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**A Psychological Study of Gothic Fiction Based on Post-Traumatic Experiences**

**Case Study: The Protagonist 'Sethe' in Tony Morison's 'Beloved'**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master in Civilization and Literature.**

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## **Dedication**

**To my beloved Parents**

**Dear Father,**

**May Allah have mercy on your soul.**

## **Abstract**

This given dissertation entitled ‘‘*A Psychological Study of Gothic Fiction Based on Post-Traumatic Experiences*’’ aims to investigate and target the immense role of the traumatic experiences (especially of slavery as a psychological factor that may reconstruct the black peoples’ personalities and thinking. It attempts to tackle how these people are obliged to undergo the loss of their identities and not only face the brutality of racism, but their own society as well. The protagonist of the novel, Sethe, is a vivid example of the given case. As a black woman, she was destined to have a difficult life as a slave. Her first traumatic experience started at her very young age. Her second traumatic journey started when she killed her own daughter, Beloved, for the sake of saving her from the brutality of life, and the inhumanity in this world. This paper analyzes the effects of the first traumatic experience on the psychological state of mind of Sethe, causing the second trauma, and resulting in severe psychotic and mental disorders and turning maternal instincts from mother’s love into a killer. It also highlights the aftershock of the brutal experiences that is highly seen through the psychotic symptoms in Sethe, such as hallucinations and delusion embodied in the ghostly apparition; Beloved and representing the brutal past of Sethe, intertwined with her present.

Key words: psychology- trauma- gothic fiction- slavery- psychotic disorders.

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# **General Introduction**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

One's personality might be quite fragile. Throughout history, it has always been hard to define this mysterious part of the human psyche. The change in personality may cause a change in one's identity, and could lead to unpleasant outcomes. Such case could be exemplified through the exposure to certain mentally destructive experiences. Which may lead to a deep crack into the human soul. The whole process has not been decided yet, but the main problem is not lacking answers but it is the fact that there are no fixed criteria that could help set the steps of this psychological process and what is best than the slave narratives of the nineteenth century to set the appropriate environment for the given study. The African American Literature shed lights on the African history, in general, and focused on the crucial role of the black people in the lands of the New World. Racism, slavery and freedom, core elements of the writings of the African Americans, such as Tony Morrison.

Chloe Ardelia, was born in Lorain, Ohio, USA, on February 18th, 1931. Winner of many awards such as the Nobel Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award for her book *Song of Solomon*. She wrote many successful novels such as *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Sula* (1974) *Tar Baby* (1981), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998) in which her words mainly focused on the brutal experiences of the black people, including her own. Morrison used her characters to reflect the past, such as the protagonist Sethe, in her masterpiece *Beloved*, which represented a part of her own life.

*Beloved* successfully tackled the crucial aspects of life during the twentieth century, such as the evils of slavery and how it affected their personalities as a whole, especially women, who innately felt that motherhood is more of a burden.

The significance of this study is that it aims at combining and analyzing psychological theories in close relation to Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, and shedding light on the great

effect of slavery in destroying the identities of the enslaved black people. The novel greatly depicts the savagery and brutality of slavery and its effect on the lives of those poor people, who have been treated as ‘‘ The others’’, or non-human beings, for several years.

The main purpose of this study is to spot lights on the link between past traumatic experiences and the reconstruction of identities which leads to pose various inquiries . The main questions of the given paper are:

1. Can society influence the human psyche and identity?
2. Can past traumatic experiences affect and reshape the human personality?
3. Is it possible that childhood trauma can re-appear in the present and future causing severe psychotic disorders such as PTSD and psychosis?

It might be set as hypothesis the following points: First of all, society does play an important role in shaping and re-shaping the identity of the individual. It can also have a direct influence on his psyche. Secondly, since it can affect the individual’s identity then it can consequently affect his/her personality. Thirdly, According to different psychological theories related to trauma, childhood traumas do often re-appear in the adulthood phase.

According to Adriana Zühlke, this book is a mixture of emotions and reality, it shows through Sethe and her struggles that traumatic experiences may cause severe mental and psychotic consequences. This is to be given through psychological theories such as the looking glass theory, the identity problem and the Psychoanalytic Theory or Freudian Theory that focuses on digging through the text and analyzing it. Therefore, the descriptive-analytical method will be used in order to analyze the given data.

In attempt to provide adequate answers to the previously posed questions, this dissertation will be divided into two chapters. Their structure will be as follows:

The First Chapter: is the theoretical chapter in which a general overview of the genre of the book is given, along with its features and characteristics. In addition to a psychological approach to gothic fiction through trauma as a theory, and trauma as a main theme in gothic fiction, its definition as a psychological theory and its link to psychotic reactions that directly affect the psyche.

The second chapter, which is the analytical chapter, focuses on the protagonist Sethe, representing the destructive psychological power of past traumatic experiences by applying psychoanalytic theories in order to study the protagonist psychologically, as a woman and as mother with killing maternal instincts. The chapter investigates the post traumatic experience of Sethe and its effect on her personality and state of mind and eventually sees through her recovery.

## **Chapter One**

### **Gothic Fiction**

# Chapter One: Gothic Fiction

## Introduction

Supernatural powers, extreme violence, darkness and terror with ghostly interventions. Qualities that are thoroughly affiliated with what is widely known in the world of literature as ‘The Gothic Fiction’, a term that first came to exist in 1764, unleashing a tremendous and substantial tradition that is still highly powerful enough to intrigue and fascinate readers and audience for more than two centuries. Arousing one’s curiosity with its mysterious and terrifying plots and darkly settings. Not only scare us, but also, as a genre, mentally affect us using fear and psychological manipulation. The given chapter presents an overview of gothic fiction. It also deals with Trauma as a main theme in gothic novels, focusing mainly on collective trauma and personal trauma.

### I- What is Gothic fiction?

Various definitions explain gothic fiction. Nevertheless, the following one seems to fulfill the desired aim of the dissertation.

#### 1. Definition

Answering such a question would not be as easy as posing it. As stated by Harriet Guest, there are “two critical ingredients in Gothic literature – a benighted and powerless populace, and superstitious fictions which are fabulous, but not necessarily supernatural” (119-120). It is undeniable that one of the first words that may come to mind when uttering the term gothic would be the ‘supernatural’, but categorizing a story as of Gothic genre due to its supernatural content would not be wise. For there are many stories that include such content, and yet they are classified as Sci-fi, such as Superman or The Incredible Hulk. This leads us to the fact that the word Gothic may have different interpretations on different levels.

On the one hand, according to Lexico online dictionary the origin of the word Gothic is either French from the word 'gothique', or Latin from the word Gothicus or Gothi. The denotation of the word, as a subculture, refers to a group of people: 'the Goths, and their extinct language, which belongs to the East Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family'. 'Gothic' has its origins as an architectural term, applied to medieval buildings marked by pointed arches and vaults' (qtd. In Balk 3). A unique style of architecture that highly immersed in Western Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Regardless of the fact that the essential meaning of the term 'Gothic' has changed over time, its basic themes and motives have not, and are still present nowadays in different aspects. As in matter in fact, this subculture still exists as an identity of a minority of people, who chose to be called the 'Goths' living mainly in the UK, US and Germany, with their bizarre interest in darkness as their preferable entourage, as well as strange black clothes and sad facial expressions.

On the other hand, the term Gothic found its presence as a literary genre. A wild style of writing that explores the violence between what we stand in awe of and what we desire most. A post-medieval as well as a post Renaissance-phenomenon, which is characteristically modern. Sprung up, gradually, in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth century, thanks to the great contribution of the English writers. A distinguishable genre for its dark settings, such as ancient Victorian castles and wild landscapes, supernatural powers and spirits as well as terrifying fantasies. It became a realm of a critical and heated dispute since its first emergence during the Romantic period in 1765, through Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto*. 'An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. (Walpole, 24). As the title suggests, Horace made use of the gothic settings and themes, which is quite common in early gothic novels where the characters are faced with darkness and danger, mainly within huge buildings that could hold

perilous secrets. The kind of secrets that should never be revealed. Not only this, but they could be a playground for unseen and unwelcomed apparitions, i.e. ghosts, haunting the characters and may be the eerie assassins within the story.

## 2. Characteristics and Features

It is quite necessary to set a full list of specific elements that would decide the form of a certain genre. In order to help us determine to which literary genre does a specific novel belong. Many literary works may differ in terms of key motifs and traits, and yet are classified under the same literary genre.

The gothic genre is highly peculiar for its, perplexing, mystifying pieces of writing that have indistinguishable motifs such as extreme violence, unlimited powers and threats leading to another kind of element which is the scary atmosphere through the personality of the protagonist, as being isolated, endangered and sometimes cut off from the surrounding society. The fear and terror, as psychological experiences, may arose an alert and sense of what lays beyond reality and everyday life. Not to mention the presence of horror as well, which might be a dangerous feature that could endanger the reader mentally, in contrast to the effect of terror.

Another essential feature in the gothic realm is the wicked and diabolical setting. The gothic setting used to be highly intertwined with the medieval architecture and far away dark regions, such as in '*The castle of Otranto*'. Yet, it witnessed a remarkable shift in modern gothic fictions, from old terrifying mansions and castles in noticeably remote venues, into forsaken and deserted locus, such as abandoned houses or libraries. An example of these contemporary settings could be found in Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire* 1976 in which the characters are taken into a scary wooded place. Another example is Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* 1954 ; the setting of the story is within the heart of Los Anglos, at night. The protagonist

Neville lives in a normal house that turns into a place of terror when the sunsets, and zombies attack.

A common trait in gothic genre is what is known as the uncanny. Sigmund Freud elucidates it in his essay (1991) as: ‘‘ that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar’’. An unpleasant experience of fear of what seems to be real but it is not, what is real and caused by what is metaphysical, being lost between dreams and reality, and life and death. Readers of gothic fiction may experience such an anxious emotional state by being confronted with eerie events like death, dream-like visions, or creatures such as zombies or ghosts. Ghosts, generally, tend to damage our perception of time. As they seem to bring the past into the present through a curse or entreaty.

The supernatural is another key feature in gothic fiction that has been used in different past occasions such as in the writings of Shakespeare. Yet, writers of the gothic fiction make use of this strong element as a means to building suspense, doubt and uncertainty, as key factors of the gothic genre. Writers focus on the use of the two approaches of the supernatural, one is the ‘accepted supernatural’ as a part of reality, and ‘the explained supernatural’ in which the characters of the story only imagine supernatural situations or happenings that have logical explanations. The supernatural may be portrayed through sounds and gestures of unseen forces. Such as doors or windows that open and close by themselves, concrete things coming to life, and secret forbidden places. Using the supernatural in terms of unreal and imaginary creatures and effects is a successful method in provoking the readers’ imagination and shaking their mental state. Finally yet importantly, ‘the sublime’ is a vital component in gothic fiction. As described by Longinus, in his work *The Sublime*, it is a sense of "excellence in language" the "expression of a great spirit" and the ability to establish "ecstasy" joy, and excitement. The sublime may be generated through agony, and pleasure. An example would be admiring a scene that would captivate the reader. Alternatively, by admiring a masterpiece of art that

holds great meaning, such as John Martin's "The Great Day of His Wrath" provoking an eye-popping, apocalyptic view of the sublime.

### **III- A Psychological Approach to Gothic Fiction through Trauma**

Trauma is best represented through the lens of psychology but gothic fictions sets the appropriate platform for its discussion.

#### **1. Personal and Social Psychologies through Gothic Fiction**

The gothic genre tends to focus on targeting psychological issues since the 18<sup>th</sup>, century through exploring the mental health from different angles, and immersing on discrete awareness. The writers of this type of fiction might seem to use flat characters, like the character Dracula in Bram Stoker's novel. Yet, they have a tendency to fill them with depth, and meaning. The emotions, desires and consternations of these characters are generally embodied through other major and minor figures of the story, the supernatural and lifeless beings. All of these possibilities could be described as the eerie forces haunting the protagonists and causing them a state of paranoia, in certain cases. But this unpleasant experience that the characters may go through could lead to an acquaintance with two possible, and psychological, results.

The first phase is what is known as the liminal space, in which the character enters a threshold of moral or spiritual dimensions and changes. Through crossing this space, the character may reach the second psychological phase, that of the sublime. As Edmund Burk put it in his work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* 1757, one's imagination may undergo a sense of excitement and dread due to being acquainted with anything that is "dark, uncertain, and confused." The psychological aspects and views tackled through the gothic fiction are endless. The department of English at the University of Virginia, set arranged excerpts that are " united by a focus on the psychological

aspects of the Gothic in the broadest possible sense. ... They address such complex and overlapping themes as the mental and emotional portrait of the characters within the novels. The deep cultural anxieties that the novels reflect (and often attempt to work through), and the intense psychological responses that these works seek to elicit from their readers". These excerpts focus on four main sub-sections, starting with:

### **1.1 Terror and Horror**

Gothic fiction targets the mental and psychological response of the reader through shocking experiences within the story, in order to establish an aura of terror and horror surrounding the reader's self. This could happen by integrating terrifying or disturbing scenes. But one must not neglect the difference between both terms. Ann Radcliffe claims that the term 'terror' suggests a sense of oblivion and lack of certainty and resolution. In contrast, the term 'horror' suggests a dreadful and probably dangerous experience by adding brutality, savagery or evil within the story, which could be detrimental to the reader's state of mind.

### **1.2. The inner space and the presence of the heroin in gothic fiction**

Women have always been described as the dependent or the subordinate ever since Adam and Eve. But since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, gothic writings became the tool used to portray women's questions and identity as devastating forces that made the way to women's authorization. Michel Foucault once said that: "*where there is power there is resistance*" (qtd. in Hartmann ). The presence of the female heroin in gothic fiction, struggling in darkness and evil, is a way into destroying men's patriarchal order as a form of resistance to men's rule.

### **1.3 Architecture of the Mind**

The term 'gothic' was first used to reflect the dark and unique architecture of the High Late Middle Ages in Europe.

*'The castle of Otranto'* 1764 by Horace Walpole was the first piece of writing to introduce that captivating style of architecture into literature. This architectural space became an essential aspect of gothic fiction as it helps in creating a perception of unease and fearfulness by adapting the scary setting within the story. This architectural achievement is a direct path into the mind of the character, and reader as well. A fusion of the physical and emotional structure that shows mirrors the individual or social psyche through different architectural structures.

#### **1.4. Psycho-Social Concerns**

As mentioned above, gothic fiction is not only a way into the inner self of the readers, by extracting and provoking their psychological responses, it also is an embodiment of the authors' psyche. In addition, gothic fiction is also a demonstration of a social psyche during a particular time zone, epitomizing a specific (political, cultural or historical) problem, or fear during that chosen era, such as The French Revolution during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the people's anxiety about their place as a society, and as individuals

### **2. Personal identity**

The problem of defining personal identity existed ever since the existence of human kind. "A person possesses a mind. The mind does not have always to be conscious—a sleeping or comatose person is still a person—but there must at all times be the capacity for mentality" (Garrett 5). Some people believe that a person exists through feelings and emotions. While others, such as Garrett, argue that possessing a mental capacity is a clear confession of being a living person with a vivid identity, through the mental processes. John Locke adds that a living human being "*has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places...*" (Locke 335). In other words, not only having the mental capacity is enough for a person to truly exist but also s/he must have logic and a good sense of mental proper thinking. He also claims in his book *An Essay to Human*

*Understanding* 1689 that regardless of being integrated within the self, one's identity is yet to be fully formed throughout the person's life. As it is forever changeable, a person's identity is also formed through the everyday interaction with others. As in the words of the sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, from his "Looking glass self-theory": 'I am not what I think I am, and I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am.'

### **3. Trauma as a main theme in Gothic fiction**

The gothic fiction is considered as a vivid labyrinth into the human psyche, as it could manipulate it easily, by going through specific dark contexts and settings as a path to finding and digging through the human mental health. Representing this deep state of mind, through gothic images, is a way to raise the awareness about the possible dangers resulting from chaos and inhumanity when they take over the world. It also is a way to intensify and strengthen the readers' perception of fear resulted from psychological –nerve wracking- experiences, such as encountering a traumatic event, with long lasting effects, such as madness or insanity, by being buried deep with the memory. David Punter and Glennis Byron use this mental illness as a key factor in the gothic fiction, an emphasis on the grotesque, the macabre and, very often, the violent, digging into madness, dissolution, misery, and the endless pressures of the past upon the present. (qtd. In Genner par.3). Encountering a shocking experience could highly disturb one's mental state and completely manipulates the personality as a whole.

#### **3.1 Memory**

Each one of us has a vivid inner space in which we could store our knowledge and experiences that we gain through the everyday life. Pierre Janet, a French psychiatrist and pioneer in the research of traumatic memory, "viewed the memory system as the central organizing apparatus of the mind, which categorizes and integrates all aspects of experience

and automatically integrates them into ever enlarging and flexible meaning schemes” (qtd. In Hsu 13) while Freud regards memory as a container, merely for storing, Janet explains it as a processing capacity of all new information in regards to the already existing ones. Further adds that this capacity-container is a representation of the mental health. B. A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart explain Janet’s idea that

*“[h]ealthy psychological functioning depends on the proper operation of the memory system which consists of a unified memory of all psychological facets related to particular experience: sensations, emotions, thoughts and actions” (426).*

Memory is an important factor for the emotional and inner self; it is a guide into psychological traumatic experiences that the writers seek to present through narration, using different options such as flashbacks and ghosts. Janet divided memory into two categories; one that is habit memory, which is what Freud described as the container, only responsible for storing with no further investigation. While narrative memory is the unique human container, that is in charge of creating sense from the stored knowledge and experience. Janet comments on the matter by saying that:

*Memory, like belief, like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially, it is the action of telling a story. [. . .] The teller must not only know how to [narrate the event], but must also know how to associate the happening with the other events of his life, how to put it in its place in that life-history which each one of us is perpetually building up and which for each of us is an essential element of his personality. A situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated, has not been fully assimilated, until we have achieved, not merely*

*an outward reaction through our movements, but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organization of the recital of the event to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history. (661-62, Janet's emphasis)*

## **3.2 Trauma**

### **3.2.1 Definition**

Trauma is defined by Oxford, in general, as a wound. But, according to Sigmund Freud, trauma is:

*an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner. (Freud, Introductory 275)*

He also mentioned that “a psychical trauma is something that enters the psyche that is so unprecedented or overwhelming that it cannot be processed or assimilated by usual mental processes”. Freud suggested that the psychological trauma is a flooding experience that can only be buried within the traumatized person's psyche, and can hardly be removed. It may occur due to facing a disturbing event or an upsetting experience that could be badly harmful. Not only physically, but emotionally harmful as well. An experience that would be embedded within the mind, leaving a huge scare within the self.

The traumatized person may not realize the mental injury at the very moment it happens, yet, this person will gradually respond to it unconsciously through dream-visions, hallucinations and unexplainable behaviors. In other words, the person's response to the traumatic experience is repeated through time, as a reaction to pain and a "history that they cannot entirely possess" and the only way to it, is by expressing it and paving a way to it through memory.

### **3.2.2 Acting out and Working Through**

Both terms are based on The Freudian Psychoanalysis, and developed by critics such as Dominick LaCapra. Describing the psychological behavior of a traumatized person. When the latter is trying to 'act out' after encountering the traumatizing event, the person is still in state of shock and has not, yet, reached a phase of acceptance. Instead, he or she may experience an aftershock through dream visions and hallucinations, in other words, re-experiencing the even through time in an attempt to cope with it. Unknowingly, trying to work it out and reach what is known as redemption. Because in case the traumatized person does not 'work it out' it may lead to madness.

### **3.2.3 Trauma, PTSD and Madness**

PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder is a special mental condition resulted from experiencing a traumatic event that shocked the person's psyche as a whole. During the phase of 'acting out', the damaged person might seem as mad or lost. Psychological breaks, real-like dreams and mental breakdowns, a broken personality or what is known as DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder), all of these are possible criteria that the traumatized person may experience afterwards, especially when encountering a similar disturbing event.

### **3.2.4 Trauma and psychosis**

It has been recently proven that not only post-traumatic stress disorder is the only possible result of trauma, researches of the last decade indicate that psychosis, along with PTSD, are both “part of a spectrum of reactions to trauma” (Morisson et al., 345). Anthony P. Morrison in “Relationships between trauma and psychosis” suggests that what leads to psychosis or PTSD is the overall environment of the traumatic person including the social and personal behaviors (338-345). Morrison mentions that experiencing an unpleasant traumatic event may lead to a psychosis, which, in certain cases, could expedite a post-traumatic stress disorder.

#### **3.2.4.1 Definition of psychosis in relation to trauma**

According to EPI.CO, psychosis is defined as a ‘’ range of conditions that affect the mind, in which there has been some loss of contact with reality. A person with psychosis is, at times, unable to tell the difference between what is real and what is just in their minds.’’ In this case, the thoughts, feeling and emotions of the person with such a mental disorder tend to be severely damaged and crushed, that contact is lost with the real world. EPI further indicates that psychosis is mainly characterized by ‘’significant changes in a person’s perceptions, thoughts, beliefs and behaviors. Mathew Tull suggests two significant types of the most common psychotic symptoms of a person

experiencing a post-traumatic stress disorder or a psychosis. The first type is negative symptoms, or the absence of experience, it could be seen through the inability to perform and finalize simple daily tasks such as dressing up, or simply, not being able to express one's self through words (flat affect), i.e., having difficulty in speaking, sometimes for days, which is scientifically referred to as alogia.

The second type is: positive symptoms characterized by the existence and involvement of infrequent, remarkable sentiments, thoughts and behaviors. Mainly including hallucinations and delusions.

- **Hallucinations** refer to sensations of something that isn't really there.

*An auditory hallucination is an experience of hearing voices that aren't*

*there. A visual hallucination would involve seeing something that isn't real.*

*Tactile hallucinations occur when you feel something that isn't there.*

*Olfactory and gustatory hallucinations involve the experience of smelling or tasting something that isn't present.*

- **Delusions** are ideas that you believe are true despite the fact that they may be unlikely or odd. For example, you might believe that the CIA is spying on you or that aliens are controlling your behaviors or thoughts.

- **Disorganized behaviors** are also very common with psychosis. You may, for example, make up words, speak in unintelligible ways, or stand in an odd pose.

William Lee, a liaison psychiatrist at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth and a reader in psychiatric epidemiology at Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, and Marcus Tan an Academic Clinical Fellow at Plymouth University School of Medicine undertaking core training in Psychiatry, state in their paper *Trauma and psychotic experiences: results from a transnational survey*, that:

*People with a history of trauma are often seen in clinical practice, as are those who describe hearing voices or seeing things. However, the relationship between these problems is poorly understood. Associations between PTSD and first episode psychosis have previously been discussed on The Mental Elf. Psychosis and trauma also often co-exist (Schafer and Fisher 2011). Psychodynamic interpretations of psychosis as a defense against adverse life events (e.g. Martindale B. and Summers A., 2013) support the idea that trauma leads to psychosis.*

For more emphasis on the matter, Marcus Tan includes, in his essay, the results of a recent study executed by the World Mental Health Survey Collaboration (WHO), in 2017. The study aims at highlighting and studying the relationship between the traumatic experience and the psychosis reaction for multiple kinds of trauma. The study was carried out using a large number of participants from around the globe. And was based on applying the Composite International Diagnostic Interview procedure, i.e., (CIDI). The Participants were speculated for psychosis and traumatic experiences, and were examined and questioned on that basis. The final results were as follows:

- *71.8% (weighted) of respondents reported at least one traumatic event in their lifetime*
- *Among the participants with psychotic experiences, 90.5% reported at least one traumatic event*
- *Among the participants without psychotic experiences, 70.5% reported at least one traumatic event*
- *75.8% of traumatic events occurred before the onset of psychosis; whereas 19.2% occurred after it. The remainder occurred in the same year*
- *More traumatic events increased the odds of later psychotic experiences in a dose-response fashion:*
  - *those with 1 trauma were at 2.3 times the odds of reporting psychotic experiences,*
  - *while those with 5 or more episodes of trauma had 7.6 times the odds*
- *The effect size associated with each **type** of trauma showed large differences, In particular, results for being a “civilian in war zone”, and “relief worker in war zone”, suggested that these might be **protective** of future psychosis*
- *Incorporating PTSD or other diagnosed mental disorders into the analyses did not substantially change these findings. It did, however, mean that less trauma types were significantly associated with psychotic*

*experiences (11 in the adjusted models; as opposed to 26 in the non-adjusted).*

Regardless of the fact that it is indeed hard to diagnose an individual mental disorder with a standardized interview tool, the results of the given study above show prove that traumatic experiences presage a succeeding psychotic reactions. In regards to such studies, it is safe to say that trauma is, in fact, a risk factor for initiating psychotic disorder, i.e., psychosis and a post-traumatic stress disorder. The strong relationship found between trauma exposure and psychosis does in fact depend on when the trauma occurs and the nature of the trauma, rather than how many discrete times an individual is traumatized (powers et al). Assessments of PTSD related both to prior trauma and experiences of psychosis may improve patient well-being and give us an insight into the relationship between the two conditions.

### **3.2.5 Personal and collective trauma**

Trauma may be divided into two categories, personal and collective. Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000) specifically defines a trauma as:

*direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate (Criterion A1). The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror (or in children, the response must involve disorganized or agitated behavior) (Criterion A2) (p. 463).*

As stated above, an individual may face a certain kind of threat that endangers his well-being, physically or emotionally. The first reaction to such an experience is generally ultimate fear and awe. Moreover, as a result, causing a personal psychological disorder that may affect the damaged person only. However, there are other cases in which the traumatic event or situation may cause severe harm to a whole group of people, or a society, which is known as the collective trauma. The term refers to the collective psychological response to the unpleasant experience and indicating that: "the tragedy is represented in the collective memory of the group, and like all forms of memory it comprises not only a reproduction of the events, but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt to make sense of it."

The immense difference between the personal and collective trauma, is that the latter one not only affects the direct survivors of the experience but also affects the lives of those far away from the actual zone of the event, in terms of both time and space. And as a result, both damaged groups may have a different memory of what truly happen, and consequently, they could end up having different responses. But what is typically common between the two categories, is that both may attempt to reach the final stage of this experience, which is recovery.

### **3.2.6 Trauma and society**

### **3.2.7 Recovery**

As a final step, recovery is an individual experience that differs according to the damaged person him/herself. Recovery does not necessarily mean full redemption and freedom, instead, it suggests the ability to live in the very moment of the present and not having any kind of fear of being haunted and conquered by the past.

## **Conclusion**

The gothic genre tends to focus on targeting psychological issues and writers of this genre tend to fill their characters with so much depths and meaning. This helped Morrison present the struggles of a slave woman, as a wife and mainly as a mother. The novel shows the huge impact of trauma on the psyche in relation to memory. The consequences of trauma are highly seen through psychological mental disorders such as the lost identities, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosis. And an uncertain final stage, that of recovery.

**Chapter Two:**

**The Psychological Effect of Trauma on The  
Character Sethe in Toni Morrison's Novel *Beloved***

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Psychological Effect of Trauma on The Character Sethe in Toni

#### Morrison's Novel *Beloved*

#### Introduction

Toni Morrison, one of the best and most influential African American writers of the twentieth century. She was successfully able to present many critical topics through her writings. These topics had direct link to the African American society. The given chapter is a general psychological overview of Morrison's most famous work 'Beloved'. By first highlighting the historical background of the novel, then exploring the character Sethe as a mother and as a victim, and the effect of trauma on her psyche.

#### I. A Historical Overview of The Novel

Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved* attempts to be the voice for the voiceless, by guiding the readers into the realms of the African Americans' sufferings from the American system, for decades. 'In Toni Morrison 'Beloved' the relationship between history and memory is dramatized. She uses memory to explore and represent the various dimensions of slave life.' (ctd in Maschler 3).

Carmen Gillespie describes the novel as:

*Beloved* is the story of what happens in the silences of trauma. The novel reveals the lives of its two main characters, Sethe and Paul. D. Both are former slaves and both are trying to create lives for themselves in the wake of

decimating and pervasive personal histories. Both are forever marked by the legacy of their individual experiences with American slavery. (19)

Morison successfully brings forward the cruel past experience of the African Americans under the mercy of the American population. She invests in her characters by making the readers see the lives of the enslaved and tortured black people. The kind of slavery that first started in 1619 with the arrival of the black people to Jamestown, Virginia, as slaves. Becoming slaves for the whites merely due to skin color. Slaves in a modern society.

Regardless of the huge impact they had on the economy of the country since their arrival, blacks have only been treated as such. Until 1820, Missouri Compromise banned slavery north of the southern boundary of Missouri, which was a shocking threat to the institution of slavery in the South.

Since the beginning of their long journey as slaves, black Africans lost their human rights, regardless of whether or not they exist in a free state. They still were slaves to their masters. This gave birth to what was known as the abolition movement, which was described by Ferrell in her book *The Abolitionist Movement 2005*, as a strong reaction to the cruelty of slavery that crushed the rights of the African people. A critical problem that remained even during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, who during the civil war presented the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation calling to free all Africans in the country. Furthermore, he gave a chance to the African black people to participate in helping their new country, not as slaves, but as respectful soldiers in The United States Colored Troops (USCT).

At last, 1865 was the year of hope. The integration of the Thirteenth Amendment was what the Africans were wishing for since they first became slaves for the white American. The amendment banned slavery and finally ended it.

## II. A psychological View of the Character Sethe

Morison's novel not only depicts the lives of the blacks, but it also is a reflection to the writer's own life. She presented the reader with characters who suffered oppression and cruelty, not only because of being blacks but mainly because of being black women. These oppressed women had only one way for proving their existence through being good housewives, in regard to the absence of the father because of slavery. Morison focused on representing the sufferings of black women mainly through Sethe, the proud mother, and Beloved the ghost. As reflections to the immense aftermath of the brutality of slavery on both of them, not only physically but mainly psychologically.

### 1. 'Sethe': The Proud Mother

Sethe, is the protagonist of the story 'Beloved'. An independent strong woman who could barely remember her own mother, as she had only one memory left of her before she was hanged. The only vivid memory of her mother was when the latter tried to show her daughter (who could not even breastfeed her) a mark that somehow linked them together. As a teenager, Sethe was brought to Sweet Home. Married to Halle Suggs and a became a mother of four children who, due to the sufferings and the traumatizing experiences she went through, attempted to kill. As stated in *Reading Toni Morrison's Beloved 2013*: "...wife of Halle and daughter-in-law of Baby Suggs. [Sethe] attempted to murder her four children Buglar, Howard, Denver, and Beloved, in order to avoid having them taken into slavery" (McDonald 91). In an act of unexpected sacrifice and ultimate love, Sethe attempts to end the life of her children in order not to be taken into brutal slavery. Nevertheless, she only succeeds in killing (or saving) her two-year- old daughter, who only had a name after she dies, Beloved, written on her grave.

"She resides at 124 Bluestone Road in Cincinnati and is seemingly haunted by the ghost of her murdered child. She is also haunted by the trauma of her experiences as a slave"(McDonald 91). Although independent and proud, Sethe is always paranoid and haunted by her cruel past. She always tries to imprison it into her head, but she is always haunted by her past memories and traumatic experiences through the ghost of Beloved. The physical and mental brutality she experienced since childhood, made Sethe feel like a worthless body with no identity. Therefore, she tries to give a vital existence and value to herself by trying to save her children. And prove herself as a loving mom, regardless of her blurry relationship with her mother who was never there for her. Which is the only possible explanation to her behavior towards her kids.

Sethe's mother left her alone, facing the endless horrors of the world's cruelty by herself. However, this traumatizing experience taught Sethe to never leave her own flesh and bones in the darkness by themselves. Instead, she would be their shelter, guardian angel or even their savior by cutting their throats. She prefers ending their lives with her own hands rather than allowing evil masters to enslave them, and causing her children to encounter the same horrifying and traumatizing life experience that she went through. Beloved is the only survivor amongst Sethe's children.

## **2. Sethe's Relationship with Her Family**

The protagonist Sethe symbolizes womanhood, and the struggles a woman may go through, mainly for who she is. Sethe as a wife did love her husband Hall. However, eventually, ended up hating him for not being there for her when she needed him most. When everything collapsed:

"What Halle ever do to you? Halle stood by you. He never left you"

"What'd he leave then if not me?"

"I don't know, but it wasn't you. That's a fact"

"Then he did worse; he left his children"

"You don't know that"

"He wasn't there. He wasn't where he said he would be"

"He was there"

"Then why didn't he show himself? Why did I have to pack my babies off and stay behind to look for him" (49)

She did not forgive Hall for leaving her and their children behind, blamed him for the unforgivable sin that she had committed and for not being brave enough to protect her from everyone else "Sethe learns later that her husband, who disappeared, had witnessed her humiliation and could not survive the fact of it" (62). But, when everyone was against her, and at that moment of despair, Paul D. was there to make her smile; "Now she was laughing and so was he" (Morrison 92). For that, she loves him.

Contrary to her unstable relationship with men, Sethe has an unbreakable bond with her children. She truly is an affectionate mother, always tries to be fully committed to her beloved ones. Her daughter Denver, for example, is very close to her. She opens up to her and tells her about her unpleasant past and her sad experience with the evils of slavery. But due to her actions, Denver is always the lone child. Her brothers left and her mother took the life of her baby sister. "Sethe's daughter, Denver, also suffers because of Sethe's decisions. Denver has always been alone in the world, her older brothers having run away, and Beloved being killed at such a young age" (Larrick 3).

Not only sees them as her children, but Sethe believes them to be an inseparable part of her. For that, she sees herself as the giver, and taker of their own lives. This helped her decide what is best for her daughters, and instead of letting them suffer the brutality of life, she decides to end it for them. Regardless of how much painful it is, Sethe had no choice but to end the life of her own daughter to save her from the cruelty of slavery; "if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear happen to her" (142). Zühlke in *Toni Morrison's Novel "Beloved" An Analysis* 2003 comments on this saying that Sethe: "is a woman, she is a slave, she is black. These are the three circumstances, which determines and nearly destroy her life. But there is still another fact, which determines her life-her motherhood"(5). It could be said that Sethe's sin is an unforgivable-extreme image of love. A sin that she *is* proud of; "It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did tha'" (117). Her unstable state of mind is probably due to her first traumatic experience as a slave since childhood. It may have led to experiencing what is known as the First Episode of Psychosis. However, her maternal instincts and love, as a mother, were far stronger than reality.

*Beloved* 1987 does, in a way, show how much Sethe loves her children. And that huge amount of love could be Sethe's reaction to what her mother did to her. In other words, Sethe tries to give her kids what her mother failed to give her. Sethe truly wants to protect her children, because they are the family she never had before. Nevertheless, the act of killing her own flesh and blood deeply hurt her. Especially mentally. It hurt her so much that she wants to believe that weird woman who suddenly appeared in her life, to be the daughter she killed with her own hands. She misses her so much that she tries her best to devote herself to her. "We'll smell them together, Beloved. Beloved. Because you mine and I have to show you these things, and teach you what a mother should" (143). Sethe not only sees that ghostly apparition as her daughter, but as a bond between her past and present.

### 3. Sethe and Beloved The Haunter from The Past

The character Beloved is the ghost in the story, who is, according to some critics, believed to be the reflection of trauma and the past on the present of Sethe, the slave. "Beloved represents the past and the slaves of the Middle Passage" (Bloom 14). However, the most common opinion on the matter is that Beloved is the ghost of the two-year-old child that Sethe killed in order to save. "Beloved was the spirit of the deceased infant killed by her mother, Sethe Suggs" (Roberson 16) which is felt through the ghost's name and her questions about the past. Suggesting that she not only is Beloved the murdered child, but the hanged mother of Sethe as well. "Sethe seems to become the child while Beloved becomes the mother" (Gillespie 37). The extraordinary figure seems to recall the past traumatic experiences of Sethe, her mother as well as the African Americans brutal history. A dreadful past, marked by slavery, racism and darkness, which will forever haunt them.

The allegorical figure from the past is empowered through existing within the present of Sethe. She "both coddles Sethe and attempts to make her suffer. Denver's unfailing loyalty goes unnoticed. Beloved vacillates between behaving like a woman and acting like a child. Her actions are filled with anger and confusion" (Gillespie 37). She not only acts as a child, or a mother to Sethe, but in between her presence, she attempts to have her vengeance through harassing Sethe.

*«Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side?»*

*Yes. I was on the other side.*

*You came back because of me?*

*Yes.*

*You remember me?*

*Yes. I remember you.*

*You never forgot me?*

*Your face is mine. (Morrison 151-152)*

#### **4. The Post Traumatic Experience of Sethe**

##### **4.1 Sethe Her Lost Identity**

Slavery not only is a physical torture, but it also is a psychological threat, especially, to the slaves. *"Beloved, as it depicts the emotional costs of enslavement, shows the psychic consequences of the slave owner's denial of the slave's status as a human subject"*(Beaulieu 36). Morrison's novel represents the mental torture that the African American slaves must undergo throughout their lives. Due to enslavement, those people felt like nothing more than animals to be misused, or tools to be purchased and controlled, and eventually, lost their identity in between.

The protagonist of the story, Sethe, is a slave and a daughter to an enslaved and hanged mother. The traumatizing events that she has experienced completely affected both of her personality, and thus, her identity. She witnessed the enslavement of her mother, and her absence in her life. She later suffered from being enslaved, tortured and mistreated. Eventually suffering from society's cruel judgment, as they see her as a mere savage and insane woman, who could kill her own child with her own hands.

Her endless love for her kids made them seem as a part of her being, her own properties, and that only she has the right to decide how they live, and what is best for them, including death. But, Sethe's horrible experiences haunt her and feed on her every day. Her

memory always recalls the brutality of the past, and the loss of her child. Guilt keeps torturing her mentally and is able to destroy her identity bit by bit regardless of being aware of the reason behind killing her daughter *"if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear happen to her"* (142).

The traumatizing experience she went through encouraged her to decide that her kids must die before experiencing the same traumatic events. An act that she regrets, and yet would probably do again if she is given the chance to, because of being sure that death for the slaves equals mercy *"I couldn't let all that go back to where it was, and I couldn't let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher"*(116).

Sethe's past is engraved within her memory, and is revived with every breath she takes. *«It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that»* (117). Sethe dedicated her own life to her kids, she knew that regardless of losing herself to the slaveholders, as purchased material, no one can take her identity as a mother away from her. She adores her children and is willing to sacrifice everything for their own sake, even if it sacrificing their own lives for the sake of saving them from heartless power-hungry humans.

#### **4.2 Recovery and The Quest for Identity**

Toni Morrison never mentions or highlights the future in her novels, and in case she did, it is never a bright one. Yet, the end of the story of *Beloved* gave a glimpse of hope that Sethe may let go of the past. A cruel past that almost, completely, destroyed her.

*I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him say, "No, no. that's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to*

*line them up". I commenced to walk backward, did not even look behind me find out where I was headed (Morrison 137)*

Sethe's body is a symbol that marks the traumatizing experiences that she has been through, throughout her unhappy life. *"It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk—it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches"*(Morrison 57). She suffered the cruelty of slavery, body and soul.

The looking glass theory suggests that one's identity is formed through the interaction with others. Slaves' self-image consisted of a sense of identity loss because, due to slavery, they are always separated from their families. And end up regarding themselves as inhuman. Which is the case with Sethe, who was separated from her mother from an early age, and eventually, feared and neglected by the society around her.

The essential factor that helped Sethe recognize herself once more, was the appearance of Beloved. The embodiment of Sethe's past kept reminding her that she is a mother after all. *"Beloved took every opportunity to ask some funny question and get Sethe going. Denver noticed how greedy she was to hear Sethe talk"*(Morrison 46).

Sethe the slave, existed as a human being through her children. Her identity as a mother who would sacrifice life itself for the sake of her kids, would never fade away, which is a possible reason behind the disappearance of Beloved by the end of the story.

Collective trauma is shown through the women community who once turned their back to Sethe, but they eventually try to help her by first reflecting to their traumatic experience as slaves, and understanding her unexpected actions and then joining forces for the sake of ending the presence of the unwelcomed guest, who by the end of the story, is long forgotten. This

gesture is a massive step towards accepting their terrible past and admitting to themselves that their past is a part of their identity.

### **Conclusion**

The African American Literature is the voice to the voiceless black people who suffered the brutality of racism and slavery since ancient times. Toni Morrison presents those sufferings through the protagonist of the story. And presenting, through her reformed psychology, the aftermath of trauma, through the lenses of her personality mainly as a mother.

## **General Conclusion**

## Conclusion

Tony Morrison successfully invests her own life experience in her attempt to put the experiences of the enslaved black people into words and prove that these harsh engravings not only are linked and shown in their bodies, but through their souls and personalities as well.

Morrison, through her novel, tried to give a voice to the voiceless. The oppressed minorities who have suffered the evils of racism and slavery for ages, through a revival of the brutal past

This dissertation gives insight into the past traumatic experiences of the black people who, despite being born free, have found themselves at the very bottom of society along with other utilized creatures. Such people had no other choice but to endure the pain of losing their identities and freedom and live a miserable life filled with pain, terror and horrors.

The protagonist of the story, Sethe, is the main character who clearly shows the most destructive aspects of living a brutal life as an enslaved woman. She had no other choice but to undergo a series of unfortunate cruel events such as torture and rape, and eventually deal with their consequences. Among which, an endless fear of the future, that her own children will have to experience the same life that she hates most.

The traumatic experiences that characterized Sethe's past resulted in great mental harm. She saw salvation in death rather than life. And decides to save her daughter by killing her. but the dead beloved returns as a ghostly apparition haunting the living ones and representing the past into the present.

The traumatic memories of the slaves, enslaved them mentally, through their memories. Sethe loses her identity and only sees her through her children. Therefore, she considers them as a part of her. And tries to protect them no matter the cost. While Beloved, the

ghost, tries to find her long gone identity as a living creature and as a daughter through the present.

Toni Morrison, successfully, presents the outcomes of past traumatic experiences on the psyche. Her novel outlines the stages of the psychological and mental disorders as a reaction to the past brutality that lives within the human self. She was able to prove that the past is, forever, linked to the present and the future. And that the evils and horrors of racism and slavery do possess an immense power capable of destroying and reconstructing the human personality as a whole.

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## Appendix I

### A Summary of *Beloved*

*Beloved* is a novel written by Toni Morrison and published in 1987. A novel based and inspired by the real story of an African American woman, Margaret Garner, who escaped slavery in 1856 by settling in Ohio, but before her recapture, she murdered her daughter to save her from slavery.

The story opens in 1873, in Ohio. It mainly revolves around the protagonist Sethe, an African American strong woman, wife to Halle Suggs, a loving mother of four kids, and a slave under the mercy of her master, known as the ‘schoolteacher’. The memories of Sethe are told through flashbacks. She attempt to escape with her family from their monstrous owner, but along the way, they are captured by their owner. The immense fear that took over Sethe at that very moment encouraged her sense of motherhood to end the lives of her children, as an act of endless love and sacrifice, too keep her children save from the brutality of slavery.

Sethe only succeeds in ending the life of her two-year-old child, the scene frightens schoolteacher and he decides not to take crazy Sethe back with him. The murdered child only gains a name after her death, as Sethe inscribed the name *Beloved* on her tomb. The only seven letters she could pay for, as every letter costed her more flesh. After the incident, Sethe resides with her family in Ohio.

*"124 was spiteful. Full of baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims" (1)*

Beloved, the ghost of the murdered baby, haunts their scary house at 124 Bluestone Road, and is believed to be the reincarnation of the long lost daughter because the ghost claims to be named Beloved.

*"The rays of the sun struck her full in the face, so that when Sethe, Denver and Paul.D rounded the curve in the road all they saw was a black dress, two unlaced shoes below it, and Here Boy nowhere in sight"(36- 37)*

The family believe her, as she recalls the past memories that Sethe kept them imprisoned within her mind. And she is only accepted by the daughter Denver, who considers her as a sister. It was the only reason that made Sethe allow Beloved into the family. While Sethe's partner Paul D, is the only one who disapproved of her existence with them. He is later told about the murder of the baby. Paul D's concern and fear takes over him and he separates with Sethe for good.

Due to her actions, Sethe is considered as a crazy heartless woman. She loses the love of the ones around her along with her job. She ends up as a hostage to Beloved, who keeps feeding on her through mental torture. As a way to get her revenge. At first, the women community give their back to Sethe. But, as time goes by, they open their eye to the truth and facts. Eventually deciding to gather forces and help Sethe and her family to get rid of the unwanted ghost, who suddenly disappears while the women try to stop Sethe from killing a man she mistook for the schoolteacher.

The plot ends with a new phase. Paul D finally comes back to look after Sethe, and Denver takes a fresh step into the out world.

## Appendix II

### A Biography about Toni Morrison

Originally named as Chloe Ardelia Wofford, and known to the world as Toni Morrison. Born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, USA, to George and Ramah Wofford. Originally from Georgia and Alabama.

Morrison was born during the period of Great Depression in USA, in a happy family. Her life was not always filled with happiness, but she had a joyful childhood. Her mother was an independent woman who was a member of a book club and strongly believed in justice. While her father was a good family man who tried his best to afford what his family needed.

Barbara Kramer cited in her book *Toni Morrison: A Biography of A Nobel Prize Winning Writer*:

*Although times were hard, Chloe's childhood was not bleak. The Wofford home was filled with music. Ramah Wofford was in the church choir, and she was always singing around the house- Jazz, Blues, Gospel music, and Opera. Chloe's grandfather, John Solomon Willis, played the violin and for a while had supported his family with his music.*

Regardless of living in slavery, Morrison's family never let go of life. They always tried to enjoy it the best they could, regardless of the fact that they had no right to live as normal human beings. However, they still did their best in trying to hold on to their traditions through songs, storytelling and reading.

These factors had a strong impact on Morrison's upbringing and education; they were means to teach her the African American traditions through folklore and myths, in addition to what she learned at school. As blacks who suffered the cruelty of slavery, Morrison's family were very responsible and caring. All of this helped in shaping Morrison as a person, and as a great writer. She started working at an early age, to support her family and to prove that she is a responsible family member.

Since childhood, Morrison always loved to read, "By then she was reading all the great Russian and French novels as well as novels by English writers Jane Austen and American novelists Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather, and William Faulkner" (Kramer 16,17) and showing a great interest in becoming like them.

Toni's mother always pushed her child to focus on her studies. And she consequently became the first woman to attend college «After high school, Morrison attended Howard University, where she studied English and classic literature in preparation for becoming a teacher» (Learning section 2)

Her college was mainly for blacks, and yet, the works of the black writers were never allowed in American libraries.

So, Toni had access to merely classics written by white American and English writers, like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Shakespeare.

Slavery was planted everywhere, but Toni found hope in the theatrical group that she joined in college. This gave her the chance to travel and see different places in the South.

Later on, Morrison graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature and minor in classics in 1953. And in 1955, she obtained her master of arts degree in English from the university of Cornell in N.Y. «After completing her BA at Howard, Morrison studied at Cornell University, where she received a master's degree in English» (Li 13).

She taught English at Texas Southern University and at Howard University as well. And got married with Harold Morrison in 1958.

Toni Morrison was not only a brilliant writer during the 1950s, she was also considered as a vivid historian due to witnessing the pre-civil rights era. John Duvall states in his book *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* that:

“What I attempt to do in this study is to see Morrison not only as a novelist who has written about history, but also as a historical figure in her own right. From this perspective, I argue that it does matter

to her work that she grew up in pre-civil rights America, just as it matters that she became a writer in post-civil rights America (ctd in Jefferson 46).

Morrison never knew that she will truly be a successful writer. But what truly happened is that she became one the best African American novelists. What helped shaping this brilliant writer was her entourage at home and where she studied, along with her cruel experience with slavery.