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**Recollections and Repressions in Toni Morrison's
Beloved (1987)**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to discuss the theme of memory and trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). The focus of this dissertation is on the repressed memories and the traumatic experiences of the characters. Indeed, the stress is on the depiction of the characters repressed inner past memories like Paul D, Sethe and Denver. To achieve this aim, we relied on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory “*Trauma: Exploration in Memory*” (1995) and “*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*” (1996). We have shown how Toni Morrison brought to the surface of the inner thoughts of the characters and depicted them in struggling with their past through memories and different incidents that brought them to their actual situations. We also explored the way she raised the theme of memory and trauma as a dominant themes in the novel. In the end, we studied the modernist techniques mainly the use of flashbacks to reveal to which extent to which the traumatic memories affected the characters of *Beloved* and took an important part in their lives. We reached the conclusion that Toni Morrison focuses on the link between the events and their traumatic impact on the characters in the context of trauma theory.

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To

Our families, especially our mothers and fathers.

Sisters and brothers

Our relatives, and friends.

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I. General Introduction

Slavery in America started in 1619, when a Dutch ship brought 20 African slaves ashore in the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia. In the 17th century, European settlers in North America turned to African slaves as a cheaper, more plentiful labour source than indentured servants, who were mostly poor Europeans. With their arrival to the new world, black Africans were treated differently contrary to the whites, they were kept in a horrible and inhuman conditions, they were considered as inferiors, black shadows, "negroes", and uncivilized. White Americans believed in their race superiority, and the inferiority of the other races.

Black Africans were used for the development of the economy. They were important elements in the growth of agriculture and plantation. In 1865, slavery was abolished in America. Yet the south was governed by white politicians. Ku-Klux-Klan, an organization established in 1865, oppressed and terrorized the blacks. The 14th amendment gave the blacks the right for citizenship, and the 15th amendment gave them the right to vote. However, these provisions of constitution were often ignored or violated¹.

Black slaves were badly treated. They used to obey their masters in each work they did. They were forced to live in harsh situations. Blacks continued to live marginalized within the American society especially in the south, where they constituted about one third of the southern population. Slaves were completely dependent on their masters and faced a set of restrictive codes that prohibited them from learning to read and write. Black women faced a twofold struggle because they suffered both racial prejudice and sexual abuse by the white masters and black males.

Many white masters took sexual liberties with slave women and treated them as sex objects. They used to serve them and execute their orders. Many female slaves often bear the children of their white masters, master's sons, or overseers.

Through different movements, Such as the Civil Right Movement, blacks started to get some of their rights. While black men tried to abolish racial inequality, they mistreated their fellow women. Black women were treated as subjects, and they were obliged to stay at home to take care of their children and husbands. They suffered from slavery which haunted their daily lives. The stereotypes used by the white men to describe the black superiority over the blacks, were taken by the black men to apply them to their wives, mothers and sisters. Slavery was one of the common methods of their repression².

The issue of slavery constitutes a subject matter for many writers, both blacks and whites. They produced literary works to promote and reflect their cultures and identities. Among these, we may refer to an Afro-American black novelist, editor, teacher and Professor Emeritus, Toni Morrison. She wrote eight novels, and the fifth one which is entitles *Beloved*. Morrison's *Beloved* reflects the image of the black community, who haunted by the trauma of slavery, and repressed these memories in an attempt to forget the past. Morrison, in fact, reshapes the past history and rewrites the story of women.

In addition, *Beloved* is set during the Reconstruction era in (1873) and it is written in the voices of the black slaves who endured traumatic experiences that they tried to bury. She dedicated her work for the sixty million black people who died

during the passage trip to the new land and home of the Americans³. Thus, Morrison's novel is a narrative re-memory which expresses a connection with the past.

a. The Review of literature

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) received a wide range of criticism. To begin with, Emma Parker in her article entitled '*A New Hystery: History and Hysteria in Toni Morrison's Beloved*', she argues that the central characters are hysteric people. Sethe, Paul D, and the woman who exorcises the ghost. These characters had suffered from hysteric damage that resulted from the haunted memory of their past, as it is articulated "subjects haunted by the past, characters who unconsciously express repressed memories of psychic trauma through physical symptoms and use a corporeal discourse to articulate what is otherwise unspeakable". Using Irigary's reformation of Freud's psyconalysis, Parker studied the novel *Beloved* from a psychoanalysis perspective. Then, she indicates that the ghost *Beloved* symbolizes the shared hysteria of Afro-Americans haunted by the awful past. It means that the trace of slavery does not vanish completely and it is unforgettable⁴.

Another critique is advanced by Lourdes Lopes Roper, in his article, '*Beating Back the Past: Toni Morrison's Beloved as Historiographic Metafiction*', referring to Linda Hutchen, *Beloved* can be read as what she called as historiographic metafiction. She points at historiography's refocusing on previously neglected or silenced objects of study. Morrison, like many other postcolonial writers demanded that the author should be committed to the task of ripping the veil and re-inscribing what has been silenced in the history of black people. Thus, Morrison reinscribes the story of Margaret Garner⁵.

Furthermore, in '*Bloom's Guides: Toni Morrison's Beloved*', we are introduced to many literary reviews written on many themes developed within *Beloved*. Pamela E Barnett writes '*Rape and Supernatural*' in which she claims that Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is haunted by the history and memory of rape. She narrates the rape of black women and of black men as well as she foregrounds that rape is the most horrific and painful incident experienced by those characters. Thus she reminds that rape was and is often still a racial issue⁶.

In the same vein, Shelby Larrick in her essay '*Psychological Criticism of Toni Morrison's Beloved*' She argues that the character's actions are built on the psychological repression of their pasts. In her article, Larrick sheds light on the trauma of slavery and the psychological repression as the main reason for the character's suffering. It follows that repression is the main cause for the character's pain and loss. Thus through this article, we deduce that Morrison's characters choose to repress memories to rescue themselves from the painful past of slavery. She analysed the psychology of the characters: Sethe, Denver and Paul D in relation to trauma. In addition, Larrick analyses Sethe's psychology towards her mammary rape and infanticide. She justified Sethe's infanticide and gave her reason behind committing this act⁷.

b. Issue and Working Hypotheses

The review of some of the literature on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) has revealed that considerable studies have been undertaken to analyse Toni Morrison's *novel* from many different literary perspectives. These studies vary in form. They are in form of essays, articles and books of literary criticism. However, these literary

studies rather focus on the psychological impact of slavery and they are written from a psychoanalytic perspective. Hence, in this piece of research, our intention is to make a contribution to this work. This dissertation will study repressions and recollection in relation to *Beloved's* characters. Its fundamental issue is to analyse the character's repressed memories in order to bring them to the fore.

To achieve our purpose we will rely on Cathy Caruth's Trauma theory. The reason for choosing this theoretical framework as the appropriate approach to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, because it sustains our study which will mainly focus on the memories of slavery on Afro-Americans.

c. Endnotes

¹Separate but equal -wikipedia https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/separate_but_equal

²Female Slavery in the United States https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female_Slavery_in_the_United_states (June, 1, 2018).

³ Toni Morrison, *beloved*, (New York: Alfred, A knopf, 1987)

⁴Emma Parker, 'A New Hystery: History and Hysteria in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol.47. No. (Spring, 2001).pp 1-9, by Duke University Press, accessed 19, 12, 201, last modified 21,05,2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/827854>.

⁵Lourdes, Lopez Roperro: 'Beating Back the Past: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as Historiographic Metafiction' Untitled, Universidad de Sevilla, institucional.us.es/revistas/philologia/13_2/ art_19.pdf, accessed (May, 29, 2018).

⁶Harold, Bloom. Ed. 'Bloom's Guides: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', (Philadelphia: Chelsea house. 2004) print.

⁷Larrick, Shelby, '*Psychological Criticism of Toni Morrison's Beloved*', a case Book. On *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, 2007, English Department, Millikin University, Decatur, IL,

<http://www.milikin.edu/English/beloved/Larrick-Psychological-essay2.html>, accessed (02, June, 2018).

II. Method and Materials

a. Methods

Our study will be based on Cathy Caruth's theory, which she developed in her books: *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) since it fits more our study. Her theory is based on the different disciplines which help to understand and explain the notion of trauma, including: psychology and literature. In her books, Caruth elucidates the problems that make the victims unable to recognize the meaning of a traumatic experience. For her, the traumatic event is needed to be recollected in order to heal and forget about those terrible moments. She asserts that: "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance-returns to haunt the survivor later on"¹. She explains that traumatic events are not flexible in the past, but still haunt the mind of the victims later on.

Trauma, then, is a paradoxical event that causes psychic disorder which moves between the awareness and the absence of identification of the real event. In addition to this, Cathy Caruth explains: "in its repeated imposition, the trauma seems to evoke the difficult truth of history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence"² meaning that trauma is repetitive through remembering the past events which occur in incomprehensible way. Caruth adopts Freudian terminology which he named, "Latency"³ to describe that the period of the effect of the experience is not clear and it appears through time.

Trauma can be defined as a disturbing experience which happens in a private history that takes place within historical context. It can be war, child abuse, and rape. The survivors of traumatic experiences are coined Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is a term that is defined as a disorder that some people develop after experiencing a shocking, scary, or dangerous event⁴. In addition to PTSD, a new diagnosis has appeared to explain the symptoms of trauma and its impact on personal life which Judith Herman names “Complex”. For her, women with limited personality disorder were marginalized by mental health, those who were unable to distinguish between their sexual abuse and present experience⁵.

To understand trauma, one may know that is a universal aspect that is not limited in time and space. Thus, trauma allows entering the mind, where the traumatic events are located, trying to understand what had really happened. Thus, trauma theory offers an understanding of the effects of the hellish moment experienced in life such as, violence, rape and infanticide. This theory helps the survivors of trauma to be exposed to the effects of pain and anxiety. Consequently, people get traumatized when they encounter those memories. So, the theoretical approach of trauma attempts to demonstrate their emotional pain, and know the symptoms that are present after the experience of trauma, that is to say, it helps the survivors to know more about their experiences. Caruth argues that all reference of personal experience is indirect and it can give us access to history, which means it provides us with deep insight for history in our understanding. Thus it permits the history to arise again⁶.

Caruth highlights the importance of integrity and expressing trauma. She argues that trauma is an overwhelming experience that should be heard. As she states:

"Trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures"⁷. So, Caruth affirms that literature is mainly the best location "where the dialectic process of knowing and not knowing the traumatic past can be presented and analyzed by psychoanalytical methods"⁸.

To conclude, we can not speak about trauma without making reference to Cathy Caruth. The later is known to have made the beginning and the development of trauma theory. She is among the prominent figures who paved the way to the extension of this field of study.

b. Materials

1. Summary of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is set after the American Civil War. It is about an escaped slave woman, Sethe, who moves to Cincinnati, Ohio, to join her mother in law Baby Suggs. Yet, the slave owner manages to take her and her children back in order to protect them from the horrible life of slavery. Sethe decides to kill her children. Thus, she hangs her two-years old daughter whose name is Beloved. After this incident, Sethe goes to live with her daughter Denver and her mother law Baby Suggs in Cincinnati, 124 Bluestone Road, Ohio where the house is "full of baby's venom" whom they believe to be the ghost of Sethe's baby. The presence of Paul D after almost two decades of absence brought a lot of painful reminiscences to Sethe, who worked hard in order to arise everything that reminded her of her dark past. Coming home, after a day out, Paul D, Sethe and Denver encounter a young woman calling herself Beloved setting in the front of the house. This makes Sethe think that

she is her murdered daughter. Thus, Sethe tries everything to correct her mistake. Yet, Beloved tries to make sethe's life to be the horrible one. The arrival of Paul D to the house makes Denver jealous of her mother's attention to him. Denver and Sethe were previously living alone as outsiders, with no contact with their neighbourhood, but the presence of Paul D brings some changes to their life.

Denver's fear pushes her to ask for help from the black community to get rid of the woman called Beloved who is considered a threat. Sethe's depression comes just after the coming of the white man who wants to offer a job to Denver. This makes Seth so angry thinking he is the school teacher who is back to take her child from her again. So, she attacks him to protect her family. The novel ends with "this is not a story to pass on"⁹ which means that is not something to forget.

2. Toni Morrison's biography

Toni Morison, was born Chloe Antony on february18, 1931 in Loraine in Ohio. She was the second of four children born to Ramah and George Wofford. Both her relatives family had fled to the north to escape from hard conditions and racism that were imposed against African Americans in the south. She had witnessed the period of the great depression, in which many families had lived in hard conditions. Indeed her father was obliged to work three jobs in order to support his family that was in debt. Morrison's childhood was filled with African American folklore, myths and rituals. Her family used story telling as a means to entertain their children and adults. Morrison was inspired by her childhood memories which helped her start her writing. When she was in high school, she was influenced by Jane Austan and Gustave Flaubert's works, however most of her works reflected the African American culture

and experience.

Studying at Howard, Morrison had been a member of the Howard university players, a theater company that presented plays about the lives of the African American people. Morrison's first play was *Dreaming Emmet*, which was about the murder by white men of black teenager Emmet Till in 1955. Once there, she experienced segregation, as she saw for the first time segregated restaurants and buses.

After her graduation in Cornell University, she became a teacher. She taught for two years at Texas Southern university in Houston. Then she returned to Howard University to teach there. She met Harold Morrison, a young architect from Jamaica, with whom she married in 1958, and had two sons; Harold and Slad. Few years later, she divorced and moved to Syracuse where she began her working as an editor for a Random House Company. Afterward, she became a senior editor and was the only African American woman to work there. She was helped by many African American writers like Toni Cade Bambara to publish her works. Indeed, Morrison played an important role in lightening the black culture. She contributed for the first time on working along with Nigerian writers like Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, and South African playwright as Athol Fregard to complete the book under the name “*Contemporary African Literature (1972)*”.

Morrison wrote many novels: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1974), and *Beloved* (1987) in which she depicted the hard conditions that the African Americans had lived. Most of her works’ themes turned around different subjects like good and evil, beauty and ugliness. She is the first African American woman who won the noble price for literature by the publication of her fifth novel *Beloved*, which is considered to be the

most outstanding novel. It's fictional narrative was inspired by the story of Margaret Garner, who fled from slavery in Kentucky to Ohio (a free state). It tells the story of a black slave woman who killed her two years old daughter so as not to be recaptured by the slave-owners¹⁰.

c. End notes

¹Cathy Caruth, '*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*', 1996.

² Cathy Caruth, '*Trauma: Exploration in Memory*', Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 04.

³ Eva Figes, '*A Journey through Trauma*', 2015, 11.

⁴ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - [http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/Post Traumatic -Stress-Disorder-ptsd/ptsd/508-05172017_38054.pdf](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/Post%20Traumatic%20Stress%20Disorder-ptsd/ptsd/508-05172017_38054.pdf)

⁵Chapter Two Memory, Trauma, and Trauma Narrative in *Beloved*
<https://nccur.lib.nccu.edu.tw/bitstream/140.119/33341/6/51001106.pdf>

⁶ Cathy Caruth, '*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*', 1996, 04.

⁷ Cathy Caruth, '*Trauma: Exploration in Memory*', Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

⁸Eva Figes, '*A Journey through Trauma*', 2015, 11.

⁹[https://www.uscupstate.edu/globalassets/academics/colleague-of-arts-and-sciences/llc/English literary-file/elfvl2wrenn.pdf](https://www.uscupstate.edu/globalassets/academics/colleague-of-arts-and-sciences/llc/English%20literary-file/elfvl2wrenn.pdf).

¹⁰Toni Morrison_Wikipedia.org/Wiki/Toni Morrison.

III. Results

The first chapter is devoted to speak about times and lives in Toni Morrison's novel. It is important to know the circumstances that pushed her in order to write it. Thus, in her novel, Morrison deals with the issue of the African Americans' oppression by the institution of slavery.

The second chapter discusses repressions and memories of both male and female characters through their past traumatic experiences. In fact, recalling the past causes mental disorder for the characters.

The third chapter examines the modernist techniques, mainly the flashback technique, in order to show the inner thoughts of the characters. As a result, all the past memories come unwillingly to haunt the characters' minds.

IV. Discussion

This section examines trauma, memories and the psychological repressions in *Beloved's* characters. It is divided into three chapters. The first one is entitled times and lives in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The second one is trauma, Memory and the Characters. The last one is the use of modernist techniques in *Beloved*.

Chapter one: Times and Lives in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987)

The following chapter deals with the institution of slavery and how women are seen during this period. The reason of this chapter is to give a deep understanding of the novel.

The institution of slavery in North America began in the early seventeenth century and continued to be practiced for the next 250 years by the colonies and states. Slaves mostly from Africa worked in the production of tobacco crops and cotton. With the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 along with growing demand for the product in Europe, the use of the slaves in the south became essential for its economy. The end of the Civil War (1861-1865) resulted in the abolition of slavery throughout the whole United States through the ratification of thirteenth Amendment in December 1865¹.

During the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the number of the exported female slaves is more than male's number. This difference between the two sexes because of their diverse experiences, which means, women and men's positions and occupations were separated and had different value.

In fact that being females and blacks, African women faced both racism and sexism, indeed, in early times, women had the authority over men in the whole community and they were included in a strong communities. Moreover, they appreciated their native cultures and habits especially the notion of motherhood which was considered to be sacred. However, after their exportation as slaves, they were introduced to a patriarchal system, violently racist and exploitative society².

Furthermore, African female slaves were introduced to limited fields, mostly in the domestic sphere, as nursing, taking care of their children. Slaves and especially women faced bad conditions. They were considered as sex objects, illiterates and inferiors. Also, they were given derogatory names as "Negros" and "Others". Besides, they suffered from the bad conditions in raising their children whom they were usually sold or given to other masters³.

At the end of the civil war, although slavery was over, many slaves continued to live brutalities of the white's oppressions and prejudices. The black former slaves still lived in poverty and witnessed inequality. Black women often preferred to be as homemakers, unwelcomed in the public sphere⁴. In addition, the trauma of slavery caused a great effect on the victims and their descendants both psychologically and physically. Black people suffered from psychic damages, though their traumatic experiences had reached the highest degree of diseases, the enslaved black people had no mental health therapists available to them⁵.

From a literary point of view, the subject of slavery has been widely addressed in the American tradition. Indeed, many former or fugitive slaves narrate their experiences either in written forms or orally. This kind of narrative came to be known as the slave narrative, for example, among the first slave narrative we may cite the two volumes: *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* written by himself (1789)⁶. Then, many autobiographies of former slaves appeared, many reported realities have been published, for instance many abolitionist newspapers appeared namely *The Liberator* which gave a chance to the slaves to tell

their stories, such as William Lloyd Garrison the editor of *the Liberator* , and Lydia Maria Child edited Harriet Jacob's '*Incident in the Life a Girl*' (1861)⁷.

Many black writers started to deal with the issues of slavery during the twentieth century. These issues include sexuality, racism and subjugation. Among these writers we find, Toni Morrison in particular. Most of her works center on the memories of the black people especially women, who faced the racial prejudices under the patriarchal system and memorialize the history of slavery in the United States. Thus in her novel *Beloved* (1987), Morrison tries to show the slaves' experiences, brutalities, oppressions and subjugations that black women endured. She says "There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there is a necessity for remembering in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember"⁸. In other words, Morrison states that recovering from the horror of slavery demands remembering every specific event. According to her, the issues of slavery are avoided in the contemporary American culture. She wants the reader to know the history of slavery, in order not to be forgotten⁹.

The American author Toni Morrison inspired her work from the story of Margaret Garner which took place in 1851 when Margaret fleeing from the slave state of Kentucky to the free state of Ohio with her husband, children and mother in law. However, they were discovered as runaways. So, Margaret wanted to kill her children to prevent them to experience slavery as she did, but she managed to kill only one.

As she said "I will not let those children live how I have lived"¹⁰. It means that Margaret preferred death rather than living through slavery.

Morrison was also inspired from other fragments of stories about horrific incidents of slaves' committing infanticide to prevent their children from enduring the atrocities of slavery. In her essay entitled '*Beloved or the shifting shapes of memory*'. Claudine Reynaud states that "when first writing the book, Morrison was obsessed with fragments of stories about two different incidents: a child murder, by an ex-slave, and the forgiveness of a young lover who helped her murderer escape the police"¹¹

Endnotes

¹Wikipedia, "Female Slavery in the United States" Last modified December 16, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female_slavery_in_the_United_States (accessed May 28, 2018).

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵David, Love. "Post- Traumatic Slave Syndrome and Intergenerational Trauma: Slavery is Like a Curse Passing Through the DNA of Black People." Atlanta Black Star.
<http://www.bibme.org/citation-guide/chicago/website/> (accessed September 13, 2018).

⁶Williams L, Andrew. "Slave Narrative." <https://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative> (accessed September 27, 2018).

⁷Ariel, Moniz "Black Women in American Literature: Slavery Through Slave Narratives and Contemporary Fiction."

[https://hilo.hawaii.edu/campuscenter/hohonu/volumes/documents/BlackWomeninAmericanLiterature-](https://hilo.hawaii.edu/campuscenter/hohonu/volumes/documents/BlackWomeninAmericanLiterature-SlaveryThroughSlaveNarrativesandContemporaryFictionArielMoniz.pdf)

[SlaveryThroughSlaveNarrativesandContemporaryFictionArielMoniz.pdf](https://hilo.hawaii.edu/campuscenter/hohonu/volumes/documents/BlackWomeninAmericanLiterature-SlaveryThroughSlaveNarrativesandContemporaryFictionArielMoniz.pdf) (accessed October 10, 2018).

⁸Faye, Kegley. “Remembering Slavery Through Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.” (Accessed October 22, 2018).

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Claudine, Reynaud, ‘*Beloved or shifting shapes of memory*’ The Cambridge Company to Toni Morrison. Ed. Justing Telling (New York Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Chapter Two: Trauma, Memory and Characters

This chapter aims to study characters in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) in relation to the theme of memory and trauma. The characters are portrayed as alienated individuals who experienced painful moments of their past as slaves. Morrison foreshadows the mental wound left by the atrocities undergone by years of slavery.

a. Female characters and memory

In *Beloved*, Morrison aims to show the frustration of the female characters who are haunted by their past memories of the era of slavery. Through her characters, Morrison depicts their inner side of thoughts and emotions at both present and past times. In this sense, Cathy Caruth asserts "the experience is repeated after its forgetting"¹. It means that the past memories still co-exist in the present. Indeed, Sethe is constantly in conflict with her past that prevents her from living peacefully "to Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay"², that is to say Sethe can't manage to live without the interference of her past memories and her recollections are brought up through time, from the past to the present, as Cathy Caruth's word "possession by the past"³. This is well apparent in the case of Sethe's remembrances, when she fled from Sweet Home. She carried with her in her memory all the atrocities that she had survived. Thus her life is full of all the past atrocities she had undergone at the hands of the whites in Sweet Home. As it is articulated by Cathy Caruth that is not the traumatic experience itself that produces traumatic effects but rather "the remembrance"⁴. This means that the process of over thinking of the distressing events induces the person to be traumatized.

Morrison's protagonist Sethe is one of the many characters who suffer from trauma. So, she experienced many atrocities in her life. She is whipped by the schoolteacher and beaten to death despite her pregnancy. Describing the scar of a tree on her back, "the schoolteacher made one open my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still"⁵. This was the way the whites treated and subjugated the slaves and this mark on Sethe's back reveals dehumanizing and abuse by whites during the period of slavery "those white things have taken all I had or dreamed, she said, and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks"⁶. Indeed, Sethe underwent sexual and physical abuse. At remembering these traumatic events, she goes out of control. For example, the appearance of the ghost who pretends to be Beloved and whom she assumes as her dead daughter makes her revive and remember what she had already experienced in Sweet Home. In addition to this, when the schoolteacher comes back to Cincinnati, Sethe believes that he has returned to recapture her and her children back. Thus, this incident forces her to commit her infanticide by killing her two-years old daughter in order to prevent her from experiencing what she had already undergone. In fact, Sethe's trauma results from her over thinking and her painful recollections of what had happened to her in Sweet Home. Even though years had passed, Sethe is still effected by the punishment that was done to her during her time as a slave "her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no roon to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day"⁷. Thus when she starts to recall these atrocities, this made her live through them as if they were happening again. So, it is not only the death of her daughter that traumatized her, but also the remembrance of this tragic incident.

Throughout her depiction of characters, Morrison allows us to enter to their inner sides to decipher what is behind their actual situation and life. Yet, these characters repress their traumatic memories in the same way Freud suggested in “*Studies on Hysteria*” that traumatic memory is “intentionally repressed from the patient's consciousness thought”⁸. For example, Sethe represses her traumatic memories in order to surmount her past. Once, Denver said “You never told me all what happened, just that they whipped you and you run off, pregnant with me”⁹ this gives evidence that Sethe doesn’t want to recount what happened to her as Amy says “Anything dead coming back to life hurts”¹⁰. Moreover, when Paul D tries to convince Sethe to narrate her past experience and share her feelings, she answers “I don't go inside”¹¹. So, whenever when Sethe is asked to talk about her past, she immediately ignores the question and shifts the subject in an attempt to repress the hurting and traumatizing memories.

In addition, *Beloved's* characters are unable to recount their memories in a significant and linear way. For instance, Sethe's narrative memories is fragmented. She doesn’t give a clear meaning for her narrative. When Paul D asks her to tell him about the schoolteacher’s assault, she doesn’t tell him the whole story. Sethe just replies that “and they took my milk ...and then they took my milk!”¹². The above statement demonstrates that Sethe represses her disturbing memories since she avoids talking about what hurts her and what causes her emotional distress. This clearly shows that the process of narrating someone's traumatic memory is not linear or unified.

Through memories and remembrance of a traumatic experience, one may become traumatized and out of control. In this sense, Cathy Caruth suggests that

“a traumatic experience causes the dissociation of consciousness, because when someone survives a traumatic event in the past, he will be traumatized by the return of the event in the shape of overwhelming memories and hallucinations”¹³. Sethe's memories drive her to become shocked and hallucinating mainly after her infanticide and the appearance of Beloved as well as the arrival of Paul D, who interferes in Sethe's life and even Denver's routine, since they all bring with them memories of the disturbing past.

Similar to Sethe, Baby Suggs, an ex- slave woman, she experiences traumatic memories under the slaveholders. These memories haunt her and cause her to lose her desire for life. She lost her children and she doesn't remember them except Halle, Sethe's husband. Even though Baby Suggs recovers her freedom, she still faces painful memories of what she had gone through during slavery "her past had been like her present intolerable"¹⁴.

For Toni Morrison, all the black community suffered and witnessed the devastating effects of slavery. In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs declares:

Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband's spirit was to come back in here or yours? Don't talk to me. You lucky. You got three-left¹⁵.

Cathy Caruth states that "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another"¹⁶. This statement shows that the personal experience becomes the collective one, and the trauma of slavery haunted and affected all the black community. The

impact of slavery, in fact, has left a great impression on this community even long after the Civil War, slavery has led to physical and psychological damages.

Unlike Sethe and the other characters that experienced slavery, Denver is the only main character who doesn't endure the atrocities of slavery. She has never been a slave, but she is rather affected by the other characters' traumatic past memories. She is affected by her mother's memories and her infanticide. Indeed, Denver has been excluded and disconnected from community. Due to this, she becomes alienated and anxious, as she says "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by, Boys don't like me. Girls don't either"¹⁷. She can not connect to her mother and Paul D because their relationship "is deeply grounded in a past which she cannot share and which she denies her an image of the father she has never met"¹⁸. This isolated attitude causes Denver to be traumatized "Denver hated the stories her mother told that did not concern herself"¹⁹.

Moreover, Denver's understanding of slavery and even her childhood is achieved through recollecting and storytelling of other character's past memories. This period for her is a painful and a traumatizing one "her traumatization is not direct but rather Trans-generational, and thus she can narrate and appropriate it"²⁰. She knows her identity through memories of stories she has heard.

In addition, Denver lived a traumatized childhood because of the absence of her father, having her brothers runaway, the death of her sister and Grand - mother, Baby Suggs. She suffers from alienation and can't bear her fatherless. She reaches for him either in her mother's memories or in Paul D stories about him. Denver then, is portrayed in the novel as being struggling to survive and find a sense of meaning and

purpose in her life. In this context, Cathy Caruth argues that the traumatized victim "refusing to be silent in the face of the unsayable"²¹ is trying to face and challenge his trauma just as Denver who resists to survive her trauma.

Furthermore, Denver misses her father, her brothers and even her dead sister whom she doesn't know at all, expressing a kind of "unconscious wish"²². The sentiment of her parental absence grows up from her childhood to her present time causing the felling of weakness inside her, in Cathy Caruth 's words, she expresses "traumatic reliving"²³ of the past that becomes a part of her life since she recalls it mainly throughout her mother's memories and storytellings. Indeed, Denver constantly asks about her father:

“You know my father?”

“Knew him. knew him well”

“Did he, Ma'am” Denver fought an urged to realign her affection²⁴.

Denver wishes and she is eager to hear about her father, not only her father whom she misses, but also her dead sister. Denver and her mother are calling for the ghost “come on, come on, you may just come on”²⁵. She is affected when she hears for the first time the word "dady", "of course he knew your Dady. I told you he's from Sweet Home"²⁶. Thus, her affection for her father and even her dead sister brings her to loneliness and distress. Through Denver, Morrison wants to show how slavery affects childhood by keeping children far away from their parents, feeling abandoned and orphaned. Due to this, many children do not feel receive their parental, fatherhood or motherhood, love and affection.

b. Male Characters and Memory

Like many of the other characters who survived and experienced the harsh conditions and the traumatic experiences at the hands of their slave-owners during slavery, Paul D, an ex- slave and the last of Sweet Home men. He shows up, after eighteen years, in Sethe's House in 124 Blue Stone Road in Cincinnati. Like Sethe, Paul D is traumatized by the effect of slavery. He becomes shattered and alienated due to the atrocities he experienced at the hands of the whites in Sweet Home and in Georgia Prison. These incidents caused him to be powerless and manless. So, he isolates himself from the others.

Moreover, Paul D, like Sethe, doesn't want to reveal his past memories. He represses and buries his traumatic past memories. He is unable to forget what he has already endured. Cathy Caruth's states "trauma is an event which is not experienced but simply registered, as it overwhelms the person to whom it happens"²⁷. Thus the effects of slavery keep the victim silenced as Luckhurst Roger notes "in a condition of circling what they are defined by and cannot confront unable to communicate their story"²⁸. This is the case of all the characters, they repress their memories. Indeed, Paul D faced many atrocities, he has an iron bit in his mouth which prevents him from telling his story as he says:

“what did he say?”

“Nothing”

“Not a word?”

“Did you speak to him?”

“Didn’t you say anything to him?”“Some thing!”

“I couldn't”

“I couldn't, Sethe. I just,...couldn't”

“Why?”

“I had a bit in my mouth”²⁹

Thus, he retains the most unbearable past of his traumatic experience, since it makes him feel ashamed. In this statement, Morrison depicts how the institution of slavery treats and reduces the slaves to animality so effectively and strips him/her of language and humanity ³⁰.

In addition, at his arrival, in Sethe's house, Paul D recalls the repressed past memories. Yet, he fails to overcome his past feelings just as Sethe did. They begin to remember about Sweet Home's painful time. In Cathy Caruth 's words "memory is the re-experiencing of the events, and it is" a repeated suffering"³¹. So, he becomes traumatized because his repressed memories come to the fore.

Just as Sethe, Paul D also has hidden feelings and has inner sufferings due to his traumatic memory known "Latency"³² that prevents him, and other characters from enjoying their lives. As Cathy Caruth points out "the fact of latency would thus seem to, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent Latency within the experience itself"³³. People who endure traumatic experiences are found with distorted images, isolating and distancing themselves from

the rest of the world. Thus, Paul D, like the other characters who suffered from the harsh conditions of slavery and endured severe psychological repression.

Furthermore, Baby Suggs' last child, Halle, like all slaves, endured traumatic and repressed memories of his past. He suffers from psychological repressions. He becomes insane by seeing his wife, Sethe, abused and whipped by Schoolteacher and his nephews. This event causes him to be traumatized as Paul D declares:

The day I came here. You said they stole your milk. I never knew what it was that messed him up. That was it. I guess. All I knew was that something broke him. Not a one of them years of Saturdays, Sundays and night time extra never touched him. But whatever he saw go on in that barn that day broke him like a twig³⁴.

Halle's insanity is tied with Sethe's rape as Cathy Caruth affirms “one’s own Trauma is tied up with the trauma of another”³⁵. Thus, Halle has been affected by Sethe's sexual assault and abuse. As a result, he isolates himself from his family and the world as Paul D states:

It broke him. Sethe, Paul D looked up at her and sighed. You may as well know it at all. Last time I saw him he was sitting by the chum. He had butter all over his face³⁶

Indeed, Halle is overwhelmed by his repressive memories which affect the forming process of memory and cause him to be shocked as Cathy Caruth notes “what is repressed and is not expressed will come back to make surface and haunt the psyche of the victim and cause suffering”³⁷. This is the case of Halle's memory which is

connected of what Sethe underwent at the hands of the whites. He witnessed Sethe's traumatic experiences, being whipped and abused. So, he cannot overcome his memories because the hurting events are the main source of his alienation which Cathy Caruth calls "isolation imposed by the event"³⁸. Thus, Halle's isolation is not a choice, it is rather determined by what he has witnessed and experienced.

Toni Morrison depicts the characters, giving the readers the opportunity to share the real image of traumatized individuals that witnessed traumatic memories during the period of slavery. Mainly, all *Beloved*'s characters are affected by the atrocities of slavery, they are obsessed and haunted by past memories. They try to repress their memories but do not manage to keep them buried. In fact, each time, they recall these painful and unbearable memories which cause them psychological repression which torments their psyche. Throughout these characters, Morrison reveals the pains of the black community and foregrounds the repressed memories that haunt them and prevent them from living a balanced life. Cathy Caruth explains that "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event"³⁹. All the characters are possessed by the past and their entire life is tied to their past. The aim of Morrison is to bring back the past into the present and to speak about what has been neglected as she said "this is not a story to pass on"⁴⁰.

c. Rape and Infanticide

1. Rape and Memory

The act of rape is one of the most horrible atrocities experienced by many characters in Morrison's novel. It is considered as the most atrocious violence that is practiced against them in Sweet Home. Both the female and the male characters endured the traumatic incident of sexual abuse which traumatized them both physically and psychologically. Shelby Larrick states. "Slaves faced extreme brutality, and Morrison focuses on rape and sexual assault as the most terrifying form of abuse. It is because of this abuse that Morrison's characters are trapped in their pasts, unable to move on from the psychological damages that they have endured"⁴¹. This means that their lives are overwhelmed by their memories of the traumatic experiences of rape.

Furthermore, in the novel, the trauma of rape is revealed to the reader through the flashbacks and the memories of the characters, as Robin field articulates: "Morrison seeks not to present a comprehensive portrait of the act of rape and its bodily and psychic repercussions, but instead to offer glimpses into the traumatic event as it gradually becomes comprehensible to its survivors"⁴². Moreover, there are words which refer to the traumatic experience of rape as he also states "the traces of rape in *beloved* most often appear in one or two sentences that reveal the existence of trauma"⁴³. For instance, at the arrival to Sweet Home, Sethe was the only female, and all of Sweet Home's men desired her. As Morrison states that they are young and so sick with the absence of women, it means that all the men wished to possess her. Indeed, Sethe is considered as sex object in the eyes of Sweet Home males. Morrison writes "All in their twenties, minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing

on pallets, rubbing their thighs”⁴⁴.

Sethe Garner is the major character who is victim of rape. She is raped by the schoolteacher and his nephews in Sweet Home despite her pregnancy. In addition, she is subjected to another abuse by the engraver so as to write her murdered baby’s name in her gravestone “ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I’ll do it for free”⁴⁵. That is to say, she prostitutes her body to the engraver, and trades it in exchange of writing a name.

It is not only Sethe’s body that is violated, but her sacred motherhood as well. The white men took her milk by power, as she said “and they took my milk”⁴⁶. So, they deprived her from her possession. This causes her suffering and pain.

Paul D is another character who suffers from the trauma of rape. He experiences it twice. The first one in Georgia, when he was in prison, he was given orders by the white men to felicitate the prison guard every morning and to commit sexual acts, otherwise, he will be sentenced to death. The second time, the act of abuse is committed by Beloved. She forces him out of Sethe’s bed, and then out of the house. She obliges him to do what she wants. Pamela Barnett notes that Beloved is “a female demon and nightmare figure that sexually assaults male sleepers, and drains them of semen”⁴⁷. Thus, Paul D becomes traumatized by these horrible incidents that happened to him, since he was deprived of his manhood.

To sum up, after a traumatic event, one may suffer from Post Traumatic Disorder. Thus Sethe and Paul D are victims of it. Cathy Caruth defines Post Traumatic Disorder as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events

in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena”⁴⁸. So, Sethe and Paul Dare subjected to symptoms of psychic stress disorder because of the traumatic memories of rape.

2. The Trauma of Infanticide

The act of infanticide was one of the most common crimes committed during the era of slavery. Many distressed women killed their infants either to save them from the cruel act of slavery, or to get rid of those children who resulted from rape. In Morrison’s novel, the trauma of infanticide is undergone by three black female characters; Sethe, her mother and Ella. Morrison was inspired by a real slave Margaret Garner, who escaped from slavery, and then killed her daughter when she was caught by her master. The trauma of infanticide is caused by rape articulated by Pamela E Barnett “the depictions of and allusions to rape is of primary importance; each in some way helps explain the infanticide that marks the beginnings of Sethe’s story as a free woman”⁴⁹.

Sethe Garner commits infanticide due to her traumatic experiences, and she is haunted by the memories of her past. In this case, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “a wound inflicted not upon the body, but upon the mind”⁵⁰. This means that Sethe’s infanticide is a trauma that is inflicted upon her mind and soul. As a result, she becomes psychically traumatized. Yet, this act justifies her deep love for her daughter, and a way to prevent her from living what she had experienced before.

Though Sethe’s infanticide is a crime that is impossible to accept, it is her best

solution to keep her daughter safe from slavery. Her choice to kill her comes after the traumatic incidents she had survived in Sweet Home. Thus, these incidents make her recollect the events and relive her pain. In fact, Sethe does not experience immediately the shock of committing the infanticide, but rather when she is repeatedly possessed by the event as Caruth states “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it”⁵¹.

Therefore, the traumas she survived during her years in slavery causes her to act unconsciously and to commit infanticide. Michelle Balaev states “trauma causes the disruption and reorientation of consciousness”⁵². Which means that the act of infanticide is the result of another incident. In *beloved*, Sethe Garner’s crime of infanticide is outcome of her rape and whipping.

Infanticide is also depicted through Sethe’s mother and Ella. They reject their babies and kill them because they see them as symbols of sexual assault, and consider them among the painful experiences that they had endured. Thus Morrison portrays her characters as being victims of their traumatic past which they cannot bury. In fact, it is often repeated through recollections and remembrance. These recollections result in psychological repression.

d. End notes

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⁴Cathy Caruth, "*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*". (Baltimore the Johns Hopkins University Press 1995).

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⁷Ibid.

⁸ Sigmund, Freud, "*Studies on hysteria* "1895.

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¹¹Ibid. 90.

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²⁷Cathy Caruth, "*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*".

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²⁹Toni Morrison, "*Beloved*", (New York: Alfred, A Knopf, 1987), 135.

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³³Ibid 07-8

³⁴Toni Morrison, "*Beloved*", (New York: Alfred, A Knopf, 1987), 133

³⁵Cathy Caruth, "*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*".

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³⁷Cathy Caruth, " *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*".

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⁴⁰Toni Morrison, "*Beloved*", (New York: Alfred, A Knopf, 1987), 523

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⁴⁴Toni Morrison, "*Beloved*", (New York: Alfred, A Knopf, 1987),19

⁴⁵Ibid.05

⁴⁶Ibid.33

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Chapter Three: Modernist Techniques in *Beloved*

This last chapter is devoted to Toni Morrison's use of modernist techniques mainly the flashbacks in her novel *Beloved*. Our aim in this section is to show how this technique contributes in the development of the theme of trauma recollections. This shows clearly the character's perspective in recounting their memories of the past. Each one, in his own way, recollects and retells his memories of the haunting past of the period of slavery, and how this institution affects their psyche.

The narrative in *Beloved* is fragmented. It doesn't follow a chronological order and an inflexible place. This is mainly exemplified in the way Morrison begins her novel. The actions take place in 124 Blue Stone "124 was SPITEFUL, full of baby's venom"¹. Then, Morrison jumps back to Sethe's past memories when she committed her infanticide "no more powerful than the way I loved her"². It means that Morrison brings us to the past memories of her characters, shifting forward and backward in time. In fact, the present and the past go hand in hand. Morrison attempts to make the reader enter and go back to the past then to the present of each character's mind in order to decipher traumatic experiences.

Thus, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is built on the technique of flashbacks. Morrison depicts the character's thoughts and inner feelings. Her aim is to reveal the hidden past through *Beloved* character's past memories and to expose it as it exists in the mind of each character. Morrison uses Sethe, as the main character, remembering her repressed memories about what she had experienced in Sweet Home at the hands of the white masters. Sethe doesn't only reveal her repressed memories but goes further to unveil other's inner thoughts. Thus, throughout Sethe, the reader is able to know more about

Denver, and even her dead sister. So, throughout this technique, the reader will be able to decipher each character's mind and feel their pain and distress.

We learn about the trauma of infanticide through Sethe's flashbacks and memories. With the flashback to her infanticide, Sethe relives the pain of her past incidents and goes traumatized, Cathy Caruth argues "the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way"³. This means that the victim is not aware of his trauma before its insistent re-appearance in flashbacks. In addition, through flashbacks, we learn about Sethe's mother infanticide. Sethe has been told by her nurse how her mother has committed infanticide on board of the ship, and that her mother killed her new born babies and kept only her.

Flashbacks as a technique mainly serve *Beloved's* main theme and plot. So, Morrison explores this technique which helps the reader to understand the character's present situation, their pain, frustrations and psychological repression in relation to their past. The Flashbacks technique in the terms of Cathy Caruth "provides a form that survives at the cost of willed memory or of the very continuity of conscious thoughts"⁴. This statement means that the traumatic memories are saved in the mind of the victims and return instinctively. Furthermore, through the use of flashbacks, one may travel between the past and the present.

The appearance of *Beloved* makes the other characters, mainly Sethe, revive the painful experiences that she survived in Sweet Home, and the arrival of Paul D in 124 Blue Stone. This opens a window for Sethe's past and even for Denver who begins to know about her father whom she had never seen. All this stimulates Sethe and those

around her return to their painful past which is an unbearable and unhealable experience in their life. Sandra L. Bloom states that the trauma re-surfaces in flashbacks as she puts it "a Flashback is a sudden intrusive re-experience of a fragment of one of those traumatic, un verbalized memories"⁵. Thus once someone experiences a flashback, they don't remember the experience they relive it. In addition she notes that "during a flashback, people become overwhelmed with the same emotions that they felt at the time of the trauma"⁶. In this case *Beloved's* characters are repressed and overwhelmed by the same painful memories and experiences they survived at the time of trauma. All in all, stories or memories are just fragmented images of traumatic events that come back to mind unwillingly.

Endnotes

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³ Cathy Caruth, " *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*". (Baltimore the Johns Hopkins University Press 1995), 59.

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V. General Conclusion

Trauma is an issue that is still haunting the individual's mind. Thus, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) has allowed us to witness the authenticity of the reality lived by the traumatic victims. Memory as an important element in the life of the individual, we can not live without memories, the past is a part of our present and the future .

In this study, we tried to shed light on the work of Toni Morrison *Beloved* (1987). Her work centers on the history of slavery. Through the traumatic memories of the characters, Morrison depicts all the horrors, traumas, and atrocities that the African Americans endured during their enslavement.

Morrison's *Beloved* has very often been studied from the psychoanalytic perspective. Our piece of research is an attempt to make a contribution to this field. In our study of the novel, we have come to the conclusion that all the characters are haunted by past traumatic memories which traumatize them. Throughout flashbacks, memories and recollections, Morrison describes the inner feelings of each character, as well as the effects of the process of remembering which torments the individuals' psyche. Hence, we may deduce that the return is still haunting the characters' mind.

We hope that this research work is a helpful contribution for a better understanding of the consequences of the recollections of the traumatic memories upon the mind.

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