

Postgraduate English

www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english

ISSN 1756-9761

Issue 39

Autumn 2019

Editors:

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In a 2004 interview, Toni Morrison recounted how somebody asked her once

“Where’s that part in *Beloved* [1987], I can’t find it where she actually cuts [her]”, and I said “I don’t know”, and started looking. And I saw that it was so buried. I mean you know it all along...but the actual moment when it happens is so buried in the text you can barely find it, which is precisely what one wanted it to be.¹

The ‘moment’ to which Morrison refers occurs on page 175, and depicts the escaped slave, Sethe, upon being threatened with recapture, having killed and dismembered her infant daughter. Morrison describes the infanticide retrospectively, with ‘a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest’, a.k.a. the dying *Beloved*, whilst Sethe ‘held her face so her head wouldn’t fall off’.² ‘The details of this crucial event [...] remain ambiguous and obscured until halfway through the narrative’, with the absence of chapters further complicating *Beloved*’s non-linear structure.³ This article, in light of Morrison’s comment, will account for the ways that memory of the traumatic event, occurring eighteen years prior to *Beloved*’s opening, becomes rerouted, establishing a dual temporal occurrence where infanticide is both an event situated in Sethe’s past and resurfaces as a reminder in the

¹ *National Visionary Leadership Project*. ‘Toni Morrison: Motivation for Writing’. *Oral History Archive*, (uploaded 4 December 2008) < <http://www.visionaryproject.org/morrisontoni> > [15 April 2019].

² Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 175, 177.

³ Daniel Erikson, *Ghosts, Metaphor, and History in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 17.

present. Exploring how this dynamic accounts for the text's fractured structure, I suggest that continued experience of the event occurs because of Sethe's unacknowledged trauma. In resisting explicit location and discussion, Morrison's 'event' adheres to Luckhurst's trauma rhetoric where 'trauma is anti-narrative', a theme that 'play[s] around with narrative time, disrupting linearity, suspending logical causation, running out of temporal sequence'.⁴ This article interrogates the ways in and the ends to which Toni Morrison's *Beloved* attempts to account for the nature of traumatic experience.

The plethora of *Beloved* trauma readings to date fail to conduct a comprehensive reading of narrative structure in light of Freud's 'Pleasure Principle'. The Pleasure Principle describes how the human psyche orders itself in response to trauma, whereby 'pain' is suppressed into the unconscious so as to avoid interaction and acknowledgement and is consequently replaced with 'pleasure' inducing memories.⁵ For Freud, 'the course of mental processes is automatically regulated' when 'an unpleasant state of tension [...] determines for itself such a path that its ultimate issue coincides with a relaxation of this tension'.⁶ However, for Freud, it is inevitable that the 'instinct of the ego for self-preservation [becomes] replaced by the "reality-principle"', an apparatus that 'demands a "postponement of satisfaction" in favour of "the temporary endurance of pain"' : a means of eventually overcoming trauma. In this, immediately realised 'pain' produces a briefer process of suffering in comparison to the Pleasure Principle, that in its production of immediate relief, means that the individual experiences repeatedly resurfaced pain that 'long persists'.

I argue that Morrison's narrative embodies and adheres to Freud's psychic response to the unwelcome retrieval of Sethe's repressed infanticidal guilt. In my reading, the character

⁴ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 79, 71.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by C. J. M. Hubback (London: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922), p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1.

of Beloved becomes a transmutable manifestation of trauma; moving from a representation and projection of Sethe's augmented memory to the originally unexposed and disconcerting memory. Within my Freudian reading, I isolate key moments in the text, beginning with Sethe's refusal to look back; the competing narratives of the infanticide; and then the tempestuous breakdown in the Sethe-Beloved relationship, that signals the harm incurred by undealt trauma as facilitated by the Pleasure Principle. Given the fact that trauma presents a problem and does a type of violence to narrative stability, often existing on the edge of narrativisation, my own argument will follow the same logic in bringing traumatic evocations into a relationship that is not always clearly given in the novel. As such, my close reading may move around in its analysis. Moreover, because an aspect of traumatic cognition, memory and perception, reveals an unlikely logic that often connects experiences together through association, such critical analysis of this in a textual format can inevitably (and correspondingly) appear disjointed in its presentation. The fact that the text is recapitulative in its organisation, where connecting textual clues, interpretation, and clarity become retroactively distinguishable, means that this article similarly produces a back-and-forth effect in its analysis.

To avoid what Paul Earlie deems the psychoanalytic tendency towards an 'obscured [...] engagement with materiality of the "real"', I defend my position as being inextricable from narrative structure, thus ensuring a specifically literary grounding.⁷ According to Earlie, the 'mechanical and rigid application of psychology theory' means literary psychoanalysis risks sanctioning a textual diagnosis, where fictional characters are reduced to and erroneously interpreted as real-life sufferers and victims of mental health disorders.⁸ To circumvent pathologising Sethe, I focus on the relation between traumatic experience and

⁷ Paul Earlie, 'Psychoanalysis and Literature: The Challenge of Cliché', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 282.4 (2017), 381-84 (p. 383).

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 383

narrative expression, demonstrating the ways trauma effects and disfigures narrative. In reading Sethe's psyche as a Freudian synecdoche of Morrison's narrative structure, I rely heavily on Cathy Caruth and Roger Luckhurst's trauma theory. The self-referential nature of literary trauma, in its ability to symbolise, 'according to Caruth [...] a mode of representation that textually *performs* trauma,' informs my analysis of Morrison's structure of fictionalised infanticidal pain.⁹ Trauma refers to a 'catastrophic event in which the response to [it] occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of [...] intrusive phenomena'.¹⁰ Since its 'depart[ure] from its original disciplinary ground' of clinical psychopathology and consequently 'cross[ing] boundaries between various fields and discourses', Christa Schönfelder identifies trauma as being 'increasingly, even notoriously complex and slippery'.¹¹ Given then the plurality of trauma theory, it will be serviceable to illustrate beforehand the areas of both disciplinary and scholarly alignment that this argument will follow.

This article intersects with Caruth's 'belated' nature of suppressed trauma, informing my interrogation of Sethe's disbelief in her murderous abilities, evident in her responsive shock where 'she did not move' and 'stayed still'.¹² Also, the text's didactic ending where *Beloved* foretells how 'this is not a story to *pass* on' indicates the possible circulatory nature of Sethe's infanticidal trauma, where traumatic 'experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs', results in a repeated imposition constituted by 'issues [that] challenge [...] the capacities of narrative knowledge'.¹³ Whilst *Beloved*'s concluding phrase is indeed capable of multiple and divergent interpretations, I read it as reflecting how psychologically 'the

⁹ Christa Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), p. 31.

¹⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 11.

¹¹ Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words*, p. 28.

¹² Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 8. Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 178.

¹³ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 324 (emphasis added). Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, pp. 80, 83.

transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory' allows 'the story to be verbalized and communicated [and] integrated into one's own [...] knowledge of the past', but 'may lose [...] the precision' of actual events.¹⁴ Luckhurst's reading of *Beloved* also aids analysis of the textual resistance to a coherent reading, which he identifies as resulting from the narrative's projection of characters' traumatic history. Drawing on the two, I suggest that accurate recall, documentation, and narrativisation lay beyond trauma. By 'narrativization' I refer to Sethe's memory narrative of the 'event' and Morrison's textual narrative construction. When trauma, 'can only be conveyed by the catastrophic rupture of narrative possibility',¹⁵ its impact renders divulgence 'no longer straightforwardly referential',¹⁶ causing 'a breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world'. However, whilst Caruth places 'emphasis on the incomprehensible and unspeakable aspects'¹⁷ of traumatic comprehension, for Luckhurst, it 'generates narrative possibility just as much as impossibility, [as] a compulsive outpouring of attempts to formulate narrative knowledge' can 'seek to explicate the trauma', thus leading to acknowledgement and by extension potential rehabilitation.¹⁸

The majority of *Beloved* trauma readings focus on the African-American 'ancestral pain', where denied 'historical past',¹⁹ derives from the traumatic effects pertaining to 'the horrors of slavery'.²⁰ My reading, however, focuses on Sethe's subjective trauma of having committed infanticide. Nevertheless, I do acknowledge the trauma's contextual contingency,

¹⁴ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 153.

¹⁵ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 81.

¹⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, pp. 11, 4.

¹⁷ Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, pp. 83, 79.

¹⁹ Lynda Koolish, "'To Be Loved and Cry Shame": A Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *MELUS*, 26.4 (2001), 169–195, (p. 173).

²⁰ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, 'Narration, Doubt, Retrieval: Toni Morrison's 'Beloved' *Narrative*, 4.2 (1996), 109–123 (p. 116). See also Caroline Rody, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, History, "Rememory" and a "Clamor for a Kiss"', *American Literary History*, 7.1 (1995), 92–119; Mae. G Henderson, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text', in *Toni Morrison's Beloved: a Casebook*, ed. by William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 79–107; James Phelan, 'Toward a Rhetorical Reader-Response Criticism: The Difficult, the Stubborn, and the Ending of *Beloved*', *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 39.3–4 (1993), 709–28.

in light of Sethe's need to keep her children 'where they would be safe'; away from a slave-subjugation that would 'work, kill, or maim you'.²¹ What is interesting to note however is how *Beloved* trauma readings do often employ the language of psychoanalysis, but without the sufficient development: psychodynamic input frequently features only as an acknowledged and not an elemental component of analysis. In particular, Nancy Peterson states that 'Beloved may be effectively linked to the Freudian concept of the "return of the repressed"', but does not develop this line of argument.²² In fact, this is the only mention of Freud in her entire article. Nevertheless, I draw on these previously mentioned critics because, although our arguments differ in content analysis and agenda, we intersect when the language of trauma coincides with and becomes suggestive of the psychoanalytic presence of the denied. This article therefore unpacks, investigates, and expands upon the areas of analysis that have been overlooked within the larger trajectory of research pertaining to the presence of suppressed memory in *Beloved*. In particular, trauma readings specifically exploring the Pleasure Principle within *Beloved* scholarship also remain limited. Sherietta Farron Murrell's thesis employs the Principle but to little avail, with her ineffective definition reading: 'when I refer to the Pleasure Principle, the phrase means more than sex in this instance.'²³ Similarly, Jonathan Halper's interpretation of *Beloved*'s pre-Oedipal desire, insufficiently defines the principle as 'an act [where] the underlying id takes to skate around the restricting standards forced upon it by the superego', without providing any further explanation or engagement with the Freudian concept.²⁴

²¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 295.

²² Nancy J. Peterson, *Beloved: Character Studies* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 57

²³ Sherietta Farron Murrell, *Cyclical Time and The Pleasure Principle in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Beloved* (MA Thesis, University of Georgia, 2006) <

http://purl.galileo.usg.edu/uga_etd/murrell_sherietta_f_200605_ma.> [Accessed 14 April 2019], p. 1.

²⁴ Jonathan Halper, 'Misery and Company: Sigmund Freud's Presence in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *Articulāte*, 17.6 (2012), 42-47 (p. 44).

In thinking through the possible limitations of my chosen framework, I acknowledge the problematic territory that is Freudian psychoanalysis. Critics of this initial and, not to mention, for many researchers, unsatisfactory interpretation of psychology, hail Freud's findings, although on the one hand ground-breaking and revolutionary, and, on the other, slightly naïve and one-sided. For instance, as a theoretical model, psychoanalysis and its emphasis on the role of the unconscious is one of the most contested facets of Freudian psychoanalysis. In particular, the highly speculative nature of Freud's deductions in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is judged as being an 'elusive theory' which Alan Bourassa calls 'an impossible project' in its discourse.²⁵ Whilst untouched upon in this article, Freud's emphasis on libidinal drive in the sanctioning of the pleasure principle and its death-drive proposition, also face scrutiny.²⁶ Reading *Beloved* through a psychoanalytic lens also raises issues with critical debates regarding race and gender. Claudia Tate claims that the application of white, and traditionally male-inspired, theoretical schemas can be reductionist and risks misinterpretation of both the black and the black female experience. For Tate, these anxieties pertain to fears that 'the imposition of psychoanalytic theory on African American literature advances Western hegemony over the cultural productions of black Americans, indeed over black subjectivity'.²⁷ As such the employment of Freudian psychoanalysis in literary application is not without its challenges, especially when a novel written by and about the black female experience is its object of analysis.

²⁵ Alan Bourassa, 'Blanchot and Freud: The Step/Not Beyond the Pleasure Principle', *Substance*, 24.3 (1995), 105-20 (p. 105). Bourassa characterises Freud's tackling of this issue as 'undaunted by the impossibility of his project', yet simultaneously 'entangled in impossibility and paradox'.

²⁶ Alan Boursassa claims 'Libido seems to be everywhere. It is what acts, what speaks, what conjoins-pure affirmation, an affirmation so relentless that, like the pleasure principle, it seems to allow nothing to escape its power', which Freud fails to sufficiently prove. See also Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). Laplanche resists Freud's mediation on the death-drive due to the overlooked incompatibility between energetic diminishment expected from desired extinction and the maintenance of pleasure.

²⁷ Claudia Tate, *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 192.

Beloved ‘incorporate[s] the [...] processes and uncertainties of trauma within [its] consciousness and structures’²⁸ when Sethe is ‘talking about time’.²⁹ In the scene that reveals Sethe’s temporal scepticism and refusal, indicated by her admittance about the troubling nature of time, whereby Sethe claims, ‘it’s so hard for me to believe in it’,³⁰ there is an evocation of a Conrad-esque ‘Delayed Decoding’.³¹ Originally coined by Ian Watt, this technique refers to how, in Joseph Conrad’s writing, narrative structure and character only become clear once a set of terms gets discharged in a text. Whilst Morrison herself identifies Delayed Decoding as ‘Conrad’s unspeaking’,³² Watt elucidates the literary strategy as an ‘adaptation of impressionistic techniques to narrative texture’ which ‘strives for the illusion of reality’.³³ By ‘combin[ing] the forward temporal progression of the mind as it receives impressions with the backward process of understanding [...] done through the consciousness of a protagonist’, Delayed Decoding produces a retrospective textual understanding for the readers.

In a similar way to how Charlie Marlow, the protagonist of Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899), exhibits an indeterminacy when, during an attack, he fails to register the identity of the object Conrad initially describes as ‘sticks’, ‘little sticks’, ‘these things’, and then finally ‘Arrows by Jove! We were being shot at’,³⁴ Morrison employs the technique of delayed decoding in *Beloved*, through the novel’s ‘sustained narrative repression’.³⁵ In

²⁸ Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), p. xiv.

²⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³¹ Ian Watt, ‘Pink Toads and Yellow Curs: An Impressionistic Narrative Device in *Lord Jim*’, in *Joseph Conrad Colloquy in Poland 5-12 September 1972*, ed. by Roza Jablkowska (Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, 1975), p. 12.

³² Toni Morrison, ‘Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature’, in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Angelyn Mitchell (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 368-98 (p. 375).

³³ Ian Watt, ‘Pink Toads and Yellow Curs: An Impressionistic Narrative Device in *Lord Jim*’, p. 12.

³⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Claremont, CA: Coyote Canyon Press, 2007), p. 59.

³⁵ Erikson, *Ghosts, Metaphor, and History*, p. 15.

particular, *Beloved*, in its fundamental structure demonstrates how ‘some things go. Pass on [and] some things just stay’,³⁶ where Sethe’s enigmatic relation to the past proposes a mode of presence and dramatisation for the consequent unarticulated and repressed circumstance informing textual structure. The ‘things’ that ‘stay’, are elusively contextualised by Sethe as referring to ‘what I did’, which, ‘even if I die [remain] still out there’; resisting narrative augmentation whereby ‘even though it’s all over – over and done with – it’s going to always be there waiting for you’.³⁷ Here there is a suggestive, yet non-discursive sanctioning; words seem beyond reach, and communication of referential signification simultaneously lays dormant but nevertheless powerful in its associative evocation. For instance, Morrison writes, ‘If it’s still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies’ because whilst there are ‘some things you forget [...] others you never do’.³⁸ There is both something present, and felt, but undescribed in the novel’s narrative plexus. However, it is worth noting that although the extended use of narrative circumlocution in Conrad’s writing is one of technical innovation, used to communicate, as Conrad put it in his Preface to the 1897 novella *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, ‘the stammerings of his conscience’ and not, as I suggest in my reading of *Beloved*, one of infanticidal traumatic expression and burial.³⁹ As such, the extent to which Watt’s articulation of Conrad’s style of deferred explanation can map onto Morrison’s text is limited, as it requires an interdisciplinary interpretation and approach. Conrad’s delayed decoding reflects style, and Morrison’s reflects content.

The iconography of ‘pictures’ and residual reminders of events that are implied by the expression ‘some things just stay’, suggests a form memory recognition and engagement that causes Sethe to relive, remember, and reaffirm that which she ‘did’ and that which Morrison

³⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 43.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 44.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 44, 43.

³⁹ Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), p. 145. Conrad’s preface provides a manifesto of his literary impressionism.

evasively describes as ‘never going away’.⁴⁰ In ‘circling the subject’, this moment in the text ‘betrays a degree of self-reflexivity; that is to say, it reflects upon the novel’s form’, whereby Morrison’s ‘buried’ narrative strategy evokes the way trauma can appear ‘prelinguistic’.⁴¹ Moreover, when ‘willed access is denied’⁴² in memory, ‘the process of repression, retained on lower stages of the psychic development’ is ‘cut off from all possibility of confrontation’.⁴³ According to Linden Peach, ‘the backbone of the novel is an occluded text buried within the surface narrative which the reader has to recover in order to make sense of the whole’.⁴⁴ Sethe’s initial desire to resist the past foreshadows the way when it comes to articulation of the ‘event’; she will inflate, obscure and avoid access to the truth. She will augment, or aestheticise reality as a way to screen traumatic experience. Painful occurrences and then their associative cognitive resurfacing are met with an effect Sethe calls ‘shameless beauty’.⁴⁵ This effect that simultaneously has the power to reconstruct memory into a more bearable image of ‘the most beautiful’ and ‘pretty’ associations and meanings also however, in its refusal of the truth, produces feelings that ‘shamed her’.⁴⁶ ‘Try as she might to make it otherwise’ Sethe’s need to refashion history by resisting pain results only in temporary relief, leaving her with the feeling that ‘she could not forgive her memory’ in its ‘shameless’ beautification and masking of hurtful events.⁴⁷

Sethe categorizes that which she leaves undisclosed and unrealised as an example of ‘re-memory’,⁴⁸ a second-order living where unconscious ‘energy operates’ and individual

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 43.

⁴¹ Valerie Smith, ‘Circling the Subject: History and Narrative in *Beloved*’, in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K. A. Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993), 342-355 (pp. 342, 349).

⁴² Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 153.

⁴³ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 7

⁴⁴ Linden Peach, *Toni Morrison* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 101.

⁴⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 43.

trauma can be collectively experienced (as well as exorcised). By spatialising feeling, individuals can wander into another's memory, share it, and pass through it.⁴⁹ For example, upon stating that 'anything dead coming back to life hurts', Morrison articulates the concept of re-memory or that which 'you bump into' and are consequently forced to confront and re-experience.⁵⁰ Whilst for Caroline Rody, the re-memory 'trope postulates the interconnectedness of minds, past and present', becoming an intensifier for 'collective memory',⁵¹ where indeed Sethe admits to encountering 'a rememory that belongs to somebody else', my argument aligns with Eugene Victor Wolfenstein's interpretation.⁵² For Wolfenstein, 'rememories [are] experiences that refuse to become memories, that live on, intruding upon the present' and become 'embedded in one's character structure'.⁵³ The differing interpretations of re-memory signal the fact that *Beloved* is as a 'plurisignant' text, with a 'concurrent presence of multiple as well as ambiguous meanings'.⁵⁴ The line 'if a house burns down, its gone, [...] the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world', supports Wolfenstein's interpretation and implies trauma's temporal continuance and resistance to denial, whereby a memory continues to play out, incurred by an unwilling associative pattern.⁵⁵ To experience trauma is to be in 'the grip of mechanisms of repetition',⁵⁶ where the event resurfaces, forcing the sufferer to re-experience and re-enact that which causes them associative pain. When stimuli associated with Sethe's trauma, a.k.a.

⁴⁹ Freud quoted in Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p. 466.

⁵⁰ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 42.

⁵¹ Rody, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, History, "Rememory", and a "Clamor for a Kiss', pp. 101, 97.

⁵² Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 42.

⁵³ Eugene Victor Wolfenstein, 'Recognition and The Souls of Black Folks', *Souls*, 7.3-4 (2005), 129-39 (p. 139).

⁵⁴ Karla F.G. Holloway, 'Revision and (Re)membrance: A Theory of Literary Structures in Literature by African American Women Writers', *Black American Literature Forum*, 24.4 (1990), 617-31 (pp. 618, 629).

⁵⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 43.

⁵⁶ Laplanche and Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 488.

the past, unfolds ‘before her eyes’,⁵⁷ we see how trauma ‘violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound’.⁵⁸ In the lines, ‘someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on’ and ‘you bump into a rememory’, there is a sense of unconscious triggering, where intentional suppression appears ineffective.⁵⁹ Thus, the intense ‘hyper-vigilance’, Luckhurst identifies as a means of traumatic containment,⁶⁰ discernible in Sethe’s disclaimer that engagement with the past means ‘it will happen again’ and the painful event ‘will be there for you, waiting for you’, explains textual narrative frustration, where Morrison evades coherency and linearity.⁶¹ The latter, along with the double-negative imperative, ‘so, Denver, you can’t never go there’, emphasises how Sethe’s opening resistance pre-empts the text’s status as an ‘anti-narrative’, where narrative augmentation derives from an attempt at ‘keeping the past at bay’.⁶²

When Morrison claims that ‘you know it all along’, in reference to the infanticide, it is because even though Sethe ‘*disremeber[s]* everything’ (an amalgam of misremembering and dismembering), Morrison plants clues indicating that which has been left unsaid.⁶³ The very structure and presence of textual burial in *Beloved* only becomes fully realised when Morrison introduces competing narratives surrounding the exact nature of the much discussed ‘event’. In particular, ‘the reader realizes only *gradually* what has happened’ and why it remains suppressed.⁶⁴ One such narrative clue and suggestively alternative rendition of events occurs when Denver’s fellow school children ask, ‘Didn’t your mother get locked away for

⁵⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, pp. 1, 11.

⁵⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 1

⁶¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 44.

⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 44, 51.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 140 (emphasis added).

⁶⁴ Pericles Lewis, ed. ‘Heart of Darkness’, *Modernism Lab* (Yale University, 2012), emphasis added. <<https://modernism.coursepress.yale.edu/heart-of-darkness/>> [27 August 2019].

murder?'.⁶⁵ However, as Morrison points out, 'you can barely find' the exact details of the murder because Sethe, with 'secrets—things she wouldn't tell; things she halfway told', refuses to tell 'all what happened'.⁶⁶ In 'disremebering', a term Luckhurst identifies as 'combin[ing] contradictory imperatives: to recall and forget, to dis-member and recompose',⁶⁷ Morrison reveals Sethe's psychological burial as being facilitated by the 'avoidance of pain'.⁶⁸ Sethe's memory conserves itself allowing for memory regression that is tolerable, and thus not complete. In particular, Morrison articulates how Sethe's narrative memory is elliptically contrived, by juxtaposing the subjective recall with the most narratively distant part of the text: 'when the four horsemen came'.⁶⁹ The moment the infanticide appears to be given most narrative exposition is in its recount from Schoolteacher and the slave catcher's perspective. Here, Morrison provides the incident with seeming realism, highlighting and suggesting that as readers we can only come close to or strive for a sense of narrative objectivity upon becoming detached from Sethe's recall and narrative perspective. For instance, this account appears measured in its panoramic depiction of events, ranging from identifying Baby Suggs standing 'about twelve yards beyond', to how 'Schoolteacher and the nephew moved to the left of the house; [the slave catcher] and the sheriff to the right'.⁷⁰ The action is unconstrained in its information, empirically indicating how after 'all four started toward the shed' they discovered 'inside, two nigger boys [that] bled in the sawdust' and then 'a third [that] pumped blood down the dress of the main one'. However, this shift in narrative perspective away from Sethe's troubled memory recall is nevertheless likewise subjectively biased. In particular, Morrison's focalisation of the white horsemen's hostility demonstrates this. For instance, even though in its detachment from

⁶⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 123.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 45.

⁶⁷ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 96.

⁶⁸ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 175.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 175.

Sethe's prior restricted and suppressed narrative exposition, this scene and its perspective provides greater clarity of events, the inclusion of racist vocabulary (indicated by the repeated use of 'nigger') is nevertheless informed by a dehumanising filter.

Morrison proceeds to explain Sethe's feeling that 'she could never explain' the 'truth' of the event, as according to the fragmentary syntax, 'Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him [Paul D], the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask'.⁷¹ The latter makes clear the obscurity of the event and for Luckhurst, 'is the closest we get to Sethe's account', but remains characterized by avoidance, evasion and delay. That which Freud describes as the 'economic point of view' that the Pleasure Principle produces for the individual, can explain why Sethe's memory appears 'evasive'. When the Pleasure Principle minimizes and seeks to avoid the 'psychic relations [to] external danger', the transmission of 'undesired' memories into the subconscious occurs.⁷² In trying to reduce the ways 'psychic trauma involves intense personal suffering', Sethe's narrativisation presents an elusive and corrupted version of events.⁷³ Here, Morrison formulates the relationship between the way Sethe exhibits narrative resistance to pain, and the reason behind it.

In Sethe's identification of Beloved, this tendency towards narrative modification resurfaces. As a character who cannot be securely located, and who for Andrew Levy, represents a 'resurrected [...] multitude of painful and unspeakable inversions',⁷⁴ ranging from the trauma of the Middle Passage, to an adaptive composite of other character's fears. Indeed, as Nancy Peterson claims, 'Beloved is an enigma' that represents 'various

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 192.

⁷² Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp.1, 7.

⁷³ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. vii.

⁷⁴ Andrew Levy, 'Telling Beloved', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 33.1 (1991), 114–23 (p. 114).

interpretations' concurrently.⁷⁵ Whereas Smith calls Beloved 'ghost, made flesh', within my psychodynamic reading, Beloved is 'pain, made flesh'.⁷⁶ Indeed for Lynda Koolish, Sethe 'unconsciously summons' Beloved as an embodiment of her narrative memory.⁷⁷ And for Mae Henderson, this 'summoned' version of Beloved is one that represents and reflects Sethe's narrative memory '(re)configuration'.⁷⁸ Upon stating 'she come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing', Sethe refuses to acknowledge the possible explanation and identity of Beloved as the rebuked murdered child and signifier of the return of the repressed. Warning about how 'the baby got plans' as a 'perceptual danger' at risk of inducing traumatic and guilt-ridden infanticidal association, Sethe minimises the potential impact of the harmful truth.⁷⁹ Beloved's identity as anything other than 'an expression of interest and satisfaction' is rejected, with Sethe confessing 'I don't care what she is' so long as Beloved's presence is able to 'massage away the pain'.⁸⁰ This introduces Beloved as a coping mechanism and a Freudian 'wish fulfilment' strategy.⁸¹ For Freud, psychological wish-fulfilment is an 'endeavouring to master the [traumatic] stimulus' that for the sufferer has become 'forbidden' and 'repudiated'.⁸² Sethe views Beloved as having returned to facilitate a need within herself, namely an infanticidal justification.

However, it is important to note that Beloved's function within the text and her relation to each character is multifaceted and subjectively determined. In particular, Beloved compels others to re-experience key (and buried) aspects of the slave experience. For instance, the

⁷⁵ Nancy J. Peterson, *Beloved: Character Studies*, p. 45.

⁷⁶ Valerie Smith, 'Circling the Subject: History and Narrative in *Beloved*', in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, p. 348.

⁷⁷ Lynda Koolish, "'To Be Loved and Cry Shame": A Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', p. 172.

⁷⁸ Henderson, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text', p. 91 (emphasis added).

⁷⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, pp. 54, 115.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁸¹ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 37.

⁸² Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: Dover Thrift, 2015).

effect Beloved has and creates on Paul D is one of redirected sadomasochism, enacting the libidinal damage incurred during slavery. Whilst the text predominately explores how slave sexual violence is lived out on the female body, Paul D (and indeed the male collective) in his loneliness, experience sexual perversion. In particular, Morrison writes:

And so they were: Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, Paul A Garner, Halle Suggs and Sixo, the wild man. All in their twenties, minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, rubbing their thighs and waiting for the new girl.⁸³

Here, Morrison shows how slavery reroots the libido into inappropriate places as a form of un-productive desire. When Beloved seduces Paul D, despite his affection and commitment to Sethe ('Paul. D had been forced')⁸⁴, it echoes the ways in which his slave history resulted in a loss of autonomous desire. It is Beloved who invades his space by demanding Paul. D's sexual subjugation:

"I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name" [...] while she hoisted her skirts and turned her head over her shoulder the way the turtles had, he just looked at the lard can, silvery in moonlight, and spoke quietly [...] "Go on back in that house and get to bed." "You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name." [...] "No." "Please call it. I'll go if you call it." "Beloved." He said it, but she did not go. She moved closer.⁸⁵

Beloved, in her sexual domination of Paul. D forces his behavioural (and sexual) memory into a form of social conflict in the present. Beloved propels herself into his world to enact the perverse dynamic of fetishised sexual powerlessness previously practised during plantation slavery. As the passive victim of Beloved's sexual advances, Paul. D thus must relive and confront the libidinal injury of his slave-past. Thus, Beloved's presence and effect is one of painful and highly personal confrontation and redolence.

The effect Beloved creates for and on Sethe, initially appears to facilitate and amend Sethe's regret. Beloved's 'thirst for hearing' and 'quiet devotion', to Sethe's rendition of

⁸³ Morrison, *Beloved*, p.13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 136.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 137.

how infanticide simply meant ‘put[ting] my babies where they’d be safe’,⁸⁶ creates a ‘perfect connection, [where] Beloved is not angry with her and [...] if Beloved can forgive her, then Sethe can stop remembering the rest of the past’.⁸⁷ The latter implies that Beloved exists as an extenuation of Sethe and her desires. In particular, the two appear indistinct from one another when Beloved professes: ‘I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her [Sethe’s] face is my own and I want to [...] be looking at it too a hot thing.’⁸⁸ The absence of punctuation here represents identity fluidity, where demarcation falters, indicating Sethe as having successfully self-fashioned and augmented the collectively perceived identity of Beloved. The previously physically *dismembered* Beloved, who dies during an attempted beheading, re-appears as the physically in-tact or *re-membered*, desirably redemptive daughter. Thus, initially Beloved symbolises tightly managed memory recall, which has been forced out into a reality and a self-image of Sethe’s inclination to avoid threatening recall.

Sethe’s eventual deprivation, when ‘Beloved [became] more important, meant more to her than her own life’ demonstrates adherence to the Pleasure Principle, whereby memory spills over and the ‘pain’ resurfaces.⁸⁹ What Farron Murrell deems as Sethe ‘seeking a recovered happiness’⁹⁰ in the rekindled mother-daughter relationship, which enables her to work ‘hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe’, falters.⁹¹ Beloved becomes a ‘stimulus too powerful to be dealt with’,⁹² whereby ‘plead[ing] for forgiveness’, is insufficient and fails to have ‘made the impression it was supposed to’.⁹³ Beloved as a fulfilled projection is a superficial and transient coping mechanism. By rekindling the

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 69, 68, 193.

⁸⁷ Peterson, *Beloved: Character Studies*, p. 50.

⁸⁸ Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 248.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 248.

⁹⁰ Murrell, *Cyclical Time and The Pleasure Principle in Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon and Beloved*, p. 1.

⁹¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 6.

⁹² Freud quoted in Laplanche and Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 466.

⁹³ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 284.

relationship, Sethe cannot augment the truth of the originally severed relationship to a lasting effect. This is because narrativized pleasure, or as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan puts it, ‘expiation’ of the ruptured mother-daughter bond, eventually transforms into the initially denied painful reminder of the causation.⁹⁴ ‘The slippage of the signifier of “Beloved” is discernible when she exposes herself as a pleasurable projection turned underlying pain, by tormenting Sethe in a parasitic antagonism.⁹⁵ When Beloved grows punishable, Sethe starts feeling that she would ‘give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back just one of Beloved’s tears’ and evidence the maternal love that ‘Beloved denied’.⁹⁶ As such ‘the pain [becomes] unbearable’, and Sethe becomes fixated on trying to please Beloved and ensure pleasurable relief, with Morrison describing how ‘Sethe’s eyes bright but dead, alert but vacant, paying attention to everything about Beloved’.⁹⁷ Beloved’s hurtful refusal makes Sethe realise that Beloved, who once ‘was loving and the [one] that had soothed her’,⁹⁸ turns into provoking presence with ‘such intensity that she almost devours her’.⁹⁹ For instance, soon the narrative Sethe feeds her concerning undying love and regret, leaves Beloved ‘uncomprehending everything except that Sethe was the woman who took her face away’.¹⁰⁰ Infanticidal resentment manifests in Beloved, transforming her into an insidious re-memory mechanisation and a problem of organisation, inducing an effect that forces Sethe to ‘[remember] something she forgot she knew’.¹⁰¹ Therefore, attempts to resist psychological pain are harmful; ‘wish-fulfilment’ obscures reality, and as an insufficient remedy gives way to heightened traumatic stimulus and reactionary effects.

⁹⁴ Rimmon-Kenan, ‘Narration, Doubt, Retrieval: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*’, p. 119.

⁹⁵ Peach, *Toni Morrison*, p. 102.

⁹⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 284.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 285.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 115.

⁹⁹ Levy, ‘Telling Beloved’, p. 115.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 298.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 61.

Although Koolish claims that *Beloved* ends with the characters ‘no longer refus[ing] the deepest knowledge of the meaning of their [...] past’,¹⁰² the conclusion, in fact, sees Sethe ‘forget[ing]’ *Beloved* ‘like a bad dream’.¹⁰³ This simile affirms her position as a continued trauma sufferer, doomed to endure the ‘way[s] in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have *passed* through them’.¹⁰⁴ *Beloved*’s ending monologue, disclaims that sustained suppression of painful memories ‘seemed unwise’, repeating how Sethe’s traumatic past ‘was’ and ‘is not a story to pass on’.¹⁰⁵ To ‘pass’ through traumatic experience without sufficient engagement and necessary confrontation, results in trauma taking possession of its sufferer and victim. Sethe suggestively succumbs to a similar fate by refuting the momentarily realised painful signification of *Beloved*. Further rejection of pain occurs in the expected echoed narrativized management, whereby following wilfully forgetting *Beloved*, Sethe ‘made up [...] tales, shaped and decorated them’.¹⁰⁶ The fact that *Beloved* is speaking confirms that trauma lives on: denial does not successfully erase the very event from which the sufferer consciously disengages. It is significant that the text ends in monologue form, a style so contrasting to the rest of the novel. Narrative experimentation demonstrates the limitations of language in relaying traumatic experience. As such, Morrison requires a *new* narrative expression and literary technique to facilitate the climatic view of trauma in its didacticism. Closing indications of Sethe’s potential ‘fate’ as a continued victim to the traumatic suffering and pain that will repeat itself, implies that trauma that remains unacknowledged, continuously haunts the victim, with extraneous stimuli of associative pain transmuting further.

¹⁰² Koolish, ““To Be Loved and Cry Shame”: A Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*”, p. 169.

¹⁰³ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 323.

¹⁰⁴ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 1 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 324.

¹⁰⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 323.

To conclude, *Beloved* accounts for the nature of traumatic experience through the ways Sethe's evasive and resistant narrative memory imitates the ineffectual function of the Pleasure Principle as a means of traumatic relief. Morrison articulates and represents the implications of repressed memory by creating a buried narrative form to represent the hidden yet simultaneously evocative painful memory of infanticide. In mirroring Sethe's augmented recall of events, *Beloved* self-consciously demonstrate and embodies the uncommunicable nature of traumatic vocalisation. By revealing ex post facto the nature of Sethe's trauma, and circumstances that determine her refusal in memory recall, Morrison lays bare the infanticidal guilt that remains buried in the text.

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