory," an ever-present and unrelenting threat to her children. Consequently, Sethe imparts a solemn warning to Denver: that revisiting the place where these memories reside can lead to their reenactment, making them inescapably present once more. Sethe's descriptions of "rememories" inadvertently provide an unvarnished account of her personal experience of trauma and her subsequent coping mechanisms. To her, these haunting recollections are so vivid and distressing that she genuinely believes the events could be retriggered. Her intention to shield Denver from these traumatic "rememories" by discussing them paradoxically leaves her daughter profoundly disturbed and fearful of the world beyond the safety of their home. In essence, Sethe's trauma inevitably becomes Denver's trauma. Instead of offering her daughter an honest account of their shared past, one that Denver may already instinctively fear, Sethe exacerbates her distress by introducing the notion of dangerous "rememories." In doing so, Sethe unwittingly transforms Denver into a secondary witness to her own traumatic experiences and unwittingly passes on the burden of her suffering. In this way, "rememory" becomes not merely a personal ordeal but a shared trauma.

If we perceive "rememory" as personal memory that metamorphoses into collective trauma, then *Beloved* takes on an even more role within the narrative. She is not only the embodiment of Sethe's personal traumatic past but also the personified representation of the collective "rememory" of the Middle Passage. *Beloved* becomes a living manifestation

of the traumatic memory of the horrors endured during the slave ship experience, yet paradoxically, she herself is haunted by these memories. Beloved acts as the conduit for these "rememories," serving as the mediator, but the ambiguity persists regarding whether these events genuinely occurred to her or if she is a vessel through which these collective traumas are channeled. As "rememories" remain accessible to anyone, they can assume a haunting quality for anyone as well. The experience of the Middle Passage clearly epitomizes a communal trauma, representing a pivotal moment in the history of the African American community, and it plays a significant role in the formation of a shared sense of identity deeply rooted in the harrowing collective memory of those who endured this horrific chapter in history.

"Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it--stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened." "Can other people see it?" asked Denver. "Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else." (Morrison 21)

Sethe reflects on the idea that some memories fade away with time, while others remain indelibly etched in one's consciousness. She initially attributes this phenomenon to her "rememory," suggesting that certain memories persist because they are

unforgettable, ingrained in one's mind. However, Sethe's realization goes beyond the confines of individual recollections. She introduces the concept that places, even when physically altered or destroyed, retain a lasting essence that transcends personal memory. In this view, a place's history is not confined to the individual's memory but exists independently in the world, in the very location where the events occurred. It's as if the past is imprinted upon the physical world itself. Sethe's perspective challenges the conventional understanding of memory as a purely mental process, highlighting its tangible and external aspect. She underscores that even if she were to cease existing, the memory of her experiences would persist in the place where they unfolded. This notion of memory as a part of the external world suggests a deeper interconnection between individuals and their surroundings.

Denver's question, "Can other people see it?" prompts Sethe to affirm that these external memories, or "rememories," are not limited to one's own perception. They are accessible to others, and encounters with these shared memories can be so vivid that individuals might mistake them for their own thoughts. Sethe describes these occurrences as "thought pictures" that people might encounter while walking down the road. These shared memories blur the lines between personal and collective recollection, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals within a broader community. Memory is not a solitary, self-contained process but rather a communal and shared experience. Memories persist not only within individuals but also in the physical world, waiting to be encountered by others. Morrison's exploration of memory in *BeLoved* transcends the boundaries of personal history, illustrating how the past lingers in the spaces we inhabit and the collective memory of a community, shaping the present and future of its members.

“I liked to lost him so many times. Once he got up on the well, right on it. I flew. Snatched him just in time. So when I knew we'd be rendering and smoking and I couldn't see after him, well, I got a rope and tied it round his ankle. Just long enough to play round a little, but not long enough to reach the well or the fire. I didn't like the look of it, but I didn't know what else to do. It's hard, you know what I mean? by yourself and no woman to help you get through.” (Morrison 91)

Halle was good, but he was debt-working all over the place. And when he did get down to a little sleep, I didn't want to be bothering him with all that. Sixo was the biggest help. I don't 'spect you rememory this, but Howard got in the milk parlor and Red Cora I believe it was mashed his hand. Turned his thumb backwards. When I got to him, she was getting ready to bite it. I don't know to this day how I got him out. Sixo heard him screaming and come running. Know what he did? Turned the thumb right back and tied it cross his palm to his little finger. See, I never would have thought of that.” (Morrison 91)

Sethe, the narrator, recalls a series of incidents involving the protection of her child. She describes the fear and urgency she felt in trying to safeguard her child from potentially dangerous situations. Sethe's memories are vivid, and her recollections are charged with a sense of desperation and responsibility. The act of tying a rope around her child's ankle to prevent him from reaching the well or the fire exemplifies the lengths she would go to ensure her child's safety. The concept of "rememory" comes into play as Sethe recounts these events. It's important to note that her recollections are not recounted in real-time but are rather reflections on past events. However, the memories are still very much alive within her. Sethe's remembrances are not confined to the distant past; they continue to affect her in the present, serving as a testament to the enduring nature of trauma.

Sethe's memory of Sixo, another character who assisted her, highlights the collective aspect of traumatic memory. She acknowledges that Denver may not "remember" this particular incident, emphasizing how certain experiences are shared within a community and might not be remembered by future generations. This underscores the idea that memories, especially those linked to trauma, are not only personal but also part of a broader communal narrative. Moreover, Sethe's recollection of Sixo's innovative approach to treating her child's injured thumb demonstrates the interplay between memory and learning from others. Sixo's quick thinking in resetting the thumb and binding it to the little finger is a practical skill that Sethe hadn't considered. This interaction between individuals within a community shapes their collective knowledge and memory, making it an integral part of their shared history.

"Thank God I don't have to remember or say a thing because you know it. All. You know I never would've left you. Never. It was all I could think of to do. When the train came I had to be ready." (Morrison 108)

Sethe's statement, "Thank God I don't have to remember or say a thing because you know it," underscores the unbreakable bond between mother and child. Sethe is expressing relief that she doesn't need to recount the traumatic events of her past because Denver understands her actions and motivations implicitly. Sethe's love for her children is unwavering, and her actions, such as escaping from Sweet Home and attempting to kill her children to spare them a life of slavery, are driven by her fierce maternal instinct and the belief that death is preferable to the horrors of slavery. Sethe's mention of the train and her need to be ready alludes to her escape from Sweet Home, a plantation where she endured unimaginable suffering. The trauma of slavery is a central

theme in the novel, and Sethe's actions are a reflection of the profound psychological and emotional scars left by her enslavement. Her determination to protect her children at all costs is a testament to the lasting impact of the dehumanizing institution of slavery.

Sethe's words highlight the idea of shared memory within the African American community. She believes that Denver inherently understands her experiences and the choices she made because they share a collective history of suffering under slavery. This concept of shared memory is crucial in *BeLoved* as it underscores the interconnectedness of the characters and the collective trauma they carry with them. Sethe's assertion that she had to be ready when the train came speaks to the theme of survival and resilience. Despite the immense adversity she faced, Sethe found the strength and determination to escape slavery and protect her children. Her actions reflect the indomitable human spirit and the lengths to which individuals will go to secure their freedom and the safety of their loved ones.

CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a multifaceted work that displays the interplay of spiritual and supernatural elements, the complex nature of motherhood, and the enduring impact of memory and trauma on the human psyche. Through the lens of this powerful novel, we have explored the ways in which these themes intersect and resonate, that is both haunting and deeply resonant. The spiritual and supernatural elements in *Beloved* are not mere plot devices but integral components of the narrative. The character of Beloved herself embodies a spectral presence that blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead. Her return from the grave and her inexplicable knowledge of Sethe's past challenge conventional notions of reality and the supernatural. This spiritual presence serves as a vessel for the unresolved traumas of slavery and the anguish of those who endured it. It is through Beloved's character that Morrison explores the idea that the past, particularly the traumatic past, can never truly be buried; it lingers as a haunting force in the lives of those who experienced it and in the collective memory of a community.

Motherhood, a central theme in the novel, is portrayed in its myriad forms. Sethe's actions, driven by an overpowering maternal instinct, are both a testament to the depths of a mother's love and a stark reminder of the brutal choices that slavery forced upon enslaved women. Her decision to kill her own child, Beloved, to spare her from a life of slavery is a haunting representation of the agonizing choices mothers were forced to make under the dehumanizing institution of slavery. The novel also explores the idea of communal motherhood, where the entire African American community is depicted as playing a role in nurturing and protecting its members, particularly its children.

Memory and trauma are inextricably linked throughout *Beloved*. The characters grapple with the enduring scars of their past, and their memories are not passive recollections but active, visceral forces that shape their present and future. Sethe's "rememory" serves as a powerful lens through which we witness the persistence of trauma and its intergenerational impact. The communal aspect of memory is also emphasized, as the characters share a collective history of suffering, and their memories are intertwined with the broader African American experience. In this exploration, we have delved into the ways in which Morrison's narrative techniques, including nonlinear storytelling, vivid imagery, and shifting perspectives, create a literary work that mirrors the complexities of memory, trauma, and motherhood. Through her masterful use of language and storytelling, Morrison invites readers to confront the painful truths of history and to engage with the multifaceted dimensions of the human experience.

As we conclude it is evident that the novel's exploration of spiritual and supernatural elements, the portrayal of motherhood, and the examination of memory and trauma contribute to its enduring significance in the literary canon. Morrison's work challenges readers to grapple with the legacy of slavery, to empathize with the enduring trauma of its survivors, and to recognize the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unspeakable suffering. *Beloved* serves as a testament to the power of literature to illuminate the darkest corners of history and to shed light on the complexities of the human condition. It is a literary masterpiece that continues to resonate with readers, prompting reflection, discussion, and a deeper understanding of the profound themes it explores.

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