



Cultural Hauntings in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987)

Mohammad Shaaban Ahmad Deyab

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Minia University, Minia, Egypt

Email address:

mdeyab@mu.edu.eg

To cite this article:

Mohammad Shaaban Ahmad Deyab. Cultural Hauntings in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). *English Language, Literature & Culture*.

Vol. 1, No. 3, 2016, pp. 13-20. doi: 10.11648/j.ellc.20160103.11

Received: July 25, 2016; **Accepted:** August 18, 2016; **Published:** September 7, 2016

Abstract: African American writers' preoccupation with supernatural elements such as ghosts stems not from an interest in Gothic themes, but in a new genre in American literature termed as "the story of cultural haunting." The objective of this paper is to discuss Morrison's choice of a ghost to play the part of connecting past with the present in her novel, *Beloved* (1987). In discussing this role, the paper examines Morrison's use of the magic realism and the ghost's relationship with the other characters, such as Sethe, Denver and Paul D, as well as its relationship with the African American community. The paper also points out how the ghost's impact on these characters has been achieved on both personal and collective levels. To be more specific, the paper argues how *Beloved's* ghost is deeply symbolizing both private and collective past, which matches Morrison's notion about the past. Finally, the paper examines the ghost's cultural role of healing African Americans from the trauma of slavery.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, African Americans, Ghosts, Slavery, Cultural Haunting

1. Introduction

Stories involving ghosts are found in traditional cultures worldwide. These stories of ghosts are as much a part of the culture of many people in Europe and America. As a matter of fact, gothic writings started in both British and American literature many centuries ago. The use of ghosts and the role they play in literature has always been an issue of debate among writers for many centuries. In many cases, the ghost is used as a plot device. The plot goes around a malign ghost whose purpose is either to set right an injustice or to take revenge upon the living. The most obvious example is the ghost of Hamlet's father in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* who asks his son to avenge his murder. In contemporary literature that role has been modified to be more than just a plot device. In this literature, ghosts are meant to have a figurative or symbolic meaning and function. In contemporary African American literature, for example, the ghost is used as a way of making social use of a poorly documented and an incompletely erased cultural history. In her book, *Cultural Haunting*, Kathleen Brogan indicates that this recent preoccupation of African American writers with ghosts stems – not from a persistent interest in Gothic themes – but from a whole new genre in American literature that she calls "the story of cultural haunting:"

Cultural ghost stories, which feature the haunting of a people by the ghosts of its own past, represent one way a group actively revises its relationship to the past. Not surprisingly, these stories tend to emerge in the aftermath of times of swift and often traumatic change, when old social bonds have been unhinged and new group identities must be formulated. [3]

According to Brogan, the literary representation of ghosts is the fictional vent for any group who actively seeks to reconsider its relationship to the past. Therefore, this explains the increasing number of cultural ghost stories by contemporary African American writers, such as Toni Morrison, who uses ghosts as vehicles for recovering and reimagining the past in unconventional ways. In Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), the ghost is used to connect the characters' personal pasts and their culture. The appearance of *Beloved's* ghost has a permanent effect on the characters who are enforced to face their pasts that have been forgotten, and to discover and come to terms with themselves and their tasks within the African American community. In short, the connection to the past that *Beloved's* ghost represents causes the characters to grow as individuals.

Objectives:

Thus, the objective of this paper is to illustrate Toni Morrison's reasons to choose a ghost in *Beloved* (1987). According to Morrison, ghosts play the part of connecting past with the present. They have a cultural role where these ghosts could be used as a way to re-examine the past, investigate the present and reformulate the future. In discussing this role, the paper examines the ghost's relationship with the other characters in the novel, such as Sethe, Denver and Paul D, as well as its relationship with the African American community. Thus, the paper illustrates how *Beloved's* ghost has an impact on anyone who has a relationship with it. "They can touch it if they like, but don't, because they know things will never be the same if they do" [8]. Moreover, Morrison's use of magic realism in *Beloved* (1987) offer readers a powerful drama of the individual psyche of Sethe, Denver and Paul D.

Moreover, this paper aims to point out how the ghost's impact on these characters has been achieved on both personal and collective levels. Finally, the paper examines the ghost's cultural role of healing African Americans from the trauma of slavery. Deeply rooted in Morrison's writings, she expresses "the imperative to face a wounded past and to struggle toward healing themselves and their people" [9]. To Morrison, there is a private past, which a person creates according to his/her free will. Nevertheless, there is also a collective past into which people are born – family, community, nation, and religion. This paper discusses how *Beloved's* ghost moves between these two types of past. It reminded specific characters with their personal past, whereas, it also reminded the whole African Americans with their collective one. *Beloved's* ghost is used as a means to remind each individual in the novel of her/his personal past, and in the process, reminding the whole African American community of the suffering their ancestors went through during slavery. In order to achieve that objective, Morrison needs to render the ghost a sense of reality.

2. African Americans' Past of Slavery

African Americans have experienced the pain of slavery, and their souls now bear the imprint of this experience. They feel that this is affecting them in their daily lives. For example, according to Morrison, the past of slavery was deeply rooted in the history of the African Americans, and her job as a writer is to investigate this past. In one of her interviews, Morrison claims that her job as a writer is

Re-doing the past as well as throwing it into relief ... something in the past is ... haunting, that is not explained or wasn't clear so that you are almost constantly rediscovering the past. I am geared toward the past, I think, because it is important to me; it is living history. [15]

Morrison is always aware of "both the burdens and the blessings of the past." In another interview, Morrison complains that: "the past is absent or it's romanticized. This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to

terms with, the truth about the past" [8]. Morrison is among many African American writers who are interested in the past of slavery and its impact on the present and, subsequently, on the future of African Americans. Morrison once said, "If we don't keep in touch with the ancestors ... we are, in fact, lost" [8]. Morrison's statement seems to resonate in all of her works where the past always looms in the background as a ghost that haunts and torments the present and the future of her people. Morrison believes that it is important to revisit the past in order to live the present: "So much has to be disassembled. The past has to be revised. The way one thinks about things has to change" [10]. This explains why some of her novels are in a sense "historical novels" or at least deals with historical events. Morrison's attempt to come to terms with the past starts with her novel *Beloved*. Morrison's writing expresses experience that is specifically African American. That is, her novel records the history and cultural response that no other group shares. Although many other racial and ethnic minorities experience discrimination, however, no other group was forcibly brought to the United States or enslaved. To address this singular historical situation, Toni Morrison has written a historical trilogy. *Beloved* (1987) deals with slavery and its immediate aftermath; *Jazz* (1992) continues this exploration into the 1920s. The third volume, *Paradise* (1998), extends the examination of this history into the 1970s.

Morrison addresses the issue of remembering African Americans past of slavery in *Beloved* (1987) and she has stated the following on the matter:

There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner that can be digested, in a manner in which memory is not destructive. [12]

Morrison considers the past of slavery a ghost that haunts and lives in African Americans and this ghost has a great impact on their present as well as their future. Jenny Sharpe has rightly explained why the idea of slavery as a ghost reemerges in contemporary African American literature. Her rationale has been expressed:

Slavery continues to haunt the present because its stories, particularly those of slave women, have been improperly buried. But an improper burial does not mean that they are irretrievably lost. [14]

Morrison understands that slavery will be back as a ghost since it is not properly buried in the collective memory of her people. To Morrison, although this traumatic past is "gonna hurt, now ... Anything dead coming back to life hurts" [8], she still believes that remembering this past is essential for African-Americans to heal from the evils committed against them and to enable them to move forward into the future.

For Morrison, African American past is represented either by oral folk traditions or by written means. She does not trust the written texts and documents that depict the history of the African American in USA, simply because they are either written from the point of view of the white people or do not embody the real facts about that history. As Morrison once said,

Blacks don't speak for themselves in the texts. And since they were not permitted to say their own things, history and the academy can't really permit them to take center stage in the discourse of the text in art, in literature. [14]

Morrison believes that documented texts of history are not true or at least close to the truth. That written history is taught in educational institution as symbolized by the horrendous role of the villainous unnamed school teacher in *Beloved* (1987), or recorded in newspapers clippings that used to be racially oriented towards portraying African Americans in their worst images. Morrison believes that both are not enough for a real presentation of African American past history of slavery. She thinks that there is something more real and human behind a newspaper clipping or a photograph of a fugitive slave. Morrison believes that a fictional account of the interior life of a former slave might be more historically "real" than actual documents, which were often written from the perspective of the dominant white culture. For example, in *Beloved* (1987), when Paul D is confronted by the newspaper account of Sethe's deed, the reader is made aware that textual documents often - or always - fail to capture life exactly as it is experienced. Although he cannot read, Paul D finds the representation of Sethe's face to be inauthentic: "that ain't her mouth" [9]. Paul D's reaction to Sethe's picture makes us conscious of the discrepancy between a real-live original and any replication, either photographic or textual.

3. Analysis of the Novel

The main conventions of a ghost story are the setting and the existence of supernatural elements which contribute mainly to the story's main objective. In this sense, one can argue that Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) starts as a typical gothic story, where, the setting, 124 house, "was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom" [9]. Sethe's house has been described in a gothic manner. In one sense, it is a house "peopled by the living activity of the dead" [9]. In another, it is "a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighted, trembled and fell into fits" [9]. For example, when Sethe's sons ran away, the narrator describes how the house felt for them: "when first one brother and then the next stuffed quilt packing into his hat, snatched up his shoes, and crept away from the lively spite the house felt for them" [9]. As the setting is contributing to the sense of *Beloved* (1987) as a ghost story, the idea of the supernatural is quite evident as well. Right from the beginning of the novel, we are introduced to a poltergeist; that is, a ghost who is just making noise but "never hurt anybody" [9]. This poltergeist, Sethe's baby ghost, made tricks over the residents of Sethe's house, especially the male ones, to force them out:

The sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old – as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered in the cake (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). Neither boy waited to see more ... each one fled at once. [9]

The whereabouts these sons went to is not clear and it is not important for a Womanist writer, such as Morrison, to show us that. The escape of Sethe's sons indicates Morrison's Womanist attitude to present the heroic struggle of African American female characters such as Sethe and Denver, who prefer facing that ghost rather than cut and run. Both Sethe and Denver did what they could simply because they want to know what is behind this baby's ghost. They waged a battle against the ghost not to drive it out but to know of its demands:

Together they waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of that place; against turned-over slop jars, smacks on the behind, and gusts of sour air. For they understood the source of the outrage as well as they knew the source of light. [9]

Understanding the source of its outrage, both Sethe and Denver tried to exorcise the baby's ghost in order to talk to that ghost as a way to find out the reasons behind its acts. They are ready to exchange views to find out what that ghost really wants:

Sethe and Denver decided to end the persecution by calling forth the ghost that tried them so. Perhaps a conversation, they thought, an exchange of views or something would help. So they held hand and said, 'come on. Come on. You may as well just come on. [9]

Sethe knows that the ghost of her baby girl wants to understand why she cut her throat, and Sethe is ready to explain to her: "if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her" [9]. Sethe's attempt to understand the ghost's motivations has been interrupted by the arrival of Paul D. Here, the sons' flight has been compensated by the arrival of a father-like figure, Paul D. As an African American, Paul D inherited a tradition of believing in ghosts. The baby ghost reminds him of "that headless bride back behind Sweet Home ... Used to roam them woods regular" [9]. Like Sethe and Denver, Paul D notices the existence of that ghost: "you got company ... what kind of evil you got in here?" [9]. Brought up in a culture that understands ghosts' motivations, Paul D explains the reason why the baby ghost is there: "must be something you got it wants" [9]. Paul D attempts to exorcise the baby ghost and he is successful in doing that. However, the baby ghost disguised into a woman of nineteen or twenty years old. *Beloved's* ghost changes dramatically from being a poltergeist or unseen ghost to, a "real" ghost in flesh and blood. In this sense, *Beloved's* ghost falls into the types of modern ghosts that Dorothy Scarborough describes in her article, "Modern Ghosts." According to Scarborough, "ghosts of modern fiction are more convincing in their reality than the specters of early times. They are stronger, more vital ... more healthy, more active, and more alive than they used to be" [13]. *Beloved's* ghost is a typical modern one: strong, objective and claiming so much and hungry. Paul D comments on seeing her that it "acts sick, sounds sick, but she don't look sick. Good skin, bright eyes and strong as a bull ... I seen her puck up the rocker with one hand" [9].

4. Morrison's Choice of the Ghost in *Beloved* (1987)

Beloved's ghost is a method that Morrison uses in order to express her recollection of her cultural heritage. According to Bani Younes, "the appearance of *Beloved* is a technique that Morrison uses to assure the relation between the past and the present as well as a metaphor to play many roles in the novel" [2]. As a child, Morrison "was brought up on ghost stories" [10]. She does not hide the fact that she believes in ghosts, which Morrison considers part of her heritage. In an interview with Mel Watkins, Morrison says:

I wanted to use black folklore, the magic and superstitious part of it. Black people believe in magic. Once a woman asked me, 'do you believe in ghosts?' I said, 'yes ... it is part of our heritage. [16]

In African Americans' heritage, ghosts of their ancestors who died during slavery haunted those who are alive. That notion has been clearly stated in *Beloved* (1987). For example, Morrison states that African Americans' "mind is loaded with spirits. Everywhere you look you see 'one' because 'people who die bad don't stay in the ground'" [8]. Moreover, since African Americans believe that "not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief" [8], they regard the belief in ghosts and supernatural as part of their heritage.

In addition to Morrison's belief in that heritage, she uses ghosts in her novels for purposes. According to Brogan, ghosts writers such as Morrison, use ghosts in order to "reconceive a fragmented, partially obliterated history, looking to a newly imagined past to redefine themselves for the future" [3]. Morrison uses the ghost of *Beloved* as a way to express that interest in that tradition. Moreover, Morrison employs *Beloved's* ghost as a means to revive the historical memory of the atrocities African American went through during slavery. *Beloved's* ghost implies that history of slavery haunts people even when they have no knowledge of it. According to Gordon:

The ghost is a crucible for political mediation and historical memory ... The ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing. It gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents. [7]

5. The Use of Magic Realism

Morrison's decision to use *Beloved's* ghost presents a problematic issue regarding the readers' perception of the authenticity of the story. Many readers questions *Beloved's* ghost's role of being a supernatural ghost and at the same time of being a real historical past that comes back to haunt people. In other words, the ghost questions Morrison's ability to hold the balance between the conventions of ghost story which involves the reader's belief in superstition, and the importance of presenting her novel as a historical reality by founding her story on historical facts. According to Morrison, the ghost represents the borderline between reality and supernatural, past and present, life and death. In conversation

with Marsha Darling, Morrison expresses this complicated issue between historical facts and fantastic issues and the dialectic relationship between them in *Beloved* (1987). Thus, to Morrison,

Beloved is a spirit on one hand, literally she is what Sethe thinks she is, her child returned to her from the dead. And she must function like that in the text. She is also another kind of dead that is not spiritual but flesh, which is, a survivor from the true, factual slave ship. She speaks the language, a traumatized language of her own experience. [5]

In its appearance in flesh and blood, the ghost takes the shape of "a fully dressed woman walked out of the water" [9]. In this case, *Beloved's* ghost raises the issue of the duality between reality and fantasy. It has baby's characteristics but with a grown woman's shape and size, signifying something wrong that defies conceptual explanation: "She had new skin, lineless and smooth, including the knuckles of her hands" [9]. Moreover, the ghost is described as "a young woman, about nineteen or twenty, and slender, she moved like a heavier or an older one, holding on to furniture, resting her head in the palm of her hand as though it was too heavy for a neck alone" [9]. In this sense, things are confused, and the borderline between reality and fantasy is blurring. *Beloved's* ghost is "stuck" between two worlds, a symbolic bridge - between that of the living and that of the dead. Repeatedly, *Beloved* is described as occupying a bridge before entering 124: "I was on the bridge," said *Beloved*. "You see me on the bridge?" [9] *Beloved's* reference to the bridge indicates that the ghost itself is that bridge that connects past with present, reality with fantasy, life with death.

As a way to overcome this problematic issue of historical reality and fictional authenticity, Morrison finds the magical realism the best technique to hold the balance between reality and fantasy by introducing the ghost of *Beloved* in the text. The role of *Beloved's* ghost, one can argue, is to negotiate the relationship between what is real and what is supernatural. *Beloved's* ghost always stays on the borderline between two worlds: reality and fantasy, history and fiction, past and present. Truly, the ghost does not belong to the world of bodies, but in its (re) appearance it stops being part of the world of spirits. Jacques Derrida confirms this idea when he states that "The specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other" [6]. Throughout the novel, *Beloved's* ghost moves through these two areas of the natural and supernatural. For example, when the novel opens, *Beloved* is not yet seen, but the characters can sense her existence by the disturbance that she used to make. The novel moves between the duality of, history and fiction, present and past, reality and unreality by mixing scenes of *Beloved's* disturbing effect upon Sethe's life with visions from Sethe's memories, most of them deeply disturbing.

In *Beloved* (1987), Morrison is able to mix the real with the supernatural. She turns to gothic tradition to recover an

untold history of suffering. To render her novel a sense of historical reality, Morrison bases her story on two historical facts: newspaper clipping of a slave woman: Margaret Garner, and the “unspeakable” experience of African Americans during the Middle Passage. The novel is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, an escaped slave who killed her daughter in a desperate attempt to save her from the misery and indignity of slavery when threatened with recapture – a story very few people knew before the publication of Morrison's book. The other historical fact that Morrison uses in *Beloved* (1987) is the horrible history of Middle Passage where millions of African Americans lost their souls in their journey through the Middle Passage. According to Morrison, each of these dead souls has a ghost that wants to be remembered and accounted for; and therefore, wants to bridge the gap between what is past and what is present. As Aoi Mori puts it: “dedicating the story to those who were blamelessly enslaved and exploited, Morrison attempts to revive her ancestors and their thoughts” [8].

6. The Ghost's Relation to the Characters

The ghost's appearance in flesh and blood goes along with Morrison's objective to make this appearance significant for the main characters in the novel. Sethe, a symbol of a present generation, is still living in the past. Paul D, a symbol of African American men, is trying to live the present with Sethe. Denver, a symbol of the future, is trying to bypass the past, live the present, and look forward to the future. To Morrison, the appearance of the ghost has a great influence on the main characters of the novel as well as on the African American community: “a truth for all times ... anything dead coming back to life hurts” [9]. It is noted that each of the main characters' response to the ghost reflects his/her inner self. For example, Paul D's response to the ghost reflects his own repressed emotions about the past, about his personal history. Paul D's memories are so submersed with terror and humiliation that it is not surprising that his reaction to something associated with his feelings about the past, and his own ability to remember as well as to feel, is simply to condemn it as “evil.” Denver contradicts this description of the ghost with a definition of her own, explaining that the ghost is, as she experiences herself, “rebuked. Lonely and rebuked” [9]. Despite the fact that Paul D tells Denver that Sethe has described the ghost as “sad ... not evil,” [9] Sethe offers the final pronouncement on the ghost's character by denying the ghost's loneliness, as she denies her own, acknowledging that only madness motivates the ghost to do what she is doing: “I don't know about lonely ... Mad, maybe” [9].

The subsequent discussion is based on the fact that Beloved's ghost has influenced anyone who recognized that ghost had a relationship with it: “They can touch it if they like, but don't, because they know things will never be the

same if they do” [9]. That influence will be carried on both personal and collective levels.

6.1. *Beloved's Ghost Relation to Sethe and Denver*

The two characters who first formed a relationship with Beloved's ghost are Sethe and Denver. Right from the beginning, Sethe admits that Beloved is her baby girl coming back to her. When Beloved said her name, Sethe is sure that this is her daughter: “Sethe was deeply touched by her sweet name; the remembrance of glittering headstone made her feel especially kindly toward her” [9]. Sethe not only realizes that Beloved is her daughter from the name, but her reaction when she saw Beloved for the first time indicates that Sethe is giving birth to Beloved:

For some reason she could not immediately account for, she got close enough to see the face, Sethe's bladder filled to capacity ... Right of its door she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless ... It went on and on she thought, No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born ... there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now. [9]

Therefore, Sethe's acknowledgement of Beloved's ghost as her daughter makes it easy for Sethe to remember and revisit her painful past. Before the incarnation of Beloved's ghost, Sethe tells us that “she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe” (9) and that “the past comes back whether we want it to or not” [9]. Beloved's embodiment, her entry into the real, household world, should force Sethe to reexamine her history, to reread the facts. Beloved's claim over Sethe is to remember and to retell the past from her account. Sethe admitted that Beloved's coming helped her to look at things again: “and my girl come home. Now I can look at things again because she's here to see them too” [9]. Sethe is “trying to persuade Beloved, the one and only person she felt she had to convince, that what she had done was right because it came from true love” [9]. Sethe needs to come to terms with the fact that she murdered her baby daughter.

The relationship between Beloved and Sethe symbolizes the relationship between repressed past that tries to seize the present and affect the future. Sethe attempts to repress the memories of having murdered her daughter and to forget everything about her past life as a slave at Sweet Home. Sethe cannot ignore this haunting past now coming in the form of Beloved's ghost who is ready to consume her. Beloved is ready to eat and consume Sethe because she is the one she wants; she is the one who is responsible for her death. Beloved states clearly the ultimate purpose of her coming back. “Sethe's is the face that left me ... her smiling face is the place for me it is the face I lost ... she is my face smiling at me ... now we can join” [9]. Beloved has logic behind her possessive relationship with Sethe:

Beloved accused her of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her. She said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her? And Sethe cried, saying she never did, or meant to – that she had to get them out, away, that she had the milk all the time and had the money too for the stone but not

enough. [9]

Beloved's role towards Sethe has been carried out on both personal and collective levels. Personally, Sethe has been able to remember and revisit her past which is "unspeakable." On the collective level, beloved's ghost brings Sethe back to the community. Before the arrival of the ghost, both Sethe and Denver are shut away from the community. They feel isolated and lonely: "I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either" [9]. Because of Beloved's ghost, "she (Denver) would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" [9].

6.2. *Beloved's Ghost Relation to Paul D*

Beloved's ghost has the strongest effect on Paul D. At the beginning, and unlike Sethe, Paul D does not recognize that Beloved is a ghost. To Paul D, Beloved could be a real girl, sexually abused by a white man. Beloved seems to describe sexual abuse when she tells Sethe that "one of them [a white man] was in the house I was in. He hurt me" [9]. Paul D's realistic explanation for Beloved's presence continues to exert itself throughout the text; even as late as the final section of the novel. Stamp Paid adds fuel to this possibility by informing Paul D. that there "was a girl locked up in the house with a whiteman over by Deer Creek. Found him dead last summer and the girl gone. Maybe that's her. Folks say he had her in there since she was a pup" [9]. Paul D's conviction that Beloved is a real person urges him not to force her out of Sethe's house:

He wanted her out, but Sethe had let her in and he couldn't put her out of a house that wasn't his. It was one thing to beat up a ghost, quite another to throw a helpless coloredgirl out in territory infected by the Klan. Desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it could not live, the dragon swam the Ohio at will. [9]

Paul D's desire not to get Beloved out of Sethe's house is due to his dark memories during slavery. Paul D is convinced that if he dismissed a helpless black girl out of the house, she will be a prey to the white people who are thirsty for the black blood. Even in his belief that Beloved is a real girl, she is able to remind of parts of his past life. Paul D is actively aware of slavery's success in severing the relationship of men from family. After the Civil War:

Odd clusters and strays of Negroes wandered the back roads and cowpaths from Schenectady to Jackson. Dazed but insistent, they searched each other out for word of a cousin, an aunt, a friend who once said, "Call on me. Anytime you get Chicago, just call on me." Some of them were running from f that could not support them, some to family; some were running from dead crops, dead kin, life threats, and took-over land. [9]

Paul D's attitude towards Beloved's identity changed dramatically when he starts to view her as a ghost and witnesses Beloved's control over Sethe and the house. Paul D's compassion to Beloved turned into fear of her: "that girl in her house scares me the most" [9]. Paul D recognizes that

Beloved is not a human being but rather a ghost who is trying to do something to him, to "fix" him:

Something is happening to me, that girl is doing it, I know you think I never liked her no how, but she is doing it to me. Fixing me. Sethe, she's fixed me and I can't break it. What? A grown man fixed by a girl? But what if the girl was not a girl, but something in disguise? [9]

Beloved's ghost plays the same role of reminding Paul D with his past. Like what she has done to Sethe, Beloved's ghost also has a claim over Paul D. When Beloved went to his shed after he was forced out of Sethe's house, Paul D asked her "what you come in here for?" [9], her answer is that "you have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name" [9]. Beloved's demand to be remembered and to be called by name is a demand that has to be met by almost all the characters in the novel and even by the community. According to Beloved, one of the ways to be remembered is to let characters such as Sethe and Paul D to remember their own past, simply because she is part of this past.

To some extent, Beloved's ghost has been successful in this role. It has been successful with Sethe and so it has been with Paul D. The role of Beloved's ghost to remind Paul D of the painful past has been carried out on two levels: personal and collective. On the personal level, Paul D has to remember painful memories that had happened to him personally. Paul D, like Sethe, is haunted by the pain of his personal past. He witnessed and suffered unspeakable atrocities before the end of the Civil War brought him his freedom, and he has survived by not allowing himself to have strong feelings for anything or anyone. He has particularly dark memories of time spent in a prison for blacks, where he worked in a chain gang by day and was kept in a box in the ground at night. At some point, Paul D even finds out that Sethe's story is similar to his, and that he has to tell and refine his own past story so that he will get the best out of it:

Her story was bearable because it was his as well-to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other-the things neither had word-shapes for--well, it would come in time: where they led him off to sucking iron; the perfect death of her crawling-already? baby. [9]

To Paul D, Beloved's ghost has been successful of linking his painful past with the past of the whole African Americans. For example, when Beloved seduced Paul D in the shed, he equates his "coupling" with her with "a brainless urge to stay alive ... [and] he was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to" [9]. Paul D's reference to "some ocean-deep place" is a reference to the people of the Middle Passage whom Beloved kept referring to. Paul D's statement that he belonged to that place is his recognition of the archetypal and collective memory of the trauma of the Middle Passage.

6.3. *The Ghost's Relation to the African American Community*

Like Sethe and Paul D, the whole African American

community has to acknowledge the existence of Beloved's ghost before recognizing its power. The community believes that Beloved is a ghost, it is "Sethe's dead daughter, the one whose throat she cut, had come back to fix her" [9]. The African community's belief in Beloved as a supernatural element reflects the African American tradition of believing in ghosts and the demands these ghosts they might make on those who wronged them. The community thinks that Sethe made a mistake by killing her baby daughter and that is why this ghost is coming to "fix" her. Nevertheless, the ghost has been successful in relating Sethe to each member of her community.

To be more specific, Beloved's ghost makes demands on Sethe and Paul D as it makes demands on the African American community as well. These demands, again, have to be met on both personal and collective levels. On the personal level, Beloved's ghost reminds each member of the African American community of his/her personal past is evident in the last scene of the community's attempt to exorcise the ghost. Coming to rescue Sethe and Denver from the haunting of Beloved's ghost, each member of the community, remember the time when they were "younger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep ... they were, young and happy, playing in Baby Suggs's yard, not feeling the envy that surfaced the next day." [9]

On the collective level, Beloved's ghost helps Sethe's community to reassess their quick reading of what Sethe did to and for her children. They come to understand that Sethe's behavior cannot be understood and explained adequately apart from the historical context in which she, as an African American woman, has found herself: "It took them days to get the story properly blown up and themselves agitated and then to calm down and assess the situation" [9]. When the community accepts Sethe as one of their own, they take a hand in rewriting her past as an act of defiance. By coming to Sethe's defense, they have to acknowledge their past history, a shared past that was inhuman and unbearable. They must admit that Beloved's ghost is a part of everyone's history, a living embodiment of their past.

7. Conclusion

To Morrison, the past of slavery is a ghost that has not been laid to rest and reappears to haunt the African American mind from time to time. In *Beloved* (1987) Morrison addresses her people's attitude towards slavery with a ghost story that aims at recovering the past from the oppressive history of slavery that haunts them. Thus, Morrison tries to rescue formerly ignored historical periods and to give voice to forgotten stories from the perspective of some African American slaves. Thus, this paper illustrates how

Beloved is ... not just the ghost of one child, but also the ghost of slavery, which haunts these supposedly free black characters who ... have imprinted on their bodies the literal and figurative scars of a past which continues to name both them and their children. [8]

Through its turn to Gothic tradition, and by using magic

realism, Morrison has been successful in recovering an untold history of suffering. In doing so, *Beloved* (1987) has much to tell African Americans about their own past of slavery and the range of imaginative responses it provokes. As Brogan has rightly said:

The ghosts haunting contemporary American literature lead us to the heart of our nation's discourse about multiculturalism and ethnic identity. When summoned for close examination, they reveal much about the dynamics of social and literary acculturation. [4]

To conclude, Morrison uses Beloved's ghost to retell the story of slavery as a way to let African Americans go through it and, therefore, overcome it. The role of the ghost, according to Morrison, is to reframe the past in order to make sense of the present and provide an orientation for the future. By emphasizing its impact on African American characters such as Sethe, Paul D, and the community, this novel is written to recover African Americans' past history of slavery. As Purva Upadhyay has rightly stated, "Beloved though represents a destructive and painful past but she also signals the possibilities of bright future. Apparently, it is essential to confront the past, without which the present can never make way for the future" [15]. By discovering the truth about their past history, African Americans can face it squarely, and are willing to explore and accept the negative parts of that history. In doing so, Morrison has become, to use Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu,

One of the ancestor figures she privileges in her work, guiding her readers to a much-needed understanding of the past in order that they might recognize the urgent promise of the future, and doing so with a wisdom and eloquence unparalleled in American letters. [1]

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