

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Toni Morrison is one of the most celebrated and influential African American writers of the twentieth century. She won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993 as the first African American, and only the eighth woman to earn the accolade (Burton 39). Upon receiving the news of the Nobel Prize, highlighting the significance of the achievement, Morrison stated, “I am of course profoundly honored. But what is most wonderful for me, personally, is to know that the Prize at last has been awarded to an African-American. Winning as an American is very special—but winning as a Black American is a knock out” (qtd. in Drew 228). Nonetheless, nowadays, with the expansion of the literary canon, multicultural works such as works of fiction written by minority groups have assumed an increasing importance for scholars of American literature.

Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Beloved*, is no exception. It proved to be an intriguing work of fiction appealing to readers and critics across various disciplines. Its exceptional structure and compelling story attracted the attention of both the academia and public. The central story is about a fugitive slave woman, Sethe, who murders her own child, Beloved, in order to save her from slavery. In fact, the novel is based on the shocking but true tale of a Margaret Garner which Morrison came across while she was editing *The Black Book*, “a compilation of newspaper articles, images, and other mementos of African American history” (Stein 107). But, of course, *Beloved* offers more than just a dark and influential portrait of the dehumanizing effects of slavery.

Enjoying a wide range of critical responses, this hyper-inclusive novel has been studied through the lens of many approaches and

perspectives: history, memory and new historicism; captivity, torture, wide-reaching legacy of slavery and neo-slave narratives; trauma and psychoanalysis; black womanhood and feminism; modernity, postmodernity and multi-layered narratives, etc. just to name a few. In the matter of critical interpretation and analysis, Toni Morrison, herself, tried to fight the Eurocentric reading of her works demanding a more Afrocentric evaluation. In a 1983 interview with Nellie McKay, Morrison explains:

Critics of my work have often left something to be desired, in my mind, because they don't always evolve out of the culture, the world, the given quality out of which I write. . . . I am trying very hard to use the characteristics of the art form that I know best, and to succeed or fail on those criteria. . . . Because my books come out of those things and represent how they function in the black cosmology. (Morrison, *Conversations* 151)

In line with what Morrison demands, some scholars fervently, and in some cases dogmatically, refuse to use Western literary theories and concepts to analyze African American literature. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in the introduction of *The Signifying Monkey*, explicates: "My desire has been to allow the black tradition to speak for itself about its nature and various functions, rather than to read it, or analyze it, in terms of literary theories borrowed whole from other traditions, appropriated from without" (xxi).

However, what actually constitutes the "black cosmology" or "black tradition" is a matter of debate. What Morrison wants is a shift of focus from a traditional reading of her fiction to a more conscious one that would respond to black heritage and experience. But, it does not necessarily diminish in any way the role, merit and influence of Western traditions. The cosmology that she is talking about does not only come from Africa and African ancestry, but also from the mainstream American culture. *Beloved*, as an "African Diaspora text"

(Boyce-Davies, *Encyclopedia* xlvi), bears unique characteristics: it responds not to one but to two cultures and traditions.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois famously describes African Americans as possessing “double consciousness” (12): They are caught between a self-conception as an American and as a person of African descent. Du Bois explains, “One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring deals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”(12). Therefore, any African American literature has been influenced by the great African diasporic heritage. In the case of Toni Morrison, she “uses her double heritage (African American), her ‘double consciousness’ as Du Bois puts it, to rewrite the history of slavery” (Osagie). Furthermore, even Gates himself is perfectly conscious of the constitutive duality of the literature produced by African Americans. He recognizes African American literature as “double-voiced” (xxiii). He explains that anyone who attempts to analyze black literature must be aware of the “complex double formal antecedents, the Western and the black,” of African American texts. (xxiv).

Therefore, focusing on one aspect would only result in missing out a lot on the richness of the work. Furthermore, bringing the two concepts together and examining the ways that they have influenced, changed, canceled, and modified each other could be rewarding. Although Morrison builds a strong bond to the African tradition by drawing on its folklore and mythology, there is always a well-built trace of biblical imagery and Greek mythology accompanying the African trend. The nature of some of the borrowings from African culture can be sometimes intentional on the part of Morrison to create and establish a sense of pride and identity in the black community by showing the value of African, their ancestors’, culture. But, it should not be forgotten that the unconscious mind of the writer plays a major role in the creative process. Although she is consciously interested in

the preservation and survival of the African culture and African American community identity in diaspora, it cannot be denied that as an American she has built a strong knowledge and mastery of the mainstream traditions and customs. The inside urge and the outside influence both contributes to the outcome which is the literary work being produced.

Significance of the Study

In both style and content, *Beloved* reflects the mixture of two value systems and cultures. It is not only American tradition or only African one that contributes to the richness of the novel but African American's. In fact, it is Morrison's African American identity which has helped shape her remarkable contribution to literature. The dual nature of the experience, and the ways that the two sides have come together are of great significance. Rarely did any evaluation of *Beloved* bring the two concepts together. Therefore, this study seeks to establish a broader outlook, and a more comprehensive analysis which would encompass both sides of the literary work, *Beloved*, produced in diaspora.

Objective of the Study

The reading which is offered here is neither Eurocentric nor Afrocentric. Particular expressions and traditions of black culture and experience will be scrutinized. There are various aspects of African American experience that can be examined: African heritage, evolving African American culture and mainstream legacy. The direction of this study is toward a better understanding of the African American conception of existence, and the distinct and definable African American culture which is created out of the experience of displacement and diaspora. The purpose is to follow the multiple African and American literary traditions, and explore the ways that they have influenced the creation of the novel. The attempt is to identify and commemorate what is uniquely and positively African American in *Beloved*. The focus would be on the poetics of the work in order to distinguish the unique African American tradition and its

prominent features which can be ultimately linked to the celebration of the themes which are central in African American literature and criticism. The chief concern would be the orality, folklore, folk motifs, mythology and imagery.

Orality and folklore are significant attributes of African literature and culture. Morrison uses Black Vernacular English to give the sense of immediacy of oral literature. The musical aspect of the novel associated with jazz is reinforced by the use of rhythms, repetitions and alliteration in order to celebrate the culture and achievement which is uniquely black. Morrison comments:

We're very complicated people. I take my cue from music. Nothing is more complicated than jazz, or even the nuances of the blues. We're accustomed to very complicated art forms, we really are. It's only in literature that we think we're supposed to skim, probably because of the way in which we've been educated. So much popular literature takes the more convenient route to arouse emotions and satisfy rather than what I think is the more interesting, which is provocation. (qtd. in Mckinney-Wheststone 215)

Regarding folk motifs in *Beloved*, certain character types such as the matriarch, trickster, flying African and religious leader, etc. and certain folk practices such as singing songs, African religious rituals, naming and renaming etc. are detectable which can be studied as African attributes.

Although *Beloved*, in many ways, can be considered as a departure from American literature due to its intentional adherence to African roots and ancestry, it has a great deal of affinity with conventional American fiction writing. Therefore, different images and motifs can be studied through the lens of the Western traditions. Careful examination of the characters, imageries and rituals performed in the novel would definitely clarify the role of Greek mythology,

biblical influence and Western authority both in theme and structure of *Beloved*.

Literature Review

Based on her extensive research into West African philosophy and religion, La Vinia Delois Jennings, in *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa* (2008), studies and interprets the African themes, images and cultural resonances in Morrison's novels. In other words, Jennings suggests that Morrison, in her landscapes, interior spaces, and the bodies of her characters, uses the African symbols brought to Americas by the slaves.

By taking advantage of the expressions of folklore as a means of employing the strategies of indirection, Jacqueline Fulmer, in *Folk Women and Indirection in Morrison, Nã- Dhuibhne, Hurston, and Lavin* (2007), believes that African American and Irish women writers have successfully attracted readers while exploring unpopular subject matters. Focusing on folkloric characters, wild denizens of the Otherworld and wise women, Fulmer suggests that Morrison uses a "number of older wise women in her fiction placed alongside younger female characters who dwell near or in the Otherworld, like Sethe and *Beloved*" (51). Fulmer brings the example of Baby Suggs as one of "Morrison's living 'ancestor' figures" who "uses her position as a wise woman to stave off negative cultural influences coming out of the dominant Anglo society" (75).

Africanism and Authenticity in African-American Women's Novels (2003) by Amy K. Levin maps out the continuing influence of West African women's traditions. What she sees in the contemporary African American books is the "continuing presence of an African heritage" (131). In the seventh chapter, "Ghostwriting: Authenticity and Appropriation in *Family and Beloved*", she focuses on ghost apparitions and stories which have a strong affinity with African traditions. She suggests that "When contemporary African Americans ghostwrite accounts of slavery, they emphasize the roots of their stories in oral narratives and folklore" (129).

In the article, “A Slave by Any Other Name: Names and Identity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” (2008), Cynthia Lyles-Scott mentions the “act of naming or nicknaming” is “a way of reclaiming one’s self and one’s identity” building upon the idea that naming and renaming is an indispensable legacy of African Americans (195-196). She analyzes the names of the main characters and some of the minor ones in depth, and puts forward the implication of each one in a context of slavery, freedom, and identity.

Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject (2008) explores complex and interrelated issues such as gender, language, heritage, identity and African American women writing. Carole Boyce-Davies relates the return of the ghost, *Beloved*, to “the returning of the *abiku*, the ‘return of the repressed’”. Boyce-Davies furthermore elaborates that “African mythological pretext may offer a more textured understanding, a sign of the mother possessed and dispossessed, than the vaporous context of the Western ghost” (107).

Teresa N. Washington, in “The Mother-Daughter Àjé relationship in Toni Morrison *Beloved*” (2005), centers her argument on Àjé, which is a spiritual force inherent in African women which has remained with them even after the displacement, to analyze the mother-daughter relationship in *Beloved*.

Recognizing the undeniable significant place of music in African American literature, Saadi A. Simawe, in *Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison* (2000), proposes that African Americans draw on the magical power of music as a medium of liberation. He explains that the “constantly inventive nature of jazz performance is obviously useful for Morrison, who wants to signify on past interpretations of African American history and create new meanings” such as the reinventing of “the story of Margaret Garner” in *Beloved* (157). Furthermore, he draws attention to the imprisonment of Paul D. in a gang chain: Morrison “establishes the forty-six imprisoned men as archetypal African Americans engaged in musicking. They use music

functionally to help them get through their dull work and to explicate the joyful and pained lives they have all enjoyed and endured” (163-164).

Lars Eckstein, in “A Love Supreme: Jazzthetic Strategies in Toni Morrison *Beloved*” (2006), believes that *Beloved* is full of music. Eckstein suggests that Morrison, by the help of jazzthetic strategies “succeeds in adopting the cultural capital and community functionality that she associates with certain type of black music”. He continues that the “placement of *Beloved* in the realm of African American music is Morrison’s key to overcoming the speechlessness of trauma and to engaging in a constructive dialogue with painful chapters of the past”.

Tracey L. Walters, in *African American Literature and the classical Tradition* (2007), explores the relationship between Western classical mythology and African American women's literature. In the fourth chapter, “The Destruction and Reconstruction of Classical and Cultural Myth in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*”, Walters states that *Beloved* is “readily associated with Greek Myth” and that “infanticide and maternal heroism has drawn parallels to Euripides *Medea*” (106). In line with putting the African American experience depicted in *Beloved* in a much larger context, Kathleen Marks, in *Toni Morrison's Beloved and the Apotropaic Imagination* (2002), inspects the novel in the light of ancient Greek influences.

In *Ulysses in Black: Ralph Ellison, Classicism, and African American Literature* (2006), Patrice D. Rankine suggests that, contrary to the popular belief, analyzing works of African Americans through the lens of classics is not a mark of Eurocentrism. He believes that classical traditions can offer a rich perspective on African American literature. Regarding Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, he offers his own argument about Sethe and the ‘classical *Medea*’ (108).

Transforming Scripture: African American Women Writers and the Bible (2010) by Katherine Clay Bassard explores African

American women writers' engagement with the Bible suggesting that they have social concerns in mind while engaging in such activity which turns "cursing into blessing" (17). She proposes that "from the names of her characters—Pilate, First Corinthians, Shadrach, Ruth, Hagar—to the inscription at the beginning of *Beloved* from Hosea and Romans, Morrison's novels are laden with biblical tropes, phrasing, and intonations" (100).

Jane Cocalis' article, "The 'Dark and Abiding Presence' in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1997), searches for Calvinistic concepts present in *Beloved*. Cocalis believes that Morrison assumes a "symbiotic relationship between Puritanism and slavery in America's past" (250). *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities* (2006), edited by Shirley A. Stave, examines the ways that Toni Morrison uses Bible in her novels. Morrison relationship with the Bible is defined as "contested intertextualities".

William R. Handley in "The House a Ghost Built: *Nommo*, Allegory and the Ethics of Reading in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1995), recognizing the dual nature of the Diasporic experience, states that *Beloved* "inhabits both West African and American cultural spaces; she is at once found and then lost, visible and then invisible, tangibly alive and then a part of language, emblematic of both African survival and American loss".

Methodology

Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, is used as the primary source in this study. The central analytical approach would be based on African American critical theories and body of criticism. As the direction would be from poetics toward thematic concepts, the study would benefit from some concepts of psychological, new historic and cultural methods of criticism which can be very rewarding in driving home the fundamental intentions of the whole study. Furthermore, the data collecting method in this research is library research.

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter covers the introduction, objectives and significance of study, review of literature and methodology. The second chapter (Orality and Music) focuses on African oral culture, the medium of language (African American Vernacular English), sounds, repetitions, alternating and multiple voices and the musical aspects of the novel associated with jazz in order to discern the spoken quality of the work. Chapter three (African Traditions) examines some of the African cosmology, folkloric character types and societal and cultural norms as the integral parts of African culture and literature. Chapter four (Western Traditions) discusses the American mainstream influence on the materials, images, motifs, and characters. The final chapter would provide a conclusion to the whole argument of the study.

CHAPTER II

Orality and Music

Africa is a “massive continent consisting of 51 countries” which has faced many “colonial influences”. A “rich and well-developed oral literature” is one of the most prominent features of this continent (Smithe 1). African oral literature is mostly referred to the artistic expression of the pre-colonial period when literacy was not still established in the continent. Of course, the expression ‘oral literature’ in itself is problematic. The term ‘literature’ refers to whatever is written which fundamentally is at odds with orality. Unfortunately, as Chadwick explains, there is no satisfactory term to fully express the concept of oral heritage related to the mode in mind (qtd. in Ong 10). In this Chapter, for the sake of more comprehensive analysis, it would be better to take a step backward and consider the idiosyncrasies of the African oral culture, a culture untouched by literacy, in general. The relevant distinctive characteristics of orality would be isolated and scrutinized in relation to the text of *Beloved*.

Furthermore, the undeniable role of music in the novel will be explored. Music is an integral part of African culture as it is incorporated into many aspects of people’s lives (Agordoh 25). Morrison herself comes from a family of musicians. “Music was everywhere and all around”, as Morrison herself puts it (Morrison, *Conversations* 284). Definitely the same goes for her novels. Clinging to her African heritage, she makes music part and parcel of her artistic creations, and *Beloved* is no exception. Morrison, as Haskins suggests, was struggling to “create written books in the oral tradition, to create music with words on the page” (95). The focus will be on Jazz, as a form of African-American music, which has its roots in African music

(Meeder 21). It should be mentioned that as African music, in its turn, is a product of African oral culture, it is not surprising to find some common characteristics between the two. In such cases of overlap, the common features will be studied from both perspectives.

African oral culture has been discredited by Westerners, and Africans have been even deemed as ignorant due to their lack of literacy. Although Morrison seizes the medium of writing as a means to her artistic expression, she keeps the spirit of the oral tradition at the heart of her text to not only introduce but also preserve what orality can offer. *Beloved*, although a written text, is very much orally influenced. In other words, Morrison borrows literacy to hammer home her intention of affirming and celebrating the oral tradition of the black slaves. It is only when the two traditions come together that Morrison is able to get her point across. By basing her writing on oral forms the possibilities seems endless. With her different creative techniques, Morrison is able to shape her *written* literary creation in a way that it would correspond with oral qualities. In “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation,” Toni Morrison talks about the double nature of her fiction as being both oral and print:

There are things that I try to incorporate into my fiction that are directly and deliberately related to what I regard as the major characteristics of Black art, whatever it is. One of which is the ability to be both print and oral literature: to combine those two aspects so that the stories can be read in silence, of course, but one should be able to hear them as well. (59)

Oral peoples relate to the world around them in a fashion that is distinctive from literate peoples. An oral psyche differs greatly from a literate one in terms of understanding the world and categorizing the experiences. The purpose here is to explore some of the “psychodynamics of primary oral cultures, that is, of cultures untouched by writing” (Ong, 31), and see how they might be relevant to the structure and themes of the novel. One of the first issues is the

pivotal role that spoken words or any oral utterance can play in oral communities. Ong explains:

. . . oral peoples commonly, and probably universally, consider words to have great power. Sound cannot be sounding without the use of power. A hunter can see a buffalo, smell, taste, and touch a buffalo when the buffalo is completely inert, even dead, but if he hears a buffalo, he had better watch out: something is going on. . . . oral peoples commonly and in all likelihood universally consider words to have magical potency is clearly tied in, at least unconsciously, with their sense of the word as necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven. Deeply typographic folk forget to think of words as primarily oral, as events, and hence as necessarily powered . . . (32)

Morrison puts a great deal of emphasis on the role of words and sounds. She gives them power, potency and authority. Silence is encouraged and enforced by the slave keepers. Sethe is severely punished when she tells Mrs. Garner about the incident in the barn. She explains to Paul D: “. . . those boys came in there and took my milk. . . . I told Mrs. Garner on em. . . . Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree” (Morrison, *Beloved* 16-17). The mere act of speaking gets Sethe in trouble. The only crime she commits here is to speak up about what has happened to her. Paul D is denied the power of language by the iron bit put in his mouth which stifles his tongue. He cannot even form simple words to have a conversation by Halle (Morrison, *Beloved* 70). The former is very much ashamed by the whole experience. The bit inhibits him to use language and form words that carry so much power. Therefore, it is safe to say that a big portion of his identity as a man and as an oral person was shattered by the experience. Coming originally from an oral culture, nothing could be worse than to be denied the power of words. He is ripped off his

most cherished power. The biggest concern of the novel is those experiences that are not verbalized: “Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable to Stamp Paid, were the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (Morrison, *Beloved* 199).

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that it is not only words that carry semantic meanings which are important. Mere sounds have great significance in an oral community and its literature. Okpewho observes,

. . . oral literature is literature delivered by word of mouth before an audience. This word-of-mouth medium of presentation implies that oral literature makes its appeal first through the sound of the words that reach the ears of the audience and only secondarily through the meaning or logic contained in those words. . . . The appeal of sound can indeed be so strong, the premium placed on it so high, that performers can at times indulge in certain “nonsense” words or other kinds of sound either for sheer entertainment effect or perhaps to fill a gap when they forget to what to say next. (Okpewho 70)

One of the reasons which keeps Sethe going is the *voice* of Baby Suggs: Besides the “pressing fingers” of Baby Suggs, what Sethe misses the most is the “quiet instructive voice” of her mother-in-law (Morrison, *Beloved* 86). When Paul D goes to visit Sethe after the disappearance of Beloved towards the end of the novel, the sound is present at the background. The sound leads him to her:

To the right of him, where the door to the keeping room is ajar, he hears humming. Someone is humming a tune. Something soft and sweet, like a lullaby. Then a few words. Sounds like “high Johnny, wide Johnny. Sweet William bend down low.” Of course, he thinks. That's where she is--and she is. (Morrison, *Beloved* 271)

Most importantly, Morrison highlights this oral feature by having the praying women go back to their origins: “Instantly the kneelers and the standers joined her [Ella]. They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like” (Morrison, *Beloved* 259). It is the communal *voice* of the women which exorcises Beloved:

For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (Morrison, *Beloved* 261)

What these women do at the exorcism of Beloved is quite similar to ‘scat singing’ in jazz performances. Scat is “the use by singers of nonsense syllables instead of words” (Gottlieb 112). Closely related, Fulton observes that the “piece-by-piece method” of revealing the experiences of the central characters “simulates the note-by-note . . . form of scatting that ultimately produce a complete . . . melody” (105).

“Oral peoples,” Ong explains, “commonly think of names (one kind of words) as conveying power over things” (32). Names are believed to possess magical qualities in Africa. They are sacred, symbolic and “for the person’s soul” (Bernhardt 7-8). Morrison creates a special place for names and (re)naming in *Beloved*. Names have character and they give character. Denver is named after the whitegirl who helped Sethe with her delivery when the latter was lost in the jungle running from Sweet Home pregnant (Morrison, *Beloved* 19). Denver describes the scene where she sees Sethe kneeling beside a white dress whose sleeve is around her mother’s waist believing that

her name means friendship: “The dress and her mother together looked like two friendly grown-up women--one (the dress) helping out the other. And the magic of her birth, its miracle in fact, testified to that friendliness as did her own name” (Morrison, *Beloved* 19).

Naming is so central that Nan explains that Sethe’s mother did not name any of her children that she wanted to throw away as they were products of rape:

She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. (Morrison, *Beloved* 62)

Even *Beloved* insists repeatedly that she be called by her name when she forces Paul D to sleep with her as if her name means who she is and what she is to others, a beloved:

“Call me my name.”

“No.”

“Please call it. I'll go if you call it.”

“Beloved.” He said it, but she did not go. (Morrison, *Beloved* 117)

Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid feel it is necessary that they have a name which would be true to who they are. The first question that Baby Suggs asks when she becomes free is about her name. She confesses that up until then she called herself “nothing”. She goes against Mr. Garner’s advice, and refuses to take her “bill-of-sale name”. As a freed slave, she decides to keep the name which was left of a husband she could claim as hers (Morrison, *Beloved* 141-2). For Stamp Paid, his name is almost life-defining. He used to be called Joshua. He changed it after handing over his wife, Vashti, to his master’s son:

Handed her over in the sense that he did not kill anybody, thereby himself, because his wife demanded he stay alive. . . . With that gift, he decided that he didn't owe

anybody anything. Whatever his obligations were, that act paid them off. He thought it would make him rambunctious, renegade--a drunkard even, the debtlessness, and in a way it did. (Morrison, *Beloved* 184-5)

The idea of debtlessness defines his whole existence. He even “extended this debtlessness to other people by helping them pay out and off whatever they owed in misery” (Morrison, *Beloved* 185). But, he changes his mind when he comes to believe that he has mistreated the family of Baby Suggs. He feels that may be “he has misnamed himself and there was yet another debt he owed” (Morrison, *Beloved* 184).

In oral traditions, it is customary to invent “bizarre figures” that carry “weight and memorability” as “mnemonic aid” (Ong 68). The most important reason that makes *Beloved* a highly memorable story is the horrible act of infanticide committed by the protagonist. If the point is to “Think memorable thoughts” (Ong 34), what could be more memorable than the haunting tale of a mother who kills her own child to protect her from slavery? Sethe is not Cyclops or Cerberus, but her monstrous actions and her disturbing manner of justification do not fall short. In this way, Morrison makes the slaves’ experiences, especially Sethe’s, portrayed in the novel, permanently unforgettable. It is definitely easier to remember the story of a mother so psychologically damaged than just the accounts of the hardships of working in the fields and the occasional whippings. Sethe becomes Morrison’s unforgettable character similar to Charles Dickens’ haunting character in *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham who is a psychologically disturbed woman that chooses to go alarmingly to extremes to exert revenge on all men.

Goody and Watt describe oral societies as homeostatic, meaning that they keep their equilibrium by getting rid of the memories that carry no relevance to the present (qtd. in Ong 46). In other words, the past is subordinate to the present. What Morrison

does is that she shows in order to keep the integrity of the present intact, the ex-slaves and their descendants should first come into terms with their past. In *Beloved*, past is significant because it has undeniable influence on the present lives of the characters. By showing the dysfunctional lives of the former slaves focusing on Sethe and her family, Morrison shows how past can have a crucial role. It might be inconvenient for the ex-slaves to remember like Paul D who tries to keep everything locked up in his “tobacco tin buried in his chest” (Morrison, *Beloved* 72). But, it is necessary to do so to begin the healing process as the “past insinuates itself into the present unwanted” (Byerman 29).

In this spirit, Morrison finds relevance to the story of the past lives of the slaves and their ancestors. She makes it a special case that needs remembering. In the two last pages of the novel, it is declared emphatically, and to a point ambiguously, that “This is not a story to pass on” (275) meaning this is not one of those stories that should and are forgotten as they are not relevant to the lives of the people any more. There is obviously a clear distinction between a “loneliness that can be rocked” and one that “No rocking can hold” down (Morrison, *Beloved* 274). The traumatizing experiences of the slavery fall into the category of that part of the past that cannot be overlooked. Those stories resurface regardless of the survivors’ desire to keep them at bay as Sethe constantly works “hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe” (Morrison, *Beloved* 6). The legacy of slavery still haunts the slaves and their children as the ghost of the murdered child haunts “the gray and white house on Bluestone Road” (Morrison, *Beloved* 3). In complete opposition to the willed forgetfulness, the ex-slaves are forced to face their repressed past symbolized by the return of *Beloved*. The traumatic past needs to be worked through before it can be forgotten. Before the apparition of *Beloved*, Sethe and her daughter, Denver, lead dysfunctional lives. They live in complete isolation. Osagie, from a psychological point of view, argues that