# "Memory Seemed Unwise": Archaeological Dynamics of Memory and Amnesia: An Archetypal Reading of Toni Morrison's Beloved.

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## Abstract

An archetypal reading of Toni Morrison's Beloved highlights the archaeological dynamics of memory and amnesia at work in the novel to communicate the author's dualistic vision of the world, in general, and of racial discrimination and the American dream, in particular. Memory and forgetfulness are both individual and collective. Morrison's digging into archival residues seems very effective since she addresses 'racial memory'[1] or the 'collective unconscious'[2] of all readers. The technique underlying the whole novel is that of memory reenacted, in other words, of the ritualistic incarnation of the past, allegorically through the ghost of Beloved, then, literally through her fatal resurrection. The ghost could be taken as a projection of Sethe's tormented conscience while the body of Beloved is, indeed, but a fatal resurrection. Beloved is a paradoxical symbol of both past and present as well as amnesia and memory, whether wilful or unconscious, personal or racial. Is it a call for always retaining the memory or the scar of a racist past? Repressing the memory is crystallized in the concluding statements: "it is not a story to pass on" and "memory seemed unwise"[3]. "They forgot her like an unpleasant dream during a troubled sleep", "quickly and deliberately forgot her" (274, 5). The danger of forgetfulness is a national disaster of complicit silence, absence and erasure from the authentic narrative of American history.

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# "هل من الحكمة التذكر؟":
# دراسة للصور الأولية وديناميكيات التذكر وإغفال الذكرى
# في رواية "المحبوبة" لتوني موريسون

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## ملخص

تعمد هذه القراءة للصور الأولية برواية "محبوبة" للكاتبة توني موريسون إلى كشف النقاب عن ديناميكيات التذكر وتجاهل الذكرى أو فقدان الذاكرة اللاشعوري والشعوري. وفي هذا إلقاء للضوء على الرؤية الثنائية للكاتبة والرموز المتناقضة المستخدمة ومرجعيتها الأرشيفية، باستخدام تعبير الفيلسوف الفرنسي ميشيل فوكو، ونجد أن الصور الخيالية والرموز بالرواية نخاطب العقل الجمعي أو الذاكرة العرقية للإنسانية باستخدام مصطلحات عالم النفس كارل يونج والشاعر ت. س وايليوت.

يبدو من تكنيك إحياء الذاكرة الذي يهيمن على الرواية استدعاء أو استنساخ الماضي رمزياً من خلال شبح المحجوبة أولاً ثم بعثها القاتل مرة أخرى، والبعث هنا معنوي ومادي، شخصي وجمعي، وهو يعبر عن الماضي والحاضر في أن واحد. وفي الختام نجد كلاً من الكاتبة والقارئ يطرح تساؤلاً مؤلماً وعميق الأثر في كتابة التاريخ الأمريكي الحقيقي: هل من الحكمة التذكر أم طمس الذكرى؟ وهل آنذاك نشترك في الجريمة بالصمت إزاءها وتغييب ومحو الحقيقة؟

An archetypal reading of Toni Morrison's Beloved highlights the archaeological dynamics of memory and amnesia at work in the novel to communicate the author's dualistic vision of the world, in general, and of racial discrimination and the American dream, in particular. Memory and forgetfulness are both individual and collective. Morrison's digging into archival residues seems very effective since she addresses 'racial memory' or 'collective unconscious'. The technique underlying the whole novel is that of memory reenacted, in other words, of the ritualistic incarnation of the past, allegorically through the ghost of Beloved, then, literally through her deadly conjured presence. The ghost could be taken as a projection of Sethe's tormented conscience, while the body of Beloved is, indeed, but a fatal resurrection. Since Morrison is quite aware of this paradoxical quality, she uses symbolism as an implicit critique of racism or as a means of 'speaking the unspeakable'4, offending neither whites nor, oddly enough, blacks themselves. Paradoxical symbolism is so harmoniously interwoven within the fabric of Beloved that it gives it a profound, multi- faceted mythological and ritualistic dimension. These symbols, bearing contradictory connotations, are essentially paradoxical, bearing to the main paradox of the whole novel: death for another life, murder out of love, and burying for resurrection: "unless a mother remained carefree, mother love was a killer", says Sethe in Beloved (132). The quest for selfhood and freedom ended in a blurred identity for both Sethe and Beloved, torment and jail for Sethe, and in death for Beloved.

Among the various examples of paradoxical symbolism are Morrison's choice of the names of characters, her use of both animal and water imagery, and the ending of the novel. The novel's ending brings out the inherent paradox underlying the novel: "Remembering seemed unwise"; "they forgot her like an unpleasant dream during a troubled sleep", "quickly and deliberately forgot her" (274, 5). The dynamics of repressing the memory here wavers between being a wilful act, 'deliberately', and an unconscious one, 'sleep'. Equally significant is the novel's final refrain that persistently resonates three times, twice as: "It is not a story to pass on", and one last time as: "This is not a story to pass on". In the refrain, the contradictory

connotations are clear in the narrative shift from talking about blacks in the first two instances to the direct address to the reader in the third refrain, stressing, thus, the ritualistic message of the novel. The refrain's paradox lies in the contradictory connotations of 'pass on', which could mean either accepting and remembering, and consequently, passing the memory to the following generations; or rejecting, repressing or forgetting, and thus, 'pass by' the memory, without transcending it and extracting significance out of it. The change from the use of the demonstrative pronoun 'it' to 'this' further intensifies the stress made by Morrison on this point.

Similarly, the final word of the novel could also be taken literally to mean an address by Sethe after being reconciled to herself and to Beloved. On the other hand, 'Beloved' could be taken as an address by the narrator to the reader. The intimacy of tone and the switching of roles between Beloved and the reader further accentuate the burden laid by the author on the reader to deliver her message through ritualistic remembering. Relevant is Michel Foucault's terminology of "archaeology" and the "archive". In The Archaeology of Knowledge 5, "Archaeology", Foucault elucidates, "tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but these discourses themselves as practices obeying certain rules" (Foucault, 138). The 'opacity' and 'deep place' of that discourse as a 'monument', however, needs excavation (Foucault, 139). As for the "archive", it is "the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" (Foucault, 129). The archive embodies the statement at its root and defines at the outset the system of its enunciability (Foucault, 129). Archive untangles the "density of discursive practices" and "systems of statements", including the overtly stated and the silent ones (Foucault, 129).

In Beloved, this tenet is, in a way, related to highlighting the exclusion, the absence or the erasure of certain layers or scars in the national American narrative, especially as related to African-American history. In White Mythologies, Writing History and the West, Robert Young quotes Hegel's "Africa has no history" as evidence of an "arrogant" attempt at forgetting a "story of oppression" in the writing of the Western narrative of history. It is one of the steps

of a programmed paradigm of the process of the colonization of the mind: "creation, subjection and final appropriation of Europe's 'others' . . . In history, what is called 'other' is . . . an alterity that falls into the dialectical circle. It is the other in a hierarchically organized relationship in which the same is what rules, names, defines, and assigns its other" (Young, 2). What makes matters worse is the induced sense of inferiority (Fanon, 106) and "dependency complex" (Fanon, 59) of Africans, using Frantz Fanon's terms in Black Skin, White Masks. Fanon tries to discern a hidden relationship with Jung's 'collective unconscious' and the "Evil Spirit" personifying the id (Fanon, 102, 105) and the mechanism of racial "traumatic experience" (Fanon, 60). He traces this to an inevitable encounter on the part of the 'Negro' with "a solidly established myth" that "oppresses him with the whole weight of his blackness" (Fanon, 106). It follows naturally that the "Negro's psychopathology", which is related to an induced sense of guilt and shame (Fanon, 106), is carefully analyzed in a whole list of Western canonical writings. With a 'suspension of disbelief' on the part of the 'Negro', the myth, the illusion and the constructs are, afterwards, real, hence, his complicity and agency in the collective sin of erasure and silence.

Names of characters are symbolic. They are burdened with contradictory connotations. Sethe, for instance, is an outstanding allusion to the ancient Egyptian god of violence, evil, the desert and chaos. The mythical Sethe killed his own brother Osiris and plucked the eyes of his nephew Horus. He brought anarchy to the world and destroyed Isis's magnificent love story and family life. By killing her own daughter, Sethe committed a similar outrageous sin that brought devastation and chaos to her world, and reflected her lack of faith in an orderly universe. It was through the mythical Sethe's breath that 'worms' emerged from the 'earth', thus linking Sethe in the novel, through apocalyptic overtones, with both animal and nature imagery. Worms and the earth also trigger off associations of graves and corpses, in brief, of death and a new life, worms coming out of earth. Paradoxically enough, the mythical Sethe is an emblem of strength and reproduction as well. The reproductive asset of Morrison's Sethe is also very clear in many recurrent references. Furthermore, the

strength is illustrated in her decisive action of escape to protect her kids. Ironically, Morrison undermines the real worth of Sethe's strength by choosing a male name of a god and not a goddess. The act, killing on Sethe's part is, therefore, shown to be out of women's and mother's nature.

As for Paul D, his name could be regarded as a Biblical allusion to Saint Paul, the Christian missionary and apostle, who did much to make Christianity a universal religion, and was the first to enunciate the doctrine of justification by faith, which bears symbolically on Paul D's role of guidance both to blacks on escape and to Sethe. Furthermore, St. Paul was converted to Christianity by a vision while on the road to Damascus. This bears close resemblance to the vision or epiphany that strikes Paul D in his church cellar and helps him forgive Sethe and not see her in animalistic terms any longer. He even helps her be absolved of her sin and confront her tone identity. Paul D also shares the imprisonment experience of St. Paul. Paul D was left to lie on a pallet in the darkness: "The damp cellar was fairly warm", another contradiction, "but there was no light lighting the pallet or the washbasin or the nail from which a man's clothes could be hung" (218). The 'nail' could be regarded as a Biblical allusion to Crucifixion. This is also accentuated by a reference to Paul D "getting additional warmth from a bottle of liquor" (218). The wine could be taken as a reference to Holy Communion, which is the partaking of the consecrated bread or wine. The paradox here, however, lies in that Paul D's experience at church was somehow suffocating; religion is shown to be inefficient at times of crisis. On the other hand, the cellar is a womb-tomb symbol, since it is emblematic of both like and death, salvation and damnation. The inefficiency of religion has other serious overtones in Sethe's desperate murder of her daughter, believing in no divine justice. This is further stressed by Amy when "she stopped begging Jesus", while helping Sethe during Beloved's delivery.

Beloved's name is paradoxically symbolic as well. The name was chosen by Sethe to put on an epitaph on her dead daughter's grave since naming the dead ensured a rebirth; a proper burial ensured a resurrection. This too is an ancient Egyptian belief. Ensuring the resurrection of the deceased is the naming and calling, as related to the

'opening of the mouth ritual'. The price paid by Sethe to a write this one word was very high and humiliating. Linking sex, which is originally the source of life, with death in this particular instance is clear and offending: "She opened her legs as vide as a grave". "The spirit of the past, Beloved, the demon of historic distortion, demands full recognition (naming) before it can be exorcized."6 Beloved is, indeed, shown here as an evil spirit or a demon exorcised. "The supernatural existence of Beloved shows how a culture may find it necessary in a moment of crisis to exorcise its own demons to reaffirm its identilty."7 Though linked with evil and with the death motif, the name Beloved is originally derived from the address of the priest to people at the outset of a marriage ceremony. So the name of Beloved is a symbol of a new life as well. Another paradox is the fact that Beloved, the one most endeared by the mother, is killed by her, and consequently, tortured her as an evil obsession. Beloved, moreover, is a symbol of both past and present, both individual and national. It is also a paradoxical symbol of both amnesia and memory, whether wilful or unconscious; whether national or personal. Is it a call for always retaining the memory or the scar of a racist nation? The danger of forgetfulness is a national disaster of complicit silence and erasure.

The use of animal imagery is also inherently paradoxical. Ancient civilizations and religions venerated and worshipped animals, as gods and goddesses. In Beloved, the constant identification of blacks with animals is an implicit reference to them as deities. For both Africans and blacks understand this sublime aspect of animals; whites, on the other hand, sometimes fail to see this, perceiving only the disgusting and repulsive aspect of animals. The apprehension of animals by some whites is only as dirty, treacherous, mean and copulating. In a way, their feeling seems to be reminiscent of their prejudice towards blacks. Colour symbolism is closely lined with animal imagery. The blackness of the slave's body represents for the white a scaring 'jungle', which is, in fact, but a distorting creation of the whites' own minds:

> White people believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red guns ready

for sweet white blood (198, 9).

The more the whites speculated on their faulty belief, "the deeper and more entangled the jungle grew inside" (198):

> But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other livable place. It was the jungle white folks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through, and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their white skin; the red gums were their own (198, 9).

The last two lines indicate the paradox underlying the jungle motif and developed throughout the novel through a well – structured scheme of animal imagery. The reference here is, paradoxically, to the wilderness of Africa as 'livable' since it symbolizes all the 'roots'. The idea of a stereotype, a 'construct' or the space between reality and our falsified image of it is triggered off here. The jungle is a projection of the 'bloody' mentality of the whites and their own inherent evil. Sethe hears the Schoolteacher teaching his pupils how "to list Sethe's human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right" (193). When she ruthlessly kills her daughter, she justifies it to herself mercy-killing: "and no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper" (251). The 'definition' here, as David Lawrence8 explains, belongs to the 'definer' and not the 'defined', in other words, it is a projection of the whites' own thinking. Blacks themselves get entangled in a web of misconceptions and prejudices about themselves. A decolonization of their minds is essential to unravel their true undermined self-esteem and their acquired self-hatred. This failure to apprehend their true worth leads to the blacks' flawed quest for identity:

> The inability [of the black community] to articulate embodied experience, to find a test for the desiring body within communal codes, obstructs self-knowledge and does violence to the fabric of community . . . The exorcism of beloved, an embodiment of resurgent desire, opens the way to a rewording of the codes . . . the communal body seems ready to articulate a reinvigorated language that, in returning to its roots in the body, empowers its speakers to forge a more

open, inclusive community9.

When the schoolteacher reproaches his nephew for enraging Sethe, he does not do it because of human reasons. It is because Sethe is his reproductive "cow"; "she has at least ten breeding years left" (149). Further enfuriating is that his regret because this behaviour has enraged his "cow" to the point of escape. The animal imagery he uses to convince his nephew is the furthest from the ancient Egyptian revered Hathor, the incarnation of motherhood, affection and fertility:

> The Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think – just think – what would his own horse do _ if you beat it beyond the point of education . . . Suppose you beat the hounds past that point that away. Never again could you trust them in the woods or anywhere else. You'd be feeding them may be, holding a piece of rabbit in your hand, and the animal would revert _ bite your hand clean off (150).

After arresting Sethe for her murder of her own daughter, the Schoolteacher justifies his course of action with blacks:

> All testimony to the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who ever needed care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred (151)".

The danger lies in the confusion blacks go through; they almost get to believe in the whites' distorted image of blacks; the myth, the illusion and the construct all become real. Paul D wondered "if Schoolteacher was right" (126). He even questions the validity of definition: "In the naming done by a white man, who was supposed to know?" (124). Again it is the point of the definition belonging to the definer and projected on the defined. The definition set by whites here is "the Sweet Home men" with no individual differences of unique personalities. The black almost get to believe in it for the Schoolteacher induced this distorted self-image in them though a brain-washing address:

> One step off the ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke (124).

Even Amy, poor and humiliated as she is, still sees Sethe as a "pregnant mare in labour": "What you going to do, just lay there and

foal" (33). Sethe herself, with her induced, blurred self-image, had a cannibalistic ring about her voice when she saw Amy for the first time: "I was hungry to do it. Like a snake, all jaws and hungry (31)". Sethe is six-months pregnant with Denver; nevertheless, she crawls like reptiles, on her route to phony freedom. Like all other blacks in the novel, Sethe is surrounded by associations with animals: dogs and flies (193); lice (194); rabbits: "a property which reproduced itself without cost (228); and birds. The use of the bird imagery accentuates the flight motif as well as the motherly instinctive protection and intuitive knowledge, embodied by the behavior of "humming" and nesting birds:

> And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out away, over there where no one could hurt them (163).

The possessive nature of Sethe is clear here "every bit of life she made, all the parts of her". This motif is shown to be self-destructive on the part of Sethe and later projected on Beloved herself. Sethe thinks it is her sight to kill her daughter out of love and mercy; Beloved, too tries to possess and, thus, destroy her mother's life, later after resurrection.

Hat-hor mother image is skillfully drawn through the extensive use of the cow as an extended metaphor of motherly love, giving and of reproduction. Again, the mythical allusion is paradoxical. On the one hand, Sethe is depicted as a mother goddess and a nursing figure. On the other hand, Sethe and other black women are compared to cows, with whom men have a disgusting intercourse to gratify their sensual desires. Both women and cows are reproductive and they give milk. Milk is itself another paradoxical element of the cow metaphor: "I had milk. I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl", meaning Beloved, "I hadn't stopped nursing her" (16). Full breasts are a mythological symbol of fertility and motherhood. Paradoxically, however, it is this milk which literally brought about the whole tragedy. For Sethe was madly enraged when her milk was taken by force, and when her breasts were inhumanly violated, ravished and abused, very much like the udders of a cow. This,

literally, led her to escape and, later on, to kill her Beloved in a mad fit of temper. Milk nurtures and is symbolic of gratifying the most intrinsic and instinctive emotional and physical needs of infants. Depriving Beloved of this symbol of protection, love and care harshly severed this link. Beloved came back with a childish behaviour, as if no years have elapsed. The possessive, childish and abnormal attitude is again described in terms of animal imagery: "a ridiculously dependent child . . . Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (57).

The pathological regression to childhood is but an indication of Beloved's fragmented infancy and the traumatic separation from Sethe at a very critical age. There is this implication of oral eroticism. Regression to childhood and the possessiveness motif are heightened by references to the blurred identity both Beloved and Sethe suffer from: "I am Beloved and she is mine . . . I am not separate from her (210)"; "I want to be the two of us I want join" (213). The kind of verbal utterance itself is disconnected like child talk. "You are my face; you are me. You are mine" (216). The pronouns 'me' and 'mine' indicate the interrelation between the blurred identity, the unconsummated infancy, and the possessiveness motif. Beloved "said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her?" (241). The crisis of identity reaches a climax when Sethe faces Beloved bluntly with her inability to cope any longer with her childish, selfish and crippling demands: Sethe's dilemma reaches a dénouement when Paul D finally enlightens Sethe: "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (273), not Beloved's image in her, Paul means. This epiphany is linked with water in a ritualistic scene, where Paul D becomes, like Baby Suggs before, a holy redeemer, healing Sethe through offering to wash her feet. Jennifer Williams discusses the idea of "(un)becoming the subject", relating this to contemporary identification studies that revisit classic psychoanalysis in order to foreground the roles of race, sexuality, gender, and class as crucial elements of subject formation" (Williams, 430). She links Lacanian feminism to the "demand of primary identification for the conflation of self and other", refuting the notion of "autonomous selfhood in favour of an oscillating identifactory process between self and other, a

Black feminist idiom of subjecthood" (Williams, 431)[10].

Nature imagery is extensively used by Morrison, symbolically enhancing her dualistic, paradoxical vision of the world. Nature could be pantheistic, a goddess in the real sense of the word. In this case, the characters expect to attain their salvation through nature. On the other hand, nature itself could be not only thwarting ambitions but also a fatal route to damnation. Water is a clear example of nature imagery, a multi-faceted, profound and rich symbol. The water, Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, uses to heal Sethe is an emblem of Baptism, ritualistic cleansing and purgation. In a ritualistic act, Baby Suggs, "the uncalled, unrobed, and unanointed preacher" (87) "bathed [Sethe] in sections, wrapped her womb, combed her hair, oiled her nipples, cleaned her feet, greased her back". The words 'unrobed', 'unanointed' and 'uncalled' describe Baby Suggs as an instinctive healer, whose means of redemption are but intuitive. They are very sublime and transcendental, however, as indicated by the references to the water of Baptism and the sacramental oil of Communion: 'oiled and greased'. It is spontaneous ritualistic act, performed by a native shaman or guru. Even when Baby Suggs advises Sethe to give up hatred, she links the purgation of harbouring grudge to water, for its healing and redeeming effect: "Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Down. Both of 'em down. Down by the riverside". Elsewhere, "a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods of chestnut tress . . . broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (261).

The flight motif is also carried out through water, thwarted, however, by the riverside as well. The journey by the Ohio river, away from "the bloody side of the river" to Eden, starts off with birth but ends up in death. Sethe breaks her delivery water at the sight of the Ohio river and she gives birth to Denver. Later on, when Sethe sees Beloved resurrected and coming down by the stream, she feels wet with water, similar to that of the delivery fluid. Sethe's womb, however, almost turned into a tomb, since Denver was almost getting to drown in the womb's water. Again, the paradoxical quality is intensified with the killing of Beloved. The "naked woman by the porch", whose face was "under water", and "whose footprints come and go down by the stream" might be a reference to Eve after the Fall. Furthermore, not only is Beloved's end linked with water but also with

rain: "What made her think her fingernails could open locks the rain rained on" (275)."Down by the stream in back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go . . . By and by all the trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there". (275). Water, therefore, is closely linked with a cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

The rebirth leitmotif is also connected with rain in the episode of men's escape (110). The pantheism of nature is stressed here by setting a short sentence of only two words, "It rained", in a separate line. "Men trusted the rain"; "they prayed rain would go on shielding them" (110). Paradoxically, however, rain nearly turned into a grave for a while in this same episode:

> Water was above his ankles, flowing over the wooden plank he slept on. And them it was not water anymore. The ditch was caving in and mud oozed under the rough bars . . . The mud was up to his thighs and he held on to the bars . . . [The men] dove. Down through the mud under the bars, blind, groping . . . Others just plunged . . . Reaching for air . . . Like the unshriven dead, they trusted rain and the dark (110).

The change of water into mud, and the fact that Paul D survived the ordeal is a Biblical allusion to the clay of creation. Ram here reinforces the men's quest for identity and freedom, almost like the knight's quest for the Holy Grail. The ordeal they under went through rain is a symbol of purgation and cleansing. Even blood is pictured at times in water imagery– both blood and water being sources of life: "As though the further south they led him the more his blood, frozen like an ice pond for twenty years, began thinning, breaking into pieces that one melted, had no choice but to swirl and eddy" (106). Coagulated blood is emblematic of death. Once it liquidates, like water which 'swirls' and 'eddies' in the pond, just thawed, out of hopes. The frozen state of water is also, like coagulated blood, symbolic of death.

The references to the frozen state of water are recurrent in the morel, and work to complement and integrate with water imagery. As opposed to Africa's sun comes snow. Baby Suggs is described as "the only on who danced in the sun" (86), while Paul D is referred to as the

"sunsplashed man" (173). Sun gives warmth, while snow is shown, on one occasion, to be thwarting women's needs and frustrating their desires. In another scene, ice, which is a milder from of sow, is shown to be fulfilling the emotional needs of both seethe and Paul D. the first instance comes in the skating scene of seethe, Denver and Beloved, with a foreboding refrain "Nobody saw them falling', which could be a reference to Eve's Fall. The futile efforts exerted by the three women to stand on the "treacherous so now" is also an indication of the futility of the Blacks' endeavors to lead a normal, fulfilling life:

> Sethe thought her two shoes would hold and archer her. She was wrong . . . Sethe struggled to stand and discovered not that she could do a split, but that it hurt . . . The three of them could not stay upright for one whole minute, but nobody saw them falling (174).

If snow in this skating scene is perceived as a stagnant death-in life symbol, it is, paradoxically, on another occasion, described "like a present come down from the sky" (129). This comes in the scene where Paul D, symbolically, asks Sethe to give him a new life, a baby: "I want you pregnant Sethe. Would you do that for me" (128) . . . "You need some babies, somebody to play with in the snow" (128). In the previous scene, the three women cared that no one saw them falling. In this scene, Sethe and Paul D do not even care "if a passer by passed them by" and saw them "embracing" (129). Symbolically, too, Paul D makes it clear that even if Sethe falls, he is there to hold her, in other words, save her. Again the paradoxical theme of falling and redemption is embodied through water imagery.

The stress on the need for babies as a new life – the word is italicized in the novel – explains Paul D's need for realizing his manhood and identity. It is for Blacks, too, to have a fresh healthy generation, which should still bear the burden of the past and learn from it. Both memory and amnesia are historical, cultural, social and political. The process of reminiscence here does not go only through Sethe's mind alone, but also through the collective unconscious or racial memory of the communal body of both blacks and whites. The resistance to remembering is because resurrection is, paradoxically, a painful experience: "Anything dead coming back to life hurts" (35). That is why Morrison chose the device of symbolism as a tactful way of reminiscence. Her skilful use of it, among other devices, made of

her Pulitzer-winning Beloved a novel that makes a significant statement on the authenticity of the national American narrative.

On a larger scale, Morrison, in her Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, tries to prove that the central unique characteristics of American literature are responses to "A dark and an abiding African presence."11 Analyzing American literature, she tackles the metaphor of race as a "subtext" glimmering beneath plot, theme, character-portrayal, narrative technique and imagery. Among the topics Morrison discusses are: when does "racial consciousness or awareness of race enrich interpretive language, and when does it impoverish it?"; how are 'literary whiteness' and 'literary blackness' made, as related to the American world view and "agenda for individual freedom". She concludes the book with a caustic remark:

> All of us, readers and writers, are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes.12

Indeed, the book is closely related to Beloved's dynamics of memory and amnesia, embodying Morrison's vision and philosophy: with a 'suspension of disbelief' on the part of African-Americans, the myth, the illusion and the constructs are realized, hence, their complicity and agency in the collective sin of erasure, absence and silence in the national narrative of American history.

# Notes

1. "Racial Memory" is the term used by TS Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in Enright's English Critical Texts.
2. "Collective Unconscious" is one of the most significant tenets of Carl G. Jung.
3. Toni Morrison, Beloved. Plume, Penguin: N.Y., 1987, pp. 274, 5.
4. The title of an essay by Morrison: "Unspeakable things unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature", Michigan Quarterly Review. Vol. 28. Winter 1989 .
5. Michel Foucault's terms "archaeology" and "archive" are extensively discussed in The Archaeology of Knowledge.
6. Ashraf Rushdy, "Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's Beloved", in American Literature. Vol. 64. No. 3. Sep. 1992, p. 586.
7. David Lawrence, "Fleshly Ghosts and Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in Beloved", in Studies in American Fiction. Vol. 19. No. 2. Fall 1991. p.189 .
8. Lawrence, p. 189.
9. Lawrence, pp. 189, 90.
10. Williams, Jennifer. Review of Kevin Quashie's Black Women, Identity, and Cultural Theory: (Un)becoming the Subject, in American Literature. Vol. 77 .
    No. 2. June 2005, pp. 430-432.
11. Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary Imagination .
    Harvard Univ. Press, 1992, Preface, p. xi.
12. Morrison, Playing, Preface. p. xiii.

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