

A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING IN TONI MORRISON'S BELOVED: TRAUMA, HYSTERIA AND ELECTRA COMPLEX

Sufyan AL-Dmour

ABSTRACT: *Psychoanalysis seems to be the most suitable approach to analyze and interpret Toni Morrison's Beloved. Freud is the founder of this theory in which he was able to explain human behavior through dreams and unconscious symptoms. Beloved is recognized as one of the most modern novels to apply psychoanalysis theories. In this research, I am going to explain these theories in the novel through characters and some important incidents that occurred in a great part of the novel. Sethe is the central character in the novel, she was influenced by her actions, especially killing her innocent daughter. It was evident that she had experienced a harsh treatment in her past. She suffers from slavery, oppression and raping in Mr. Garner Sweet Home in Kentucky. Trauma, hysteria, Oedipal complex are very clear to readers as psychological symptoms in Beloved. Many critics have written and discussed the theories of psychoanalysis in the novel such as Kristin Boudreau in her article "Pain and the unmaking of self in Toni Morrison's Beloved". She asserted that "People attempted to find an outlet to help them to clear out their painful experiences and hurtful past". Sethe released her negative emotions and her stored desires by killing her innocent daughter. In the end, Many readers believe Morrison's novels are the establishment of her envisioned tradition. She challenges and requires the reader to accept her on her own terms.*

KEYWORDS: psychoanalysis, sethe, hysteria, slavery, oedipal complex, holocaust

Psychoanalysis in literature builds on Freud theories of psychology, which help readers simply interpret literary texts. Typically, Freud encourages his patients to talk freely on his famous couch regarding their symptoms and to describe exactly what was on their mind. Freud was the pioneer of psychoanalysis, a method for treating mental illness and also a theory which explains human behavior. He believes that the unconscious mind is the storehouse for hidden desires, emotions, ambitions, and fears (Bressler 90). This school of literary criticism asserts that we can read literature by applying the methods of psychoanalysis both to literary characters and their authors. This could be by treating the work like a dream and interpreting the content to uncover the hidden meaning, fulfilled through a close analysis of the language and symbolism. Morrison's *Beloved* is recognized as one of the most successful novels in the Afro-American literature. A writer who is compared to other great novelists such as, William Faulkner and others. She became the first African American to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 for her novel *Beloved*. Morrison is the one who helped bring African American literature and culture into the recognition of the mainstream reader, through her fictions.

My research focuses on the psychoanalytic theories that help interpret and explain Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. A question centered on my head: Is psychoanalysis the best way to understand the message of the writer? The novel tells the story of a black girl who suffers from slavery in Mr. Garner Sweet Home in Kentucky. She escaped to Cincinnati as a result of the oppression she had suffered there. After 28 days of freedom, a group arrives to take back her and her children under the Fugitive Slave Act, which gave slave owners the right to pursue slaves across the state. She killed her unnamed daughter because she was afraid of slavery in

Sweet House especially after the death of Mr. Garner and the cruel rulings of Mrs. Garner brother School teacher.

Readers of *Beloved* may use psychoanalysis to better understand the thoughts and actions of its characters, many of which could be considered deeply psychologically disturbed. Regardless of the reader's strategy, examining *Beloved* through psychological symptoms will undoubtedly shed some amount of light on the complicated relationships and philosophical nature of the novel.

The main subject that would be discussed through a psychoanalytical approach would be the part of the novel where Sethe murders her baby. This act demonstrates in the most awful way just how bad slavery must have been to the African Americans. If a woman was to cut the throat of her own child, the mind of that woman had to have been severely damaged. This incident also allows the reader to enter the mind of Sethe and attempt to not only imagine her position but consider it. In other words, the way Morrison explains slavery forces the reader to feel evil for Sethe, not see her as a murderer. It can be possible through Sethe asks the ghost for forgiveness, and she thought that she by killing her, she is protecting her from being a slave and raped. The psychoanalytical approach could be then further related to the other important aspects of the novel.

Moreover, Feng Yi contends in his study *Dramatizing Trauma in Resistance to Postcolonial Hegemonic Culture* that: "Toni Morrison did not stop at depicting the traumas, she in fact used magical techniques to bring the dead back to the world to dramatize the traumas and focused on the causes for these traumas, that was, the hegemonic culture in colonialism and post-colonialism countries..." (Feng 10). When Paul D saw Sethe's scars on her body that take the shape of a chokecherry tree, he reflects how harsh life with them at Sweet Home. Thus, trees had different images in the novel. Schoolteacher's men bind, burn, and shoot Sixo near the trees that he and Paul D found trusting and inviting. And while trees bear the blossoms that lead Paul D to freedom in Chapter 10, they also bear the killing victims that haunt Sethe's memory. Paul D regards Sethe's scar--tissue tree with irony. Since white men have reimagined trees as sites of brutality, thinks Paul D, Sethe cannot pretend the ugliness and brutality of her wounds by seeing her scars as a tree.

The unconscious is believed to be the most important Freudian contribution to psychoanalysis, and it has to be connected with the idea of repression which serves as a cover for the unconscious wishes and traumas. For this reason, the symptoms reveal the repressed unconscious. Toni Morrison focuses on social trauma caused by racial repression that black African citizens suffer from in America. Sethe the protagonist was born in the south to an African mother she never knew, she is sold to the Garners who practice benevolent kind of slavery on her, especially, when Mrs. Garner appointed her sadistic brother-in-law after the death of Mr. Garner. A place where children are not allowed to be with their mothers and used to call all black women Mamma. Also, a place where you have to pay in order to be free. Halle had to work every Friday in order to have the that has managed him to replace his old mother Baby Suggs by Sethe. Blacks were treated like animals which live better than them in Sweet Home. This quote explains what Sweet Home means to them or how it becomes after the death of Mr. Garner " if you go there, and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there . . . it's going to always be there waiting for you (Morrison 18). Filiz Korez is another researcher who published a psychoanalytical study about *Beloved*, he elaborates the effect of

repression through the novel. He thinks that: "The return of the repressed marks the process in which the repressed events and memories reawakened. The arrival of Paul D from the Kentucky plantation called Sweet Home, reappearance of Beloved are signs of the return of the repressed for Sethe"(Kortez 82). As Paul D arrived at 124, Sethe remembered the cruel incident that happened with her in Sweet Home particularly when the nephews of school teacher milked her by force. Beloved as well compelled her to remember her painful past. Hence, Kortez highlights that Beloved and Paul D links her present with her past while Denver serves to link her present with her future (Kortez 85).

Another analytical point of view comes from Deborah Ayer Sitter in her essay "The Making of a Man: Dialogic Meaning in Beloved". She explains: "The book was not about the institution –Slavery with a capital S.It was about these anonymous people called slaves. What they do to keep on, how they make a living, how they are willing to risk and however it lasts "(Sitter 17). As Sethe ran from Sweet Home, School Teacher and his nephews; Slave Catcher, the Sheriff, and four horsemen were following her.She cuts her daughter's throat and tried to kill her boys Bulgar and Howard and to throw Denver against the wall. It is obvious that Blacks do not have the right to read or to know what happens around them daily, they are existed only to serve whites and to get punished by them.In the novel, Stamp Paid read in a newspaper that Sethe has killed her daughter and her picture was in the newspaper. Also, Sethe believes that she did the right thing instead of being under School Teacher rules. In consequence, Sitter adds: "When Paul D and Sethe lie side by side in resentful rejection of each other, what is rejected is much more than the shape of the scar on a woman's back. Morrison places their present experience in the context of their past, introduced through their memories of Sweet Home..."(Sitter 22).

Furthermore, Freud thinks that the unresolved conflicts give rise to neurosis to constitute itself in literature. He asserted that "A work of literature is the external expression of the author's unconscious mind, and he depends on these techniques to allow the reader uncover his hidden motivations, desires and wishes"(Bressler 91). By considering the life of Toni Morrison, it will help to understand the motives and the impulses of the writer. First of all, Toni Morrison's original name was Chloe Anthony Wofford, after eighteen years, she has decided to change it to Toni which appears to be a masculine name. She wanted a powerful name instead of a frail, weak and feminine name. She insisted to throw behind her back the Women's role, and act like a man. Secondly, in reference to her marital life, she has got divorced after six years of marriage while she was pregnant with her second child. Hence, she forced to live single with her two children. Morrison transports this experience in her novel to Beloved who appears as a separated child by her parents. Thirdly, the writer's family experience where they had to move from Ohio due to the racial segregation that they exposed to. In Beloved, Morrison discloses that the violence within Black American communities is originally imposed from outside by white oppressors, whose search for victims within the black community. She is writing a book of remedial - making us look directly at extensive horrors related to slavery in order to have us, the reader, confront it and deal with it, and find solutions for it.

Hysteria is one of the neurosis diseases that hit the European and American societies in the 20th century as a consequence of boredom, ennui, depression, and oppression. Emma Parker elaborates in her article "History and Hysteria in Toni Morrison's Beloved" that: "Freud and Breuer view hysteria as an organic physical illness and it needed to be understood as a psychic disorder. They proposed that hysteria is the product of a traumatic event that is excluded from consciousness"(Parker 2). Therefore, hysteria represents hostility and desire transformed into

physical symptoms such as coughs, convulsions, limps, linguist distortion. Sethe hysteria is confirmed by her actions in the exorcism scene, where she attacks the white liberal man, Edward Bodwin. This incident serves as a cure to Sethe past memory {trauma} since Beloved disappeared after this scene immediately. In addition, Bodwin returns to take Denver to work in the same way that schoolteacher has dealt with Sethe, but she was aware, instead of killing her, she flies at Bodwin with an Ice Pick. When Denver explains what is happening in her house she says: "Sethe has lost her wits"(Morrison 254). Parker also contends: "The conviction of Freud and Breuer that "Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences"(2:7)confirms that hysteria functions as a useful conceptual tool in reading a novel that concerns what Morrison calls remotely"(Ibid). This supports the idea when Paul D remembered his brothers Paul A and Paul F and at the same time, he could not remember his mother and his father. He remembers his friend Sixo where they captured by a large group of men with their guns. Sixo started to sing and he never stopped singing, school teacher did not accept his voice, he orders his men to shoot him .

Kristin Bourdeau is one of the first critics to address the psychoanalysis of Toni Morrison's Beloved. She discussed in her article "Pain and the Unmaking of Self in Toni Morrison Beloved" the slavery issues that have a great impact on African –American people, and how they release their anger and oppression they are exposed to. She raised the question, "Can one be fully human without having suffered"(Boudreau 41). This article most certainly takes on a psychoanalytical approach to the novel. People attempted to find an outlet to help them to clear out their painful experiences and hurtful past. Sethe released her negative emotions and her stored desires by killing her innocent daughter. She reflects her pain at the end of the novel to Mr.Bodwin who she thinks him as a school teacher. She tells Beloved every day about the horror of slavery and she insists on Denver to never experience what she has faced in Sweet Home. Bourdeau clears out at the end of her essay:

Pain, cannot make us real: if empirical reality is reserved for (re)memory and desire, it can, like the acknowledgment of a self's existence, be revoked at any time. The most pain can do, as the novel suggests, is call attention to the violent and necessary process whereby self is constructed by others. If we choose to seize on more attractive versions of self and believe them to be "real" or, in the romantic account, "fully human"-we take the dangerous risk, in Emerson's words, of " courting suffering" in order to verify our humanity (Bourdeau19).

On the other hand, Lyunolu Osagie explains in his Article "psychoanalytic strategies in Beloved" There is plenty of evidence for the reading public to assume that Beloved is a ghost returned in human form, and at the end of the novel no one knows what happened with her "(Osagie 4). There are many clues in the novel which stands with the inference that Beloved is a ghost that controls 124. At first, Beloved from her appearance to Sethe and Paul D, she tried to be close to Sethe and lately she became obsessed with her. Besides, the girl name is Beloved with no last name, she comes from water and asks for sweet in which Sethe tortured and killed her. Another sign which strongly supports this outcome that the dog which was crippled by the ghost at the first chapter has been disappeared and never back till Beloved disappeared in the end. Additionally, Sethe explains to the ghost the reasons behind killing her, she thinks that she can be her mother for the second time. The most remarkable example of Morrison's intelligence in this novel is her treatment of the adult ghost. The reader logically is suspicious of this new Beloved, who may be Sethe's slain infant somehow brought to life, but the characters treat her as real. Fear, guilt, shame, and self-loathing live in Sethe's mind and heart,

and Beloved lives for the reader. The reader can never be sure, even after Beloved vanishes, if she is flesh or spirit and so shares Sethe's self-doubt.

What is more evident in Morrison's masterpiece that there is a clear response from the slaves to slavery in Sweet Home, which approves their search for a change in their personality in order to stand against whites' abuse. That's what motivates Virginia Costello to explain on her dissertation "Creation of Self and Personalism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*". The author has focused on her study on Emmanuel Mounier's Philosophy Personalism. She clarifies: "Personalism requires individuals to take responsibility for their actions and for the evils of the world as much as they are able. Before these characters reach personalism, they create themselves: they take responsibility for themselves, their actions, and their growth" (Costello 6). In the novel, slaves were oppressed by the whites' society in Sweet Home, and even the name of the farm was hurtful to them instead of being blessed and valuable. Virginia Costello states:

In *Beloved*, slave owners and overseers violate the bodies and souls of their slaves. In response, these slaves both commit murder and help others heal. After slavery, ex-slaves accept and deny their past, their emotions, and their reactions to physical and psychological abuse. They struggle, fail, and retreat into self-imposed isolation. However, by the end of the novel all the major characters have created themselves and many hold personalist values. In both novels, the major female characters do not directly move from passive, victimized beings to personalist characters. They create and un-create themselves. Some step beyond creating themselves and, without recognizing it as such, move toward personalism. The characters who turn away from personalism regress into isolation, stagnancy, and self-abasement. Those who move toward it find connections with others, growth and self-worth (Costello 14).

The Holocaust is an essential event in the history of European culture. About six million Jews were killed by Nazi Germany during World War II, 1.5million of them were children. Toni Morrison opens up her novel with the following words: "Sixty Million and more " to remind us of the effects of this incident in our lives today. She exploits this historical event to refer to the historical value of slavery in America. There is a parallel experience between Sethe and the people who suffered from the Holocaust. She will never get away the experience through memory. The best she can do is to protect her children from reliving the same pain. On the other hand, Nathalie Segéral on her essay "Reclaimed Experience: Gendering Trauma in Slavery, Holocaust, and Madness Narratives" claims that: " Jewish women were targeted by Nazis because they were viewed as threatening in their capacity to bear children. Contrary to slavery in which the female slaves were viewed by the plantation owner as productive property and had to suffer from repeated rapes by her owner"(Several 91). Ethe was a slave who lived in Sweet Home and a by Mr. Garner. When she fled from the plantation, she was pregnant with Denver. School teacher and his nephews captured her and whipped her on her back and took her milk. Several clarifies that: "Jewish women were victimized precisely for their reproductive capacity, were sterilized when not gassed immediately, and mothers and children have always killed fir intercourse between a Jewish person and a non-Jew"(Ibid). So that, Slavery and Holocaust are all similar in that they ruined the lives of those who directly experienced the terror and horror.

When life becomes intolerable, Sethe and the Sweet Home men undertake a terrible escape plan, most are killed or disappeared, including Halle, but Sethe and Paul D. Separately make it to "freedom." For Sethe this is hardly a triumphant escape: she sends her three children ahead, and in the final stages of her fourth pregnancy, she is brutally raped of her breast milk by Schoolteacher's nephews and then badly beaten and scarred when she complains to her mistress. In this wounded condition, she rushes on across Ohio to bring her milk to the baby she sent ahead, but on the way, she gives birth to Denver with the help of sends them ahead to freedom. Morrison says, "Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense" (Morrison 103).

The return of Beloved can be seen as an extension of the circle of slavery. Sethe was a slave and was also enslaved by her children. To protect them, she behaves like their master and made a life-or-death decision for them. Then, Beloved returns and enslaves Sethe yet again. Sethe seems to be continuously trapped by her daughter She completely controls her mother when she rose from the dead. She even drives Sethe to insanity.

Oedipus complex is one of the most determinative elements in the growth of the child. In which a child enters in competition for the mother and feels threatened by the father figure. It is the contrary here, Beloved is the ghost of a girl, asserting Carl Jung theory Electra complex in which the girl searches for her father. The girl sees the mother as a rival figure and obstacle in the way to get the father's love, "Sethe played all the harder with Beloved, who never got enough of anything: new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk. If the hen had only two eggs, she got both" (Morrison 238). She finds her father figure in Paul D, then she had sex with him, she says: "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name (Morrison 3). Bernadette Hawkes in her essay "Beloved Mothering and psychotherapy" has acknowledged this theory in Toni Morrison's Beloved: When Beloved is killed there was no one in the role of father figure. On her return, Paul D is in the place of the father she hardly knew," Beloved dropped her skirts as he spoke and looked at him with unfilled eyes. She took a step he could not hear and stood close behind him "(Morrison 116). Beloved does not accept Paul D, she resents him as Sethe is obviously very interested in him"(Hawkes). This can explain as well Beloved wanted to revenge from her mother by having a relationship with Paul D. Obviously, Beloved wants to punish her mother for leaving her, she returns to make Sethe pays for what she did with her.

To conclude, it is clear that the novels of Morrison can be judged in different ways, and Psychoanalysis is one of the best theories to analyze and to judge her novels. Critics have revealed the central place of fantasy and unconscious in Morrison's novels. Many readers believe Morrison's novels are the establishment of her envisioned tradition. Morrison tries in Beloved to examine the horrors of slavery and racism in a very direct, frank way. She presents in the novel how slavery dehumanizes slaves, dealing with them as animals. School teacher and his nephews think of them just as machines that work for a long time without rest. After their escape from Sweet Home, Sethe and Paul D were still haunted by the memories and what happened with them there. In fact, Morrison wanted to clear that America's future relies on its past just like Sethe who had to put terms to her past in order to have a prosperous future with Denver and Paul D.

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