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Toni Morrison; Magical Realism Serving to Outline Cultural Experience

Toni Morrison; Magický realismus jako prostředek k nastínění kulturní zkušenosti

.

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Resumé

Ve své práci jsem se zaměřila na roli magického realismu a jeho využití v románech Toni Morrisonové *Píseň o Šalamounovi* a *Milovaná*. Jelikož nadpřirozených prvků v těchto dvou příbězích je použito hlavně jako hybných sil, které napomáhají odhalovat utajené a potlačené skutečnosti ze života románových postav, byli mými hlavními cíli rozbor a určení autorčiných motivací k tomu, aby prvky magického realismu použila, za jakým účelem, a co tyto snahy patrně přinesly.

Nejprve jsem analyzovala autorčinu vlastní akademickou práci, ve které se zaměřuje na to, v jaké pozici se jako afro-americká autorka nachází: musí čelit odlidštěnému obrazu černochů v americké společnosti tak, jak ho vytvořili američtí běloši, aby ochránili vlastní civilizovanost v divočině Nového Světa. Co se týče literárního jazyka, autorka polemizuje, že tato stanoviska a z toho pramenící literární tradice jí nabízejí jen dva možné přístupy k věci: útočnou oslavu černošské minority či defenzivní přizpůsobení se stanoviskům a přístupům hlavního proudu. Taková řešení se ovšem jeví jako slepé uličky, jelikož ani jeden z přístupů nemá potenciál k tomu, aby z něho vzešel autentický obraz života Afro-Američanů.

Je třeba zmínit jednu důležitou překážku v takovém snažení, kterou je skutečnost, že během procesu odlidštění černochů bylo hodně z jejich životních zkušeností ignorováno či dokonce zapomenuto. Mou snahou bylo ukázat, že se Morrisonová právě pomocí magického realismu snaží znovu vzkřísit potlačované lidství a historii Afro-Američanů. Snaží se s jeho pomocí líčit příběh způsobem odlišným a nezávislým na tendencích, jaké využívá k portrétování afro-amerického života a otrokářské historie dominantní kulturní proud. Pomocí srovnání dvou zmíněných knih s duchů prostou autorčinou prvotinou *Nejmodřejší oči* jsem se snažila ukázat, jak pouhé realistické pojetí a hmatatelná realita odsuzuje autorčiny literární postavy k tomu, aby zůstaly psychicky zlomené, s nedostatkem osobního i

kolektivního sebevědomí, jak je to například v případě rodiny Breedloveových a hlavně jejich dcery Pecoly v románu *Nejmodřejší oči*.

Z příběhu lze usuzovat, že nedostatek sebevědomí má kořeny v rasistických postojích a dominantním společenském chování bílých Američanů. Nicméně, *Nejmodřejší oči* neřeší do hloubky otázku, co konkrétně Afro-Američané postrádají. Je to právě *Píseň o Šalamounovi*, kde Morrisonová uvádí postavu zvanou Mlíčňák do světa jižanských černochů, znenadání daleko poutavějšího než jeho dřívější penězi ovládaná iluze svobody, a to právě díky nadpřirozeným silám – jako například duch jeho dědečka – které mu ukazují cestu. V *Písni o Šalamounovi* Morrisonová zdůrazňuje důležitost rodinného folkloru a zároveň poukazuje na jeho absenci v životě a vzpomínkách svých postav, jelikož pouze síly stojící mimo realitu ho dokáží vynést zpět na světlo.

V *Milované* smrt opět ožívá, aby obnovila pouto mezi matkami a dcerami, které bylo v časech otroctví často zpřetrháno a ignorováno. V knize jde ovšem ještě o víc. Jelikož zde tato pouta silně narušuje vražda dítěte samotnou matkou, jde v *Milované* nejen o poukázání na bolest způsobenou nemohoucností mít kontrolu nad vlastními dětmi, ale také ukazuje, jak takové situace tyto jinak čistě emocionální pouta deformuje: matka si zdánlivě osvobozující vraždou ironicky svou vlastní dceru podmaňuje, a ta se na oplátku vrací, aby jí oplatila stejným metrem. Při zpětném pohledu na *Nejmodřejší oči* si čtenář může všimnout, jak vztah Pauline k Pecole a svému domovu obecně negativně ovlivňuje materiální pohodlí – či spíše jeho nedostatek. V *Milované* Morrisonová využívá postavy ducha, aby identifikovala možný původ tohoto problému.

Thesis Abstract

In my thesis I focus on the application and role of magical realism in Toni Morrison's two novels, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*. Because the supernatural elements in these two stories serve mainly as catalytic forces that reveal hidden and submerged realities of the characters' lives, my goal was to discuss and determine Morrison's motivations for the use of magical realism, its purpose, and possible final results of the writer's literary effort.

I began by analyzing Morrison's own critical work in which she focuses on her position as a writer being confronted with the dehumanized picture of blackness the way it was created by white Americans in order to preserve their own humanity in the wilderness of the New World. As for the literary language, the writer argues that the said point of view and the literary tradition that stems from it offer only two possible approaches: incursive glorification of the minority, or defensive conformity. These nevertheless appear to be metaphorical blind alleys to her attempts, as none has a potential to create an authentic picture of African Americans.

A relevant hindering obstacle to mention is that a lot was lost through the process of dehumanization. My attempt was to demonstrate that by the application of magical realism, Morrison tries to re-humanize (to re-member) black history by creating a picture different from and independent of the tendencies of the dominant culture regarding the depiction of African Americans and their slave ancestors. Through a comparison of *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* with the magic-free *The Bluest Eye*, my goal was to show how the sole realistic rendering of what can be traced through reason dooms the characters to be psychically broken and void of personal and collective confidence, as is the case of the Breedloves and specifically their daughter Pecola from *The Bluest Eye*.

One can only assume that this lack of confidence has its roots in the racist conduct and the dominant social behaviour of whites. Nevertheless, *The Bluest Eye* does not answer what exactly the black characters are missing. It is in *Song of Solomon*, where Morrison, ushers

the character called Milkman into a world of southern blacks which suddenly appears to him much more valuable than the money-driven illusion of freedom to which he used to adhere and it is the supernatural forces as for example the ghost of his grandfather, that guide this way for him. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison stresses the importance of familial folklore and at the same time its absence in the lives and the memory of the characters, as it can be recreated only with a little help from beyond.

In *Beloved*, dead people are brought back among the living in order to recreate the bonds between mothers and daughters which were often brutally severed and their presence ignored during the history of slavery. It does even more than that. Because the maternal bonds in the novel are severely maladjusted by an act of infanticide, *Beloved* not only addresses the pain associated with not having control over the lives of one's own children, but it also shows how these essentially emotional bonds can be deformed: the mother, by a murder which is supposed to be freeing, ironically enslaves the daughter, who comes back to avenge it in the same manner. Looking back at *The Bluest Eye*, the reader can notice how Pauline's attitude towards Pecola and the home as such is negatively determined by material comfort - or rather the lack of it. In *Beloved*, Morrison uses a ghostly character to identify possible roots of this problem.

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1)

Introduction

In her two novels, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*, Toni Morrison makes use of a literary technique called magical realism, through which she reveals realities and information that would otherwise remain unknown both to the reader and the characters of these two novels. My goal is to discuss Morrison's reasons for the use of the supernatural in her storytelling scheme, as well as its results. The core of my effort will be to demonstrate how the introduction of ghostly elements helps the characters of these two stories to reveal and recreate their unique African-American identity.

In order to determine what makes the role of magical realism in Toni Morrison's novels *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* so particularly important for outlining African-American cultural experience, I first had to identify elements I perceive to be missing from these works, although one would expect them there. The preliminary expectations stem from Morrison's status as an African-American female writer; and as a mark imposed on her by the white, masculine, dominant culture, it affects and hampers every literary move she may make. As it is with every such attempt at emancipation, the emancipation of African-Americans within the social and cultural sphere of the United States has had to face several hindering obstacles. The word emancipation and the idea behind it are in themselves quite problematic. The struggle of finding, recovering or creating one's distinctive identity can be negatively tainted either by an endeavour to mark this identity with the same positive qualities which define the official stream, and by doing so denying the very distinctiveness of this identity. Or it can attack the justifiableness of the dominant culture by stressing, magnifying and treating all the differentiating characteristics as positive without reserve and presenting them strictly in contrast with the wrongful aggressors. In *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*, Toni Morrison acknowledges and tries to avoid these two paths that can lead a writer in her position astray.

In the first chapter, I develop an argument that Morrison's critical conclusions, applied to and treated in the context of her own literary work, lead her to create a complex portrait of her main characters in *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* as people inwardly affected and destroyed by the social and moral context that shapes their lives. Sethe's act of infanticide cannot be seen simply as an act of rebellion because while she conquers the schoolteacher, she loses to herself. Likewise, Macon Dead's attempt at being a successful man destroys his family life. Thus, having tried to avoid what Morrison qualifies as possible impediments to her literary attempts, she arrives at the point where her characters become their own enemies. That is the subject of the first chapter.

In the second chapter, I shall develop the argument explaining why it is difficult for Morrison's characters to gain a healthy and authentic sense of self-esteem, and more importantly, what I see as Morrison's principal literary device through which she tries to develop the plot in *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* towards more positive ends; that is, the magical realism.

I want to point out the difference between these two novels and Morrison's first book *The Bluest Eye* where the supernatural does not yet play a significant role and where the story ends tragically and no positive future is yet offered to Pecola.

I will discuss how the use of magical realism allows Morrison to enhance the two stories with elements that were excluded from the official US history: the picture of black slaves as individual human beings. This effected not only the collective consciousness of the dominant culture, or the dominant race, but it also had an immense impact on the self-esteem of the excluded. The crucial role of ghosts in both novels is to serve as a connection between major characters' present day lives and their long gone past which often offers them certain answers to their life-long personal issues. The purpose of this narrative technique in the two novels is to reveal something that is hidden, submerged, that even haunts the characters from the depths of their subconsciousness.

The third chapter is dedicated to the consequent effects of the narrative technique discussed in the second one. Again I use a comparison with *The Bluest Eye*, mainly in the case of *Song of Solomon*, which I argue to be a partial response to the former novel. In her essay, Valerie Smith says that "those whom social relations exclude (like Pecola Breedlove of *The Bluest Eye* [...]) lack self-knowledge and are destroyed by themselves or by others."[1] According to Smith, *Song of Solomon*, on the other hand, is a novel "in which her protagonist completes successfully his/her search for psychological autonomy."[2] This comparison between these two novels illustrates the shift in the direction in Morrison's narrative intentions, the result being a revival of self-knowledge.

The second part of the third chapter is dedicated to *Beloved*, where Morrison uses magical realism not only in order to offer the aforementioned psychological autonomy to her contemporaries (both characters and readers), but mainly to search for and analyze mental processes of those directly and indirectly affected by the experience of slavery.

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[1] Valerie Smith, "*Song of Solomon*: Continuities of Community" *Conjuring Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, ed. Marjorie Pryze at al. (Indiana University Press. 1985) 274.
[2] Smith, 274.

2)

The History: A Submergence of the Minority Soul and Blind Alleys on Ways towards Re-emergence

In her ambiguously named essay “Black Matters” from *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison takes due note of the obstacles and limitations which are imposed on her by the socio-cultural situation in which she finds herself when she says: “My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American female writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world.”[3] As a writer who represents a specific minority, or who is viewed as such a representative, Morrison is confronted with predefined and, to a certain extent, prefabricated cultural and literary characteristics of the black persona. In consequence, this ostracizes the minority from the official history and culture, and disallows them to take part in the forming of a specific cultural identity that would not be perceived as a mere deviation from the dominant culture.

Because of the negative implications which this conception of deviation creates, it is hard for such writers as Morrison to step out of the shadows of the racial or cultural caste. If not altogether suppressed, the representatives of alternative currents are forced to compete with the mainstream. However, both the cause and the result of this enforced competition further strengthen these deviations as they emphasize the apparent absence of an accent in the supreme culture. Thus, this places such writers in a vicious circle, and may often secure for them a limited role of a defender: a role characterized by a lack of freedom in personal expression.

A realization of the role of what Morrison calls an “Africanist”[4] element in the shaping of white American culture is crucial for Morrison’s own literary discourse. She realizes that a careful treatment of problems that arise from this situation is necessary for her,

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[3] Toni Morrison, “Black Matters,” *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). 4.

[4] Meaning the African-American population in the United States, who Morrison views as culturally distinguishable and distinguished from the white population of European origin.

and for other writers in a similar situation, in order to see what exactly differentiates her from other writers who do not have to consider a limited range of freedom regarding their literary discourse; and more exactly, why it is so. The seeming absence of the mark in white American literary culture forces one to assume that it was shaped and re-formed entirely by itself, with no external influence. Pondering over her own status of a writer with a mark, Morrison at the same time questions the validity of what she calls "knowledge;" that is, the cultural awareness of the white population of the United States. This "knowledge," according to Morrison, is based on the cult of a new American man who is thought to have developed unrelated to the presence of black slaves in the United States of America. She wonders if all the virtues of the Emersonian new man are not "in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence."[5]

The purpose of Africanism in American literary culture, Morrison says, is to shape the "Americanist" accent-free view, and to limit the African culture within its artificial boundaries. In order to preserve the classicist, rational ideals of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, which largely shaped the basis of the new American culture, in this vast and wild *terra nova*, it was necessary to place these ideals in contrast with uncultivated darkness, personified in "representations of black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent, or under complete control."[6] What, according to Morrison, helps the masculine literary ideal to keep his civilized dignity is the fact that "he is backgrounded by savagery."[7] Romanticizing the unknown and the dreaded preserves the rational and industrious psyche of these European migrants. Morrison says: "These images of impenetrable whiteness need contextualizing to explain their extraordinary power, pattern, and consistency".[8] At the same time, this attempt of self-preservation, quite logically, keeps the Africanist character out of the deeper literary interest, and consequently also out of the official history.

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[5] Morrison, "Black Matters," 4-5.
[6] Morrison, "Romancing the Shadow," *Playing in the Dark,* 33.
[7] Morrison, "Romancing the Shadow," 44.
[8] Morrison, "Romancing the Shadow," 33.

These attempts to ostracize one specific social group are closely connected with Morrison's critique of an opinion that the "official" literary culture is free of any external racial determination. For her, racial variations and the problems which these variations induce are an essential and undeniable part of the shaping of American identity:

> Statements to the contrary, insisting on the meaninglessness of race to the American, are themselves full of meaning. The world does not become raceless or will not become unracialized by assertion. The act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act. Pouring rhetorical acid on the fingers of a black hand may indeed destroy the prints, but not the hand.[9]

Morrison supplies this argument with an ominous deduction that metaphorical fingertips of the other party are likewise tainted and marked with this acid.[10] In other words, the dominant culture is, according to Morrison, wrongly perceived as raceless. In literature, as well as in a broader social space, such an act is not the act of a removal of the boundaries that prevents someone from becoming a part of a larger, internally determined group. It is a deletion of one's specific characteristic in favour of the other. Here, the wicked circle continues to whirl. The idea of the complete integration of the previously wronged community dooms the moral perceptions and culture of such community as permanently inferior and with it also denies the distinctiveness of this community's subjective experience.

In her essay called "Talking Back to Schoolteacher: Morrison's Confrontation with Hawthorne in *Beloved*" Caroline M. Woidat contrasts Morrison with a previous generation of African-American female writers with the intention of showing that Morrison does not conform to the discriminative verbal characters that form and shape the white literary

[9] Morrison, "Romancing the Shadow," 46.
[10] Morrison, "Romancing the Shadow," 46-47.

discourse, which is even more restrictive in the case of female writers. The contrast is made by the latter group's attempt to offer their readers an image of an African-American (woman) as a being worthy of dignity, and Woidat simultaneously examines and weighs their ability to respond to the oppressively dominant literary tendencies. [11] Treating Nathaniel Hawthorne as a definer of the supreme (male) literary canon who thus segregates the characteristics of the literary works written by female writers, Woidat quotes him to show how such fudges diminish the expressive power of female writers in the eyes of general literary public. According to Hawthorne:

> (Fanny Fern) writes as if the devil was in her, and that is the only condition under which a woman ever writes anything worth reading. Generally women write like emasculated men, and are only to be distinguished from male authors by greater feablesness and folly; but when they throw off the restraints of decency, and come before the public stark naked, as it were – then their books are sure to possess character and value.[12]

In conclusion, a female writer – according to Hawthorne – can be either bad; or mad, as if possessed by the same black, devilish power that was associated with the inferior (i.e. black) part of the population. Woidat argues that this "double bind for female writers" puts black female writers in "multiple jeopardy."[13] Consequently, the main obstacle hindering the endeavour of these women is that in order to win over the "white" readership, they use and identify with sentimental bias, typical for white female literature of the 19th century,

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[11] Caroline M. Woidat, "Talking Back to Schoolteacher: Morrison's Confrontation with Hawthorne in *Beloved*," *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Nancy J. Peterson (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): 185-186.
Woidat explains that the main reasons for her argumentation stem from the allusions to Hawthorne in *Beloved*, which have been detected by "more than one reader." 181.

[12] Hawthorne, qtd. in Woidat, 185.

[13] Woidat, 185.

described by Hawthorne as a "d----d mob of scribbling women."[14] These "restraints of decency" not only lower their value as writers in the eyes of judges such as Hawthorne (which is a good example of the wicked circle I mentioned above) but – more importantly - forbid them to depict the everyday realities of their slave heroines,[15] because these everyday realities are full of things which the decent women should not talk about. These women in consequence fail to fully translate their own point of view, or, more specifically, the way they live through sorrow, cope with pain, and experience happiness of any kind, into the literary language.

Woidat argues that unlike her 19th century predecessors, Morrison does find a way to talk back to "schoolteacher"[16] through the character of Sethe in *Beloved*.[17] Here, while murdering her child, Sethe also defies the schoolteacher by robbing him of his property. Nevertheless, while this idea of "talking back" has a prominent place in Woidat's paper, I have difficulty perceiving it as the ultimate thing which Morrison as a writer strives for, because mere talking back to the oppressor cannot ensure that the oppressor will fully acknowledge it as a valuable counterargument. Morrison seems to realize this, because she confined Sethe for this act of "talking back" in a prison of a silent house with a choking atmosphere for eighteen years, only to punish her even more after this punishment seemingly ends. I understand Morrison's illustration of the house no. 124 as a "spiteful"[18] place in the first section of the novel as her own realization that having the mental power to point at the wrongness does not stand for a proof that the "wrongness" is really wrong, or at least that this particular way of talking back is really the right one. Robbing the schoolteacher of his property cannot work as a sufficient argument against the oppressive nature of both physical slavery and the obtruding ethical dogma of the enslavers, because Beloved is not only the

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[14] Woidat, 184.
[15] Woidat, 184-185.
[16] In Woidat's paper, this "schoolteacher," apart from being a character in *Beloved*, is also a contextual personalization of Hawthorne, or rather the dominant mark-free power he represented.
[17] Woidat , 182.
[18] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998) 3.

teacher's self-proclaimed property, but first and foremost a human being that was robbed of its own chance to say that. Therefore, Morrison does not have enough ammunition to do more than "describe" what Sethe, or Margaret Garner, did.

It is true that for Morrison, showing her characters as mentally crushed people – dead, impotent, or under complete control – is no longer a taboo that would hinder her literary attempts. As to that, Woidat makes a good point when presenting Morrison as a nonconformist in comparison with her predecessors. It is also not only restricted to her female characters. Morrison apparently feels no "restraints of decency"[19] when presenting her characters as ones who have to face and have to deal with the lack of manhood, dignity or personal will. What is more, she also does not hesitate to identify the very source of their problems. It is Paul D in *Beloved* who cannot feel like a man after having realised that a mere cock is allowed to keep more male dignity than him; or Halle, who goes mad after he saw Schoolteacher's pupils taking Sethe's milk and could not prevent it or stop it. Likewise, in *Song of Solomon*, men whom Milkman meets in Danville, Pennsylvania "began to die [even as boys] and were dying still"[20] because they had seen old Macon Dead 'make it,' only to witness him later robbed of everything, including his own life, by a white, rich local family of "dignity."

These and many other examples show that Morrison is not willing to persuade her readers by using the formulas of the dominant tradition, nor does she feel ashamed to show the weaknesses of the people of her own race, and it is possible to see Sethe as one of the best examples of such characters in the two books: she would rather kill her own children than to see them treated as, or even worse than, cows and mules. However, here her strength as a literary backlash rather tragically ends, and Woidat fails to fully acknowledge it. Woidat

[19] Woidat, 186.
[20] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (London: Vintage, 1998) 235.

comments on the murder in a way that "Sethe's 'thick' love for her children is depicted in defiance of traditional conception of motherhood,"[21] and adds that:

> writing in the twentieth century, Morrison is less defensive than Wilson or Jacobs in portraying her black heroine's unique virtues; she makes no excuses for abominations such as Beloved's death because they result from the white institution of slavery.[22]

This argument nevertheless bears a weakness, because it implies that the murder and its literary treatment are both acts of bold rebellion. The "thick love" is Sethe's own apologetic concept, not Morrison's, as the murder defies Sethe herself in the first place. First and foremost, in her attempt to save her children from being the victims of the schoolteacher's will or whim (i.e. mere cows and mules), Sethe herself makes them the victims of her own will. By taking full power over their life and death, she inevitably robs them of their right to decide for themselves and thus become full-fledged human beings. Also, the depiction of this abomination certainly counts to no "restraints of decency" as to Morrison's expressive voice, but the assertion that this is due to her assertive capability to talk to the schoolteacher through Sethe also implies that Sethe's misdeed is justifiable due to the misdeeds that have ignited it. Woidat's crucial mistake is that she places the portrayal of the outgrowths of physical and mental oppression on the same level with a murder that can but does not have to be a work of a mentally oppressed mind. Moreover, while all black characters in the book would probably agree that Halle's insanity is a sad result of the despicable oppression, their sentiments regarding the infanticide are significantly varied. Probably the most powerful argument against the murder comes from the mouth of Paul D. Although he later realizes he does not know where this argument came from; because it

[21] Woidat, 187.
[22] Woidat, 187.

conflicts with his emotional death represented by the metonymical heart embedded in a rusty can, it is there as a testimony that there may be certain moral ideals accessible to any human being regardless of one's upbringing and life experience:

> "What you did was wrong, Sethe."
>
> "I should have gone back there? Taken my babies back there?"
>
> "There could have been a way. Some other way."
>
> "What way?"
>
> "You got two feet, Sethe, not four," (Paul D) said and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet.[23]

Even though Woidat quotes from *Playing in the Dark* to support her argument she blatantly overlooks the underlying character of the whole critical work, because Morrison tried to widen the ideological scope of American literature "without the mandate for conquest."[24] In relation to Morrison's critique of the racial blindness that dominates the perception of American identity, she also implies that an outright critique could not be a solution. The core of the problem is that the affected are not able to fully reprimand the aggressor, simply because they are the affected, meaning affected and tainted by the aggressor's moral politics. Picturing Sethe as a moral heroine would be unrealistic. To have written *Beloved* as a downright critique would contradict the core of her argument, as she says that she does not "want to alter one hierarchy in order to institute another."[25] Instead, she chooses to treat both paths as carrying a characteristic stigma:

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[23] Morrison, *Beloved*, 165.
[24] Morrison, "Black Matters," 3.
[25] Morrison, "Black Matters," 8.

> My vulnerability would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it. The kind of work I have always wanted to do requires me to learn how to maneuver ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains.[26]

The vulnerability which Morrison talks about seems to be closely connected with the possible vulnerability of the "knowledge." Such romanticizing would inevitably be accompanied with an odour of hypocrisy, because it lies in the glorification of one group at the expense of the other. The product of such romantic celebration of blackness could only strengthen the resentment of the demonized towards the demonizing, and further widen the gap between the two groups. It would, most importantly, only emphasize the difference. It would lead Morrison into one of the places where, in her own words, "imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision,"[27] and would by no means produce a picture of an authentic identity of the African-American people. On the contrary, it would help to keep these people in the limited space designated for them by the official, accent-free culture. Morrison herself therefore identifies the attitude as counterproductive. Woidat's previously mentioned argument that "[Morrison] makes no excuses for abominations such as Beloved's death because they result from the white institution of slavery," implies the presence of this attitude in Morrison's work. Giving Beloved's death this sole purpose – to criticize the "schoolteacher" – would save the character of Sethe from every bit of her own guilt and conscience, even though the character is in reality full of it. Something as radically negative as a murder of a daughter would be very hard to vindicate without any suggestion that Sethe herself might have done something wrong. In other words, to use the killing of one's own

[26] Morrison, "Preface," *Playing in the Dark*. Xi.
[27] Morrison, "Preface," *Playing in the Dark*. Xi.

child solely as a critique of white slavery and racism would only be a replacement of one senseless brutality by another.

The presence of numerous characters in both *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* challenge Woidat's point even further, because they share a limited capability to cope with the portrayed situation. The presence of Beloved's ghost and her behavior towards Sethe contradicts and undermines any theory that Sethe's act of murder is a sole accusative response both to slavery and the dominant tendencies in the white masculine discourse. The murder is not an act of liberation. It creates another kind of enslavement. Sethe's own explanation that the murder was an act of true love is promptly supplemented with Beloved's complete lack of understanding: "Uncomprehending everything except that Sethe was the woman who took her face away, leaving her crouching in a dark, dark place, forgetting to smile."[28] Deborah Horwitz writes in her essay called "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*": "Beloved transforms from a lonely, affectionate girl into a possessive, demanding tyrant, and her ruthlessness almost kills Sethe."[29] What is the purpose of the character of Beloved, if it punishes Sethe for "talking back"? Why does Morrison stress each character's want to possess the other? Stressing the importance of the recurring themes of possession and debt in *Beloved* (for example, the implicit meaning of the adopted name "Stamp Paid"), Trudier Harris offers some interesting points about the possessive nature of human relationships in *Beloved*:

> Ultimately, these monetary images succeed in sending mixed messages about how well the characters in *Beloved* have succeeded in transcending slavery. If black people are indeed free of slavery, then why burden them with evocations of that condition? If they indeed have superior morality (as Stamp Paid implies when he

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[28] Morrison, *Beloved*, 252.

[29] Deborah Horwitz, "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved", Studies in American Fiction*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Autumn, 1989) 161.

observes about white people – “What are these people?” and as Baby Suggs implies when she asserts “There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks”), then why is it so confused?[30]

The reason why Morisson raises these questions regarding the characters’ inner psychological irregularity and instability might be found in Horwitz’s observation that even though Sethe “tries to impress upon [Beloved] how slavery made it impossible for her to be the mother she wanted to be,” Beloved does not forgive her and continues to torture her, because “for Beloved, her mother's protection became the act of possession that led to her own death, which was murder.” [31] In other words, Beloved is angry because Sethe does not understand and acknowledge Beloved’s point of view: that is, that Sethe herself killed her and made her suffer. It is possible to conclude that more than trying to justify the murder by arguing that this is the result of slavery, Morrison treats it as a debt Sethe had to discharge. The controversy of the fact that an individual has to go through it and give over the payment while the destinies of others are spared this necessity cannot be omitted. The presence of Beloved nevertheless points to the obstacles which would be a result of an obvious critical response to the group of oppressors. These are the same obstacles Morrison mentions in *Playing in the Dark*. As Sethe, while opposing the schoolteacher, applies very similar oppressive methods and basically claims the ownership of her children, so does Morrison seem to acknowledge that instituting a new system of values by suppressing the previous one would end in a mirrored image of the criticized. Therefore, Sethe’s “talking back” is only an extension of the oppression and Sethe can be freed only when this possessive bond between the mother and the daughter is unhinged.

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[30] Trudier Harris, „Escaping Slavery but Not Its Images,“ *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present,* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah (New York: Amistad Press 1993) 338-339.

[31] Horwitz, 261.

In this light, the murder is by no means a victory over schoolteacher's repressing supremacy. It is a continuation of the black woman's victimization. It shows how much the slave can have in common with the master if they grow up in the same social conditions. Even among the former slaves, an individual human being can be mistaken for and treated as personal property.

As for *Song of Solomon*, the issue of racial injustice vs. property pervades the whole book. If Sethe's act of murder in *Beloved* was the act of robbing the schoolteacher of the possession of Beloved, certain characters of *Song of Solomon* associate property with dignity. In this book the identification with white values likewise leads nowhere. Macon Dead adheres to a belief that he can hide the colour of his skin behind his money. The only result of this is that although he definitely stays "black" for the white people, he starts to behave in exactly the same way as them, and is caught in a grey, empty space between two worlds, not belonging in either of them. He rejects everything that connects him with the oppressive past, including his own sister who cannot fulfil his idea of a person worthy of love and esteem because she does not try to conform to the "white" definition of good, decent behaviour. What is more, an echo of the sense of property described as in *Beloved* is perceptible also in this character, when Macon first tries to kill his son still in the womb, and later to steal him from his mother Ruth, as if Milkman was his property rather than his blood.

In *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*, Morrison makes it clear that her focus is not placed merely on racial injustice committed on the black population, but rather on the way it affects all parties concerned, each individual in a different way. The diversity of characters and their respective attitude allows Morrison to show how everyone's personal opinions are determined by his or her social position and experience. The reader is therefore offered a wide range of contrasting characters: "humane" slaveholder Garner; spineless whites who put property above anything else, such as the Butlers in the *Song of Solomon* (ironically, Macon Dead – whose father the Butlers killed – later becomes their mirrored picture);

disillusioned people; people who are victims of the popular opinion, regardless of their race or social standing. The intricate nature of the social system is portrayed in the character of Amy Denver, simply because she happens to stand outside of this vicious circle where fear and bias create more fear and bias.

Amy Denver is in many ways a very interesting character: being a white girl reduced by another white person to an almost slave-like social position, she does not hesitate to offer help to a "nigger girl"[32]. It is not a coincidence that the lack of racial prejudice is accompanied by the lack of property (and the sense of power over others that stems from it).

Another character that stands virtually "outside," unaffected by the social/mental trap of power and race, is the character of Pilate from *Song of Solomon*, who willingly chooses relative material destitution over gold and grows into a morally very strong guru of a literary character. She is almost a symbol of freedom that has power to talk, though not necessarily to talk back to anyone, to confirm her personal human dignity. It is her whom I am able to see as a convincing opposition to the schoolteacher from *Beloved*, who likewise appears more a symbol of slavery than a real, deep character: a reified whiteness.

Some other white characters are deeper, more individualized and less brutal than one would expect them to be in a solely defensive piece of work, and they often appear – due to the moral complexity of the issue of slavery – as walking paradoxes: a slaveholder who allows his slaves to be men; an abolitionist who, however, wants to secure his social standing that determines his "manliness," because he cannot stand to be treated the same way as those he first decided to protect. A major factor that disallows them to abandon all racial obstructions is their property.

On the other hand, Morrison creates black characters who are so affected by slavery and its moral standpoints that they, in attempts to defend themselves, often resort to the same

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[32] An expression used by the author herself: Morrison, *Beloved*, 80.
Morrison lets Amy use such language, which in the light of Amy's actual behaviour seems to lose its negative connotations.

condemnations, making the same generalizations, as those whom they criticize. A good example of a black but morally ambiguous entity is Seven Days.

An interesting testimony of the controversial group of black men calling themselves Seven Days is shown in Milkman's disagreement with it both in his days of unconcern, shared with his father, and after a genuine acceptance of his roots. Guitar leads Milkman to a conclusion that "the Sunday-school girls deserved better than to be avenged by that hawk-headed raven-skinned Sunday man who included in his sweep four innocent white girls and one innocent black man."[33] Although the hideousness of crimes committed on innocent African-Americans mentioned in the novel cannot be denied or belittled, the practice chosen by Seven Days would hardly win the readers' sympathy. Guitar's argument that every white person would be capable of lynching under the same circumstances equals an opinion that every black male is a rapist.

This seeming refinement of the portrayal of the whites and at the same time treating some of her black characters as not so noble people is Morrison's great charge. She by no means disavows from criticizing the white oppressors of her race. The importance lies in what exactly is criticized. However distorted some of her black characters may be, the main difference between them and the whites is that while the black soul is damaged by slavery and by the painful and haunting experience it left in African-Americans, the blame still remains on the slaveholders, as the latter were driven mainly by their fear of their own vulnerability, searching for something that would make them feel civilized, superordinate and safe.[34] The character of the schoolteacher can be seen as a downright critique of thoughtless racist tyranny; it is nevertheless also a critique of the incapability of objective reasoning. In his attempt to maintain his position of a white master, the schoolteacher loses the ability to think critically: it is his own animal self-preservation instinct that urges him to

[33] Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 331.
[34] Now I am talking strictly about racism, not about the institution of slavery in its economical context.

try to find and specify the “animal” features of Sethe. To summarize it, what Morrison tries to show by this is that the white attitude, psyche and culture are by no means raceless.

The identification of the two main boundaries – patronizing majority culture and the subjectivity of pain and fear – offers a challenge which is at the same time an opportunity: to provide a stylistic ground for the creation of a black human being whose humanity and moral strength are NOT the result of “white” moral codes, without the need to dehumanize whiteness at the same time. Morrison's treatment of the characters such a Sethe or Macon Dead (eventually Milkman) exhibits her realization that picturing them as morally strong and admirable people is unreal, because the picture of what they could be is still crushed and hushed under the overcoming power of white supremacy. Because Morrison does not want to resign to this realization and leave her characters crushed and broken, she answers the challenge by an attempt to analyze and recreate the beyond and the subconscious; which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3)

The Submerged History: Morrison's Attempt at Re-emergence and the Process of Re-membering in *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*

In her essay named "*Beloved*: A Spiritual," Karla F. C. Holloway states that "Morrison re-envisions a history both spoken and written, felt and submerged."[35] Holloway's statement is of a crucial importance mainly because it recognizes the absence of the evidence of direct experience of American slaves in the official written history, which was one of the main subjects of the previous chapter. The descendants of these slaves often miss strong literary witness not only of suffering, but also of thinking, feeling, folklore and any individual sense of identity, however deformed by the depersonizing institution of slavery.[36] Holloway's comment is therefore a valid identification of one of the sources of the previously discussed danger that often hinders the writers who represent a certain minority from avoiding the already mentioned obstacles.[37] That is, the absence of tangible historical strongpoints, as those which sustain the dominant culture (myths, religious dogmas and established social structures),[38] intercepts the way towards the revision of one's own historical experience, because this experience has been constantly suppressed by the dominant culture. In Holloway's words:

> For Morrison's novel, what complicates the physical and psychological anguish is the reality that slavery itself defies traditional historiography. The victim's own

[35] Karla F. C. Holloway, "*Beloved*: A Spiritual," *Callaloo. Vol. 13. No. 3*. (Summer, 1990) 516.

[36] This is not to say that previous African American literature with this goal is virtually nonexistent. The example of the contrary is *The Narrative* by Frederic Douglass. Nevertheless, as Prof. Procházka writes, even the black writers participated on the hindering of this development. He mentiones particularly Booker T. Washington and his compromising tendencies: to divide the two races on a social basis, but to unite them on the economical one – basically, to "prove" the *equality* of the African Amerians with the majority race by dilligent work. [Martin Procházka, "Abolitionism and African American Literature from Beginnings through the Harlem Renaissance, " *Lectures on American Literature* (Nakladatelství Karolinum: 2007)] This more or less submissive attitude ironically disables what Washington hopes for.

[37] This concerns my previous argument that because the majority culture is accent-free and at the same time superior, which gives it the right to dictate what it correct both morally and literally; it places the writers associated with a minority in the role of either an aggressive defender, or a conformer; or both.

[38] As for example the myth of New Jerusalem, one of the primordial sources of the ideas of the American Dream.

chronicles of these events were systematically submerged, ignored, mistrusted, or superceded by "historians" of the era.[39]

Unlike writers such as Hawthorne,[40] Morrison has no historical and literary annals to draw from, except those written by white people. The original story of Margaret Garner, the real Sethe who was convicted from the act of infanticide in 1855, comes from historical evidence written by whites. Therefore, as Holloway reports, "Morrison refused to do any further research on Margaret Garner beyond her reviewing of the magazine article that recounted the astonishment of the preachers and journalists."[41] In her review of Morrison's *Beloved*, Ann Snitow speaks about Morrison's final lamentations over the people who "died before they had the chance to become the sort of people about whom you could tell real stories."[42] The final epilogue in *Beloved*, with its much discussed sentence "it was not a story to pass on," reveals both the fate of such life stories, and Morrison's ambitions to change it. How can one achieve this, without falling into one of the pitfalls that are put on the writers with this goal?

The nonexistence of a widely accepted literary tradition with a testimony to the pain of having no control over the destiny of one's self or one's own child leaves seemingly nothing but anger and offers hardly any reconciliation with the past for those who are the descendants of these suffering people. This kind of anger is still to be traced in Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye.* In this work, Morrison offers both the acceptance of the majority culture, which is – mainly in case of Pecola – mentally devastating, and the anger and rebellion represented by the main narrator, Claudia. Claudia tries to warrant her confidence by an open hatred directed towards the symbols of the white notion of beauty. The hatred

[39] Holloway, 516.
[40] Apart from the fact that Hawthorne was mentioned in relation to Morrison in the previous chapter, I choose him as an example here also because of his critical treatment of the Puritan tradition.
[41] Holloway, 516.
[42] Ann Snitow, "Beloved," The Village Voice Literary Supplement, Sep. 1987, *Conjuring Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, ed. Marjorie Pryze at al. (Indiana University Press. 1985) 31.

grows so strong that Claudia feels a desire to hurt real girls who are lucky to live up to the notion. However, when Keith E. Byerman talks about Claudia's anger, he sums it up by stating that "the state of rebellion cannot be sustained because it requires perpetual opposition and negation without hope of victory."[43] Morrison was obviously already aware of this kind of psychological blind alley when writing her first novel, because she apprehensively introduces the story with a declaration that it can offer only the response to the supposed question "how," because the question "why" is much more difficult to answer.[44] The statement discloses certain ruptures in the author's self-confidence as a creator of a decisive narration. Morrison's essays in *Playing in the Dark* show the effort to overcome the struggle of finding the answer to the question "why." The choking dominance of the white culture leaves no space for Pecola to appreciate herself as a valuable human being, because the picture of Shirley Temple is a seemingly accent-free symbol of beauty and perhaps goodness. The element which is missing is any evidence which would give Pecola a clue that her own features are something more than mere invaluable deviations from this white symbolism; nevertheless, when it comes to identifying this problem, Morrison keeps silence. According to Valerie Smith:

> The book does not undertake to explain [...] why black Americans aspire to an unattainable standard of beauty; why they displace their self-hatred onto a scapegoat; how Pecola's fate might have been averted.[45]

It is not so with *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon,* where the author already tries to identify the reason for the silence and oblivion regarding one's historical and social consciousness and self-knowledge. While Morrison deliberately labels the story of Beloved

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[43] Keith E. Byerman, "Beyond Realism," *Conjuring Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, ed. Marjorie Pryze at al. (Indiana University Press. 1985)106.
[44] Toni Morrison, *Nejmodřejší oči* (Odeon: 1983)7.
[45] Smith, 274.

as „not a story to pass on,[46] and thus identifies one of the main problems of Beloved's history, the crucial evidence of Milkman's identity (*Song of Solomon*) exists only in the form of an oral tradition, which is nevertheless inaccessible to those who left their original background.[47] Since the internal, humanizing experience of Africans has been suppressed by the official history and philosophy, it asks for a different treatment of the question "how," and so Morrison tries to revive it by something that reaches beyond the rational realism of a white self-made man, which can bring back the dead witnesses of their own humanity: magical realism.

A significant difference between *The Bluest Eye* and the two novels is the absence of supernatural elements in the story about Pecola. In *The Bluest Eye* the narration is split among several first person narrators and a seemingly omniscient one, who nevertheless omits those parts of information which are hidden to the knowledge of any of the characters. When the narrator for example speaks about Cholly's encounter with his father, the only information which the reader gets is consistent with Cholly's own memories and impressions. Such evidence is tainted by a certain mental bias and offers no space for objective reconciliation. If *Song of Solomon* were all written in the same manner (i.e. the only source of subjective information being the mind and memory of the living characters), it would be a completely different story with no end, and Milkman would remain an arrogant middle-class dandy, just as Pecola never learned to appreciate herself the way she is. In the same way, the story of *Beloved* without the ghost of Beloved would probably not be able to sustain its existence against critical comments as that of Stanley Crouch, according to whom *Beloved* "seems to have been written in order to enter American slavery into a big time martyr rating contest."[48] The emergence of Beloved and the subsequent development of the

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[46] Here in the meaning of the story not to be preserved. The other possible interpretation of the clause will be discussed below.

[47] In this case it is Jake after leaving his home country and becoming Macon Dead. After his death, his children are already deprived of this knowledge.

[48] Stanley Crouch, "Aunt Medea: *Beloved* by Toni Morrison", qtd. in Holloway, 517, *The New Republic*

story nevertheless indicate a rather different purpose and so contradict Crouch. Holloway uses this critical comment to argue that such comments "miss the point entirely" because rather than being an elementary critique of slavery, *Beloved* is "not a story to pass on"[49] and therefore it deals mainly with submergence and revival of stories like this one. The introduction of a ghost in both *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* creates a possibility to fill the gap that emerged because people like Margaret Garner, not to mention the child she murdered, never had a chance to speak. When Holloway comments on the presence of the materialized ghost of Beloved, she says:

> (…) the "ghostly"/"historical" presence that intrudes itself into (*Beloved)* serves to belie the reportage that passes for historical records of this era as well as to reconstruct those lives into the spiritual ways that constituted the dimensions of their living.[50]

It needs to be added that an insertion of the spiritual and the supernatural creates a real challenge for the writer who at the same time needs to create a credible story: how to connect the "ghostly" presence with a realistic, in many cases physical, pain. Apart from the forgotten histories of her characters, Morrison cannot omit the everyday struggles which are in a great part the result of the forgotten; nor can she afford to give them a coat of supernatural irrationality, because the alleged irrationality of American blacks is one of the arguments having been used by the supporters and creators of the dominant culture in order to sustain their own "rational" right to control the oppressed. Things like Guitar's distressful childhood or the emotionally dead household of the Deads (*Song of Solomon*), or Halle's insanity in *Beloved* do not allow for metaphysics in their description, because they are all

(October 19, 1986).

[49] Holloway, 517.

[50] Holloway, 517.

very real and need to be portrayed as such in order to convince the reader that the pain is real and so is the humanity of those who suffer. According to Keith E. Byerman, "the rational telling of extreme events (in Morrison's work) forces a radical reconstruction of commonly held assumption about black life and black-white relationships."[51] However, Morrison does not always fully meet the challenge. The character of Circe in *Song of Solomon* can serve as a good example: while her presence is crucial for Milkman to learn more about his family, she is simply too old to live at the time when Milkman arrives. This gives the story a tint of a fairytale which can reduce in the eyes of some readers the importance of such more serious elements of the story as, for example, the psychological portrait of the character of Ruth Dead. How, then, to connect the pains and realities which can and must be said without the use of metaphysics (because the characters are alive and present at the moment of telling the story), and the forgotten pains to which the living characters already lost the access?

The narrative technique which allows Morrison to cohere the supernatural and the realistic principles is already perceptible in *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison makes great use of the narrative technique developed by Faulkner, which is characterized by a very markable difference between fabula and sujet, and by the application of the stream of consciousness. The story frequently changes narrators, first starting with the character of Claudia, introducing the point of view of someone who observes Pecola's life from a certain distance: the reader is at first acquainted with Pecola 'role' as a scapegoat. As the story proceeds, it develops in two different phase streams; one leading directly to the rape of Pecola and her finally going insane; and the other one showing retrospective pieces of history, with other characters frequently used as alternative narrators (for example Pecola's mother) presenting pieces of memories and recollections in a form of an inner monologue.

In the same way, rather than being an integral narrative, Morrison's *Beloved* is a series of split, fragmentary episodes which in the end together reveal the big picture.

[51] Byerman, 100.

Morrison often conceals herself as an omnipresent creator; instead, she assumes the role of a mediator[52] and presents the story through inner monologues that swirl inside the minds of individual characters. This results in a multiplicity of viewpoints, each of them encompassing only a fragment of reality. This way, Morrison in *Beloved* achieves the same results one would get from hearing the characters talking directly about their own experience: pieces of emotionally tinted memories which would never become a part of the official history, but which would only be passed on to others orally. This significantly enhances the role of the reader who is thus pulled into the story as one of the participators. In *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*, Morrison further develops this technique in order to connect the supernatural with those parts of the story that demand the realistic treatment; she makes use of the internal quality of the "oral text" so as to incorporate the ghostly elements and to give voice to dead people. These inner monologues allow for the seepage from the unconscious, and the irrational nature of human unconsciousness consequently legitimizes the use of the supernatural. In this way Morrison tries to break the barrier of ignorance which hinders the characters' chances to get to know the sources of their struggle in the case of *Beloved*, or to identify their real roots in the case of *Song of Solomon.* The reader, having been already invited to "come on in"[53] the story, is also allowed to be a direct participant in this process of remembering. While in the case of the character of Circe in *Song of Solomon*, where the story moves away from the reader due to its improbability, this mediating oral quality keeps the reader sufficiently inside the story.

In her essay called "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*," Valerie Smith points to the difficulties regarding the relationship between experience and representation. While she argues that representation is inescapable, referring to the structuralist and post-structuralist theories which perceive representation as the only access

[52] Holoway, 518.
[53] Holloway, 518.

to experience, she also acknowledges that this inevitably leads to the denial of real suffering bodies.[54] This undoubtedly makes any attempt to make this suffering as authentic as possible for the reader rather difficult.

Morrison seems very much aware of this fact when she states at the end of the novel that this "was not a story to pass on."[55] This statement is to a great part a reference to her opinion that the American literary tradition *deliberately* marginalized the presence of African Americans in the "official" literary and therefore also general history.[56] Nevertheless, the sentence also seems to encompass the problems which concern conveying the sense of suffering to the reader.

This attempt to create a difference between the story which could not be passed on to new generations, and the story to which Morrison does not want to be oblivious any longer, is one of the implications left to be deduced from the epilogue. The inability to authentically reconnect with one's painful memories forms a substantial part of the whole message. Even those who knew Beloved, spoke to her, lived with her or loved her are no longer able to "remember or repeat the single word she said," suddenly feeling as though "she hadn't said anything at all."[57] The reason for this is the impossibility of a tangible contact with anything that would signify Beloved's previous existence. Not only is her trace forgotten; the water which could possibility evoke the memory of her is gone as well. Once Beloved herself is gone, so are all sensory traces of her. Morrison's final ambiguous description of the story as "not a story to pass on" illustrates the paradox of reviving a story of forgotten and muted characters by giving them a new voice in the literary space. As Horwitz argues, "although

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[54] Valerie Smith, "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*," *Conjuring Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*. ed. Marjorie Pryze et. al.. (Indiana University Press. 1985) 343.
[55] Morrison, *Beloved*, 274.
[56] Toni Morrison, "Black Matters"
[57] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume, 1998) 274.

Toni Morrison states that 'it was not a story to pass on,' she herself has put words to Beloved's tale."[58]

According to Smith, there are at least two places where the novel "marks the gap between representation and the actual suffering,"[59] using as an example the beginning of the novel, where Sethe is not able to reconnect with bits of suppressed memories, while the narrator *is* able to name them. Smith also states that not even *Beloved* is able to deal with these problems, because in spite of its evocativeness, the story is still only a verbal representation of human suffering.[60]

Even though Smith stresses the fact that the characters memorize bits of their own experience through sensory impulses, she does not recognize it as Morrison's attempt not only to mark the gap, but also to cross it. Nevertheless, this realization of the gap is the very reason for Morrison to invoke Beloved back into the story, as she is able to do what the narrator cannot do satisfactorily enough: to become an 'accelerator' that would force Sethe to remember her pain again. The sensory impulses which bring back painful and often muted memories are recognized by Smith largely as an attempt to consider "the place of black bodies in the construction of narratives of slavery:"[61]

> Just as the characters seek out ways of telling the experience of their suffering, so too is the novel involved in the project of reclaiming or recovering those bodies in narrative for posterity.[62]

This is certainly true, but in order for the novel to be able to live up to this role, it calls for an explanation regarding why the story fell into oblivion for such a long time. One

58 Horwitz, 167.
59 Smith, "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*," 349.
60 Smith, "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*," 349.
61 Smith, "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*," 346.
62 Smith, "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*," 349.

thing which Smith overlooks in this part of her argument is that the characters are not always "telling" their experience, meaning that the narrator(s) is (are) presenting the story from a narrative distance. As Snitow puts it, "bits and pieces of them leak out between the closed eyelids of her characters, or between their clenched fingers,"[63] meaning they are presented to the reader seemingly at the very moment they are (re)experienced. An excellent example would be the part when Sethe remembers hearing about her being the only child whom her mother did not kill. Here, the situation is already slightly different from the part which Smith identifies as marking of the gap between experience and the representation of it. It is true that the narrator still assumes the role of a mediator between Sethe's inner train of thoughts and the reader. Nevertheless, the narrator no longer supplements the story with what Sethe cannot recollect herself, but only with those bits and pieces she actually does recollect. This change is possible due to the previously mentioned 'accelerator.' The shift is made from the narrator naming what is not in Sethe's mind to naming what is, which is only presented to the reader in small doses that Sethe herself is able to remember and absorb at a particular moment.

Morrison supports this attempt by three inner monologues, each of them formulated in a way that corresponds to each woman's inner processing. The appearance of these monologues in the narrative is again possible only thanks to the supernatural yet palpable presence of Beloved. Here the narrator disappears completely. What is left are thoughts seemingly reproduced in first person narrative, as opposed to the rest of the novel. However, these words are not directed to the reader; instead, the reader is put into the position of an almost telepathic intruder. The reader is even forewarned by the narrator that the following inner monologues are comprised of "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken."[64]

[63] Snitow, 27.
[64] Morrison, *Beloved*, 199.

The quality of this part of the text is best seen in Beloved's monologue, which is free of any punctuation. Instead, oral pauses are marked by mere interspaces between individual lexical units, giving it a quality of inner, eventually oral speech. Looking to Sethe's or Denver's part, the 'oral' quality of the text is likewise marked. Various themes and ideas dissolve fluently and randomly into one another, as can be seen in the following extract:

> Because you mine and I have to show you these things, and teach you what a mother should. Funny how you lose sight of some things and memory others. I never forget that whitegirl's hands. Amy. But I forget the color of all that hair on her head. Eyes must have been gray, though. Seem like I do rememory that. Mrs. Garner' was light brown – while she was well. Got dark when she got sick.[65]

The punctuation is here this time, yet the text does not have the 'written' character of something which was retold. Rather, it creates a sense of something which, even when said aloud, would be delivered to the listener the very moment it is thought. Simple, even one word sentences, or new clauses starting with junctions, disclaim the notion of deliberate and edited recollection, and create a convincing illusion of authenticity. Moreover, the spoken or even conceptional character of the three monologues is further sustained by the unimpeded dialogue among the three characters.

These three chapters are the most radical employments of Morrison's narrative construction. The novel encompassed tens of years, starting chronologically on a slave ship, carrying Sethe's mother from her homeland to America. However, it is not fully mentioned until the last third of the book, where the reader can decode the internal impressions from the ship through Beloved's incoherent inner monologue. Here, the reader can also learn that Beloved actually represents more than just Sethe's dead daughter; perhaps even "sixty

[65] Morrison, *Beloved*, 201.

million and more"[66] similar fates. The story as a whole consists of shreds of information, presented randomly according to the individual characters' ability to recollect them. This way the whole reading process resembles a large puzzle, where different parts of the picture are revealed sporadically. What is important is that neither of the characters who participate in this process is familiar with the whole of the story, and the narrator seems to have no interest in making it any easier for the reader to follow the characters' struggle. As the sujet is formed largely by remembering, the story is virtually shattered to pieces that are scattered around, leaving numerous gaps; and it is up to the reader to fill them.[67]

The actual plot starts in 1877, when Beloved is already eighteen years dead. The first picture which the reader is offered is a "spiteful" house where its inhabitants spend their days in oblivion. This dichotomy between wrath and the impossibility to fully reconnect all its causes is described by Morrison as an "environment completely foreign," into which the "reader is snatched, yanked, thrown," and Morrison wants it "as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense."[68]

This is where the text applies its power to evoke corporeal sensations even on the side of the reader. Possible feelings of frustration, or disorientation, are only enhanced by the internal character of various characters' recollections, because it allows the reader to experience how it would feel to be under the skin of the characters about whom he or she would otherwise only read. The feelings caused by the frequent absence of direction from the lurking narrator can be therefore compared for example to the actual visitors of Auschwitz, who could, even for mere five minutes, feel the choking panic seeping through

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[66] Morrison, *Beloved*

[67] Marilyn Sanders Mobley, "A Different Remembering: Memory, History, and Meaning in *Beloved*." *Conjuring Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*. ed. Marjorie Pryze et. al.. (Indiana University Press. 1985) 359.

[68] Smith, "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*," 349.

the cell walls in Birkenau. Such experience of course still cannot compare to the despair of those who knew they would never get out; however, the sensory reactions still cannot be easily substituted by a depersonalized compassion of those who only heard about the place.

Another thing the narrator seems to do by naming what the character of Sethe cannot – by enumerating what is not in her mind, even though after that one would think that it should be there – is showing how difficult it is for her to recollect painful memories without any external help. The novel is then largely about giving her the impulses that would invoke her memories. The process is started already by the arrival of Paul D: his contact with Sethe, which has largely a sensorial character, forces both to recollect things they could not access independently. Memory is, according to Marilyn Sanders Mobley, used by Morrison as:

> a metaphorical sign of the interior life to explore and represent dimensions of slave life that the classic slave narrative omitted. By doing so, she seeks to make slavery accessible to readers for whom slavery is not a memory, but a remote historical fact to be ignored, represented or forgotten.[69]

The effect of all this is that the reader is "shown" the state of things, as no one is speaking directly to the reader. Even in the previously mentioned semi-internal monologues, Sethe, Denver and Beloved are not telling anything. The only way the reader is allowed to witness these inner speeches is by his or her becoming an unnamed companion of the three women, or possibly alternately each of the three. Their actual "telling" of the story would undoubtedly result in what Mobley describes as "all-inclusive eye-witness accounts of the material conditions of slavery."[70] Instead, she stresses the oral quality of the text, which

[69] Mobley, 357-8.
[70] Mobley, 359.

stems from the characters' actual living through the process of memorizing right in front of our eyes, resulting in their direct communicating between each other. As Mobley puts it:

> each of their fragments amplifies or modifies Sethe's narrative for the reader. In that the fragments constitute voices which speak to and comment on one another, the text illustrates the call and response pattern of the African- American oral tradition.[71]

The fragmentary quality of *Beloved* acts against the reader's potential ability to imagine the whole picture until the very end of the story; and even then the puzzle is still full of holes. Halle never arrived to tell what hindered him, Howard and Buglar are likewise not there to present their own testimony; the list could continue. The story misses a historian in a form of a narrator who would help to fill enough gaps to make the holes sufferable. However, *Beloved* was clearly not a story to be edited; not before those who really lived through it could pass it on. Because at the physical time of the actual plot, the core witness is already dead, the inclusion of the ghost in the story compensates for a historian to fill enough gaps while preserving this call and response pattern mentioned by Mobley that allows Morrison to reconstruct the story through partly posthumous memories of the people whom it concerns. Beloved can fill the crucial gap in the understanding of mother-daughter relationships of slave women because, as Deborah Horwitz says: "Beloved stands for every African woman whose story will never be told. She is the haunting symbol of the many Beloveds generations of mothers and daughters hunted down and stolen from Africa; as such, she is, unlike mortals, invulnerable to barriers of time, space, and place."[72] Her standing outside the reality and at the same time being in connection with it helps the mortals

[71] Mobley, 359.
[72] Horwitz, 157.

around her to see beyond the known and accessible reality. This segment in the process of remembering could not be omitted, because without it the story would remain dead.

The word "dead" plays an important role in *Song of Solomon*. As a narrative, *Song of Solomon* appears as less complex than *Beloved* in that does not have such departures from common narrative techniques as *Beloved* does. Morrison does not work with inner monologues based on the train of thoughts here; nevertheless, many parts of the book already contain the oral element without which the individual parts of the story could not be connected together, and the connector who helps to fill the gaps again assumes the supernatural character. The story's main objective is to transcend death as well as the oblivion it brings.

The story is predominantly narrated in the third person. However, the nature of the presented information cannot be always identified as omniscience, because the narrator willingly informs the reader of all the important details from individual characters' life histories, but only in case the characters themselves are able to recollect them; and only at the time they recollect them. Thereby the story again splits in numerous first person meditations and recollections. In such occurences the story often moves from factual descriptions to internal processes. Passages such as Porter's drunken exhibition at the beginning of the book contrast with the parts depicting for example Ruth Dead's internal struggle. Nevertheless, as long as this method of narration is applied, we are encountered with the members of the Dead family who are virtually dying, or at least stagnating, inside. Macon Dead's obsession with accumulating property and trying to get access to the world of "white" success entombs the whole family in an emotional vacuum; their big house becomes almost a crypt that keeps the family encased between two worlds. In these conditions, the central character nicknamed Milkman grows into a self-centered being who is convinced that only money will buy him independence and freedom, which is also the initial reason why he

undergoes the journey in the pursuance of gold. Here, Morrison has to incorporate something which will give his journey a completely different destination: to step beyond reality.

Apart from the not so convincing, rather external, presence of impossibly old Circe, other supernatural enhancements in the story are closely linked to the main oral element of the narrative, represented by the folkloric song of the man named Solomon, or Shalimar. The first reference to the song can be found at the beginning of the novel. However, the name of the main protagonist is distorted into an evocative title "Sugarman." The song is recollected by the character named Pilate at a moment when a man called Mr. Smith decides to commit suicide by "flying off" the roof of the Mercy hospital on his own wings, as he describes it in his farewell letter. It is an earlier example of the call and response pattern in Morrison's work. This act of suicide provokes Pilate to remember and sing the above mentioned tune on the occasion, as the song also refers to flying:

> O Sugarman done fly away
>
> Sugarman done gone
>
> Sugarman cut across the sky
>
> Sugraman gone home . . . .[73]

In this passage, Morrison works with the same process of gradual re-membering as she does later in *Beloved*. Here also, most of the information is hidden and what is shown is revealed only due to accelerators that support the instant memory. Neither the reader nor Pilate know the real importance of the song – it contains a relation of an event that stands at the beginning of the whole history of the Dead family. It remains unrevealed until the end of the book, after having gone through a gradual process of re-membering. What is important in this process is again the fact that the living characters are unable to re-member this story

[73] Morrison, *Song of Solomon,* 6.

without a supernatural influence. Here, the “dead” element that can supply the story with missing pieces is largely the ghostly character of Macon Dead sr., previously called Jake. The apparition of his ghost helps to fill two missing gaps; he repeatedly manifests himself to tell Pilate the name of her and Macon's mother, as well as to inform her where his own physical remains are to be found. It is interesting that even though Milkman is the one who is to learn about his roots, the character whom Morrison supplies with the ghostly indicia is Pilate.

As a character, Pilate is strong when it comes to not being affected by external pressures. When I mentioned this character briefly in the previous chapter, I was talking about her being a symbol: standing outside the vortex of power, property and social bias, she is a counterpart to characters formed in the opposite way, such as the schoolteacher in *Beloved*. In other words, she is a symbol of everything which is inaccessible to Pecola. This symbolism is further strengthened by the absence of a navel on Pilate's belly as a mark of complete disconnection with her mother in the literal understanding of the text, and with her past in a possible broader sense. This nevertheless creates a complication, because while being a symbol of an African American humanity unaffected by the cultural consequences of slavery, she must be logically incapable of re-membering, and in fact she is. This at least supplements the popular argument that Morrison created Pilate in order to keep the main authority in the hands of women, which is described by Nellie McKay: “Milkman Dead lives in a world in which women are the main sources of the knowledge he must gain, and Pilate Dead, his aunt, a larger than life character, is his guide to his understanding.”[74] Pilate is definitely a larger than life character, but the fact that her presented wisdom, knowledge and understanding are not limitless – the fact that they are quite limited in comparison to Milkman's final reasoning – must not be omitted. The puzzle waits for Milkman to be tagged

[74] Nellie McKay, “An Interview with Toni Morrison,” *Contemporary Literature, Vol. 24, No. 4* (Winter, 1983) 414.

together, because Pilate is unable to unriddle all the indicia to which she had access from the very beginning. She even undergoes the same journey years before Milkman, driven by her father's ghost's lamentations that she “just can't fly on off and leave the body,”[75] which she however understands as being a reference to the man whom Macon seemingly killed in the cave. This kind of perpetual ignorance in the case of a character who was otherwise written to be sage, together with her standing somehow outside the social mechanisms, makes me think of Pilate as of yet another semi-supernatural character. Born without a navel, from the womb of an already dead mother, Pilate is in fact regarded as someone or something unearthly throughout her whole life.

Pilate is important for the process of re-membering, but she leaves Milkman to be the one on its receiving end, as she fails in treating and decoding the message presented by the accelerator in the form of her father’s ghost. Nevertheless, after my previous conclusions, I cannot see it as a real failure, but rather a technical shift by which Morrison transferred the role of an accelerator from the ghost onto the fleshly Pilate. It is understandable, considering Milkman's initial insularity, which prevented him from having sufficient sensibility to undergo the mental journey on his own. Pilate’s immense authority lies in her ability to transcend the material world and to provide a connection with what is lost. This kind of relationship between Pilate and Milkman becomes apparent when Milkman connects a song he hears in Shalimar with the tune he used to hear from Pilate:

Jay the only son of Solomon

Come booba yalle, come...

[75] Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

> Everybody in this town is named Solomon, he thought wearily. Solomon's General Store, Luther Solomon (no relation), Solomon's Leap, and now the children were singing "*Solomon* don't leave me" instead of "*Sugarman*."[...][76]

This passage is the breakpoint in Milkman's interests and his psychological perception of the world. From now on, the story – through Milkman's search – begins to unveil all hints that lay scattered without any further commentary from an omniscient narrator, so that neither the characters or the reader are able to fully understand them before reaching this point together with – or even through – Milkman. The result is so strong that when Morrison writes "Milkman's scalp began to tingle,"[77] the reader can feel and share this tingling sensation together with the character. The transformation of the submerged into the almost physical re-membered state appears as accomplished. The question what the accomplishment of the process of remembering means for individual characters, and to what effects Morrison attempts to dispose of it, will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[76] Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 302.
[77] Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 302.

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The Future: Effects of Re-membering in *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*

In one of the retrospective chapters of *The Bluest Eye,* Morrison sends out the teenage character of Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's parent, to search for his yet unrecognized father. He finally finds him in a place called Macon, only to learn that the man really has no intention in knowing his own son and thus severs the last remaining string that could have held Cholly to his own personal, vital past. "His search for the man he believes to be his father ends at a dark alley dice game when the man chases him away, believing he has come only for the money,"[78] Byerman writes in his essay "Beyond Realism".

Why do I mention this? Interestingly enough, Morrison uses the same place name (i.e. Macon) for the creation of the artificial patronymic identity of her main characters in *Song of Solomon*. When the teenage Milkman wants his father Macon to acknowledge him as an independent human being, the latter tells him a story about how his own father, Milkman's granddad, got the name that is since then being inherited from father to son:

> He asked Papa where he was born. Papa said Macon. Then he asked him who his father was. Papa said, 'He's dead.' Asked him who owned him, Papa said, 'I'm free.' Well the Yankee wrote it all down, but in the wrong places. Had him born in Dunfree […], and in the space for his name the fool wrote, 'Dead' comma 'Macon.'[79]

The parallel between the two stories lies in the fact that both Cholly and Macon Dead (Pecola and Milkman) lose the contact with their progenitors – and in a broader sense with their collective identity – and this loss is in some way connected with the place called Macon. This similarity intrigues me not because the actual physical place might be in any

[78] Byerman, 102.
[79] Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 53.

way important for either story; geography is not important. Cholly's old identity which could have saved him from his and his daughter's personal tragedy metaphorically dies in Macon. The same thing happens to Jake, the son of Solomon, when he is accidentally robbed of his old name and adopts a new one: Macon Dead. Of course, he himself does not lose the past, but it is his premature death that prevents him from passing it to his son and daughter, together with a hope for decent future and sincere home. The idea of Macon as a symbolical place where the figure of a father is lost somehow connects the two stories. From this point on, the future of the characters from both *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* is characterized by their lack of natural confidence in the world ruled by 'white' standards. Cholly – and his whole family – loses it entirely, while Macon creates a new one based on the social prerequisites of the white world. However, while Cholly's father is lost forever, Jake/Macon Dead sr. reappears again to help his children recreate the path leading to the almost lost past.

In the previous chapter, I already discussed Morrison's narrative techniques and the difference between *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* (and eventually *Beloved*) due to the application of magical realism in the latter. I mentioned Morrison's focusing on the question of **how** Pecola got mad, and how the narrator admits having the difficulties with answering a question **why** the character was destined such a future. When comparing these two novels, Byerman seems to successfully answer the latter question when he says that "while *The Bluest Eye* shows us the victimization that comes in a black community without a sustaining folklore […], *Song of Solomon* reveals the power that can be achieved through the embrace of a folk history."[80] More specifically, the answer is the sustaining folklore. Nevertheless, the absence of the sustainable background is not so evident in *The Bluest Eye*, until is it confronted with *Song of Solomon*. The characters of *The Bluest Eye* are ignorant of the

[80] Byerman 118.

absence, they filter their frustration from failing to live and to get to know themselves in a form of creating a scapegoat, which becomes a means of forgetting one's own downfalls.[81]

After his first, and at the same time the last, encounter with his father, Cholly is left a stranger with no supporting kindred. This absence of "my people" finally destroys Pecola as there is no soothing power that would protect her from a society whose dominant standards automatically exclude her from the "worthy." On the contrary, her own people single her out as someone even weaker than them, her weakness being the source from which they seek their own worth. The absence or lack of a strong familiar and cultural background leads them to cling to the only thing which they seem to know as rendering personal worthiness – material wealth and possession of things.

The same absence, together with a certain sense of white supremacy, leads Macon Dead to build his complete existence around money. Nevertheless, Milkman, who narrowly avoids ending up with zero sense of having any emotional responsibility towards other people, is in the end offered a precious source of exhilarating mental power. The process of re-membering, which is effected in *Song of Solomon* largely due to the presence of the supernatural or semi-supernatural characters, allows for a regressive remedy. Travelling back to the place where he comes from, Milkman also discovers the myth of flying slaves that stands at the beginning of his family's history. According to Timothy B. Powell, Morrison borrowed this theme from an existing tradition of Igbo slaves who "rose up in rebellion against the white agents"[82] in Georgia in 1803. This historical event is also an interesting testimony of the split between "white" and "black" interpretation of history. While in the written accounts, the incident is treated primarily as "the loss of a substantial financial investment"[83] with a note that the slaves commited suicide, in the African-American oral tradition the story is transformed into a "Myth of the Flying Africans," who "got together

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[81] Morrison, *Nejmodřejší oči*, 64.
[82] Timothy B. Powell, "Ebos Landing", The New Georgia Encyclopedia, 15 June 2004, 22 May 2011 <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.com/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2895>
[83] Powell

and stuck that hoe in the field and then . . . rose up in the sky and turned themselves into buzzards and flew right back to Africa. . . . Everybody knows about them".[84] Through Milkman's point of view, Solomon's act of suicide also suddenly obtains a new metaphorical sense that can be seen as a course of personal emancipation. Milkman's own metaphorical flight at the end of the book can be seen as an act of freeing himself from the limits imposed on him by the white-male dominated society without having to embrace the solution presented by Seven Days which he rejects.

In *Beloved*, Morrison tries to explore the narrative potential of magical realism in the development of the story still further. *Beloved* is a bold step outside the author's own primary historical experience, as both Pecola and Milkman are virtually Morrison's contemporaries. There are no kindred or folk history in *Beloved* to be metaphorically or even literally embraced and used as a supporting power for twentieth century African-Americans to determine or (re)create their role in the living society. The reader is shown the state of the African-American soul at the historical edge between slavery and dubious freedom. If we tried to find Sethe's counterpart in *Song of Solomon*, it would likely to be Ryna – a "dead" character for whom there is no hope and future. Nevertheless, characters such as Ryna have almost no space in the *Song of Solomon*. They are reduced to remote ancestors who serve as a solid ground for an overall positive sense of belonging at which Milkman finally arrives. Their true life stories are blurred in a myth. Milkman's newly obtained lightness is not destroyed even by the realization of his misbehaviour towards Hagar, seeing the parallel in Solomon's actions:

> He had hurt her, left her, and now she was dead—he was certain of it. He had left her. While he dreamt of flying, Hagar was dying. Sweet's silvery voice came back to him: 'Who'd he left behind?' He left Ryna behind and twenty children. Twenty-one, since

[84] A testimony of Wallace Quarterman, qtd. in Powell

> he dropped the one he tried to take with him. And Ryna had thrown herself all over the ground, lost her mind, and was still crying in a ditch. Why looked after the twenty children! Jesus Christ, he left twenty-one children![85]

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison uses these distant characters to help Milkman change his view of the world and of his life, but as to the direct revival of their own feelings and sufferings, they are not allowed a place to speak for themselves. Their own experience is a conveyed one.

In *Beloved*, the supernatural process of re-membering also serves for the recreation of the submerged, but on a more psychological and somber level, because the novel deals with the fates of distant predecessors instead of their perplexed progeny, as it is in *Song of Solomon* and *The Bluest Eye*. While Milkman finds and reveals folklore, Sethe reveals her painful submerged memories. In the previous chapter I already discussed the role of Beloved in the story as being that of a catalyst. Morrison often makes sure the reader will understand that Beloved does not stand only for the dead daughter, but encompasses much more. Apart from passages such as Beloved's inner monologue, where she takes the reader on a slave ship and so obviously takes on a role of a different woman in a different period of time. Moreover, even in a dialogue with Sethe, Beloved sometimes uses a language that, as Horwitz argues, belongs to "the woman from the sea."[86] This might be Sethe's own mother or even other women with a similar fate. As Horwitz says, "Death and the Middle Passage evoke the same language. They are the same existence; both were experienced by the multiple-identified Beloved."[87]

Apart from this, the story is supplemented with other, plainer references to the character's multiplicity. Denver, for example, often notices how Beloved frequently imitates

[85] Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 332.
[86] Horwitz, 162.
[87] Horwitz. 162.

Sethe to such an extent that "it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who."[88] In a conversation with Paul D, in a response to whether she really thinks Beloved was a ghost of her sister, she also answers: "At times. At times I think she was – more."[89] According to Horwitz, "in this novel grief is not only for one deceased woman but for the empty space that she leaves inside all her daughters."[90]

The catalystic nature of Beloved forces Sethe to recollect lost memories such as those about Sethe's mother,[91] and in this sense her main purpose seems to be to torture Sethe to death. An important aspect of this torture is that Sethe herself pursues it:

> [Denver] had begun to notice that even when Beloved was quiet, dreamy, minding her own business, Sethe got her going again. Whispering, muttering some justification, some bit of clarifying information to Beloved to explain what it had been like, and why, and how come. It was as though Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out.[92]

This shows that one of the roles of Beloved in the novel may be that of Sethe's own conscience. In the second chapter, I have already briefly mentioned the possible purpose of Sethe's being tortured by Beloved both physically and mentally: the painful confrontation with a murdered daughter being the only way to reform Sethe's mentality tainted by the dehumanizing experience of slavery.

Apart from forcing Sethe to face her soul and self distorted by slavery, the character of Beloved has a direct impact on yet another character. Both Sethe and Beloved are the daughters of slavery represented in the novel by the physical place of Sweet Home, and their

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[88] Morrison, *Beloved*, 241.
[89] Morrison, *Beloved*, 266.
[90] Horwitz, 163.
[91] Horwith, 157-8.
[92] Morrison, *Beloved*, 252.

relationship is in a certain sense concluded. Beloved representing also Sethe's mother, these three characters/entities create a closed circle of women directly affected by slavery which is virtually inescapable and thus seemingly offers no future. Denver, on the other hand, represents already a "free" African-American daughter who carries this burden hereafter for further generations. Sethe has to be tortured by Beloved also in order to force Denver to step out of her personal bubble, because Denver – at the same time ignorant of her mother's pain and experience, and being confined to its effects – is caught in a mental land of nowhere, feeling that the world of the former slaves, including her own mother, leaves her out, feeling

> that her own father's absence was not hers. Once the absence had belonged to Grandma Baby – a son, deeply mourned because he was the one who had bought her out of there. Then it was her mother's absent husband [...] Only those who knew him ("knew him well") could claim his absence for themselves.[93]

This passage shows an interesting testimony of how Denver confuses human bonds and relations with possessing[94] – a mental obstacle which so fatally affects Sethe's behaviour. However, Denver is at the same time completely ignorant of the experience that affected the mentality of the former slaves in *Beloved* in such a way. In this manner, it seems Morrison assigns for her the role of the first generation of those disconnected with their mute mothers and fathers, not being able to identify the source of the negative power that nevertheless still haunts them.

The presence of a fleshly Beloved nevertheless opens Denver's eyes. At the beginning, the reader is confronted with Sethe and Denver merely *existing* inside the house number 124, having in common only the fact that they are both victims of the spite of a

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[93] Morrison, *Beloved*, 13.

[94] One mental feature which can be ascribed to various characters in *Beloved*, is confusing human relationships with property. I talk about this more deeply in the Chapter 2.

harmless ghost, though each one in a different way. The difference becomes evident when the ghost turns into flesh and so gains the ability to be harmful, because only when Denver sees the destructive effects of the slave mother-daughter relationship in front of her, she is able to take steps towards becoming independent. While Sethe placidly endures Beloved's whims and accusations, Denver's relationship towards Beloved changes gradually from her possessive sympathies towards her sister, as expressed in Denver's inner monologue, to the completely unselfish attempt to save them all and to finally protect Sethe and also her own self from the devastating power of Beloved:

> Little by little it dawned on Denver that if Sethe didn't wake up one morning and pick up a knife, Beloved might. […] The job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved. Now it was obvious that her mother could die and leave them both and what would Beloved do then? […] Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help.[95]

After this psychological step forward, Morrison lets Denver be the hero of the end of the novel. By reforming Denver, Morrison finally does more than just reopen badly healed wounds of slave mothers; as if she tried to create brand new Denvers for some alternative universe where these women would wholeheartedly love their Pecolas, and make them grow up into confident women. The possibility of such a conclusion is however left open. Although Morrison leads Denver to overcome her fears and be "more sure of herself,"[96] she does not proceed any further, as it would probably be a bit risky. The history, of course, cannot be changed, and Morrison suddenly appears very hesitant as to what to do with the

[95] Morrison, *Beloved,* 242-3.
[96] Horwitz, 167.

remaining characters, because if such new Denvers and their Pecolas really existed, there would be no need to write psychological stories about their pains. Morrison's conclusion of the story is therefore dubious in a sense that it does not dare to determine the continuation of the story beyond the boundaries of the novel. By the end of her essay, Horwitz argues that "the paradox of how to live in the present without cancelling out an excruciatingly painful past remains unresolved at the end of the novel."[97] Morrison does not develop the character of Denver further beyond her newly gained independence, which is satisfactory only in terms of being able to take care of oneself, but does not answer whether it is enough to be able to make Denver happy in the future. More so, the writer is even reluctant as to letting Sethe herself make something positive of the encounter with Beloved, or in other words, to be her own best thing from now on. The reluctance to make a final conclusion therefore echoes in Sethe's final "Me? Me?"[98]

In conclusion, the character of Sethe in *Beloved* is Ryna being given a voice to tell the suffering, but just like Ryna, she remains the dead character with little personal hope for the future. The question, however, is whether the paradox mentioned by Horwitz is really a paradox and not just a realization that these characters must remain tragic, because it is the essential part of the history of the African American. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison concludes through Milkman's ponderings that "Shalimar left his [children], but it was the children who sang about it and kept the story of his leaving alive."[99] This sentence not only sums up the main purpose of this novel, but it may also point to the limits in the process of remembering – what is to be mended, and what must remain as it is – which determines the end of *Beloved*.

[97] Horwitz, 167.
[98] Morrison, *Beloved*, 273.
[99] Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 332.

5)

Conclusion

In *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*, Toni Morrison develops a theme of exclusion. What is interesting about it is the fact that it is not only segregation from the majority white culture and public, but also from the black community. Morrison uses magical realism so as to give relevance to the latter, and to reconnect the bodies and souls of her characters with it in order to eliminate the feeling that they have been put aside of something.

The adoption of magical realism may be a result of Morrison's search for a literary device which would be as free as possible from racially tainted language and forms of expression. In Morrison's own critical work, the writer raises a point that the exclusion deliberately results from an absence of valuable otherness. In other words, this otherness has been forcefully reduced to an inferior position. This artificial inferiority consequently tends to be overlooked, suppressed and even ignored; the same thing happening to the identity of those marked as inferior. The result of this loss of one's own valuable identity is either hate or admiration for what is thought to be superior. For Morrison, this is true both in the case of literary discourse and, in a broader sense, in the cultural and social world that is the model for her narratives.

Looking at Morrison's first fruit, *The Bluest Eye*, the reader can notice two prominent characters who – in the context of Morrison's literary critique – represent the two approaches which Morrison later identifies as deficient: revolting Claudia, hating the symbolic presence of Shirley Temple, and psychically subdued Pecola, with her tragic attempt to live up to it.

One interesting aspect that anticipates Morrison's later development is Pecola's role of a scapegoat placed on her primarily by those who we would expect to protect her. This illustrates Morrison's interest in the effects of slavery and racism on African-American souls and mental lives, even though these effects often appear as negative. For Morrison to avoid

repeating the ending of *The Bluest Eye*, she must delve deeper into the unconscious and submerged past.

The use of a supernatural catalyst gives Milkman and the three main characters of *Beloved* the ability to see and realize things to which Pecola remains ignorant. In the *Song of Solomon*, it is mainly the value and importance of one's "own people" and family merits. Even though the familial folklore bears some painful facts, Milkman accepts it as it is and arrives at psychological freedom.

In *Beloved*, Morrison uses a ghostly character to restore a soul deformed by slavery. As Sethe's power of judgment is deformed by the painful experience of being someone's property, she can find ways to excuse the killing of her daughter in order to save her from the same experience. The fallacy in this deduction is the fact that by the act Sethe herself becomes an enslaver of her child. Morrison lets the child come back to "life" both in a physical way and as an allegory of Sethe's buried primordial conscience. Even more importantly, Beloved also seems to encompass the destructive power which haunts the consciousness of the characters in *Beloved* and leaves them hurt and confused. This role of Beloved can be directly deduced from Ella's opinion of the ghost and its actions towards Sethe: Ella perceives Beloved as "past errors taking possession of the present."[100] Even though it "infuriates" Ella, the presence of Beloved in the story connected with Sethe's preoccupation with the past is necessary at least for Denver to grow up and realize that love does not mean the possession of the loved, which is a notion that Sethe acquired through the experience of slavery.

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[100] *Beloved*, 256.

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