

## ( دراسة فانتازمية لرواية محبوبة "Beloved" للكاتبة توني موريسون )

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### الملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة البنية التركيبية في رواية (محبوبة "Beloved") للكاتبة توني موريسون باستخدام نموذج "الفانتازم" المستند إلى مقالة جان لابلاش وجي بي بونتاليس "الخيال وأصول النشاط الجنسي". يركز البحث على تحولات الرواية من الحاضر إلى الماضي، من خلال إعادة النظر في التجارب السابقة وذلك في ضوء الأحداث اللاحقة، بدلاً من فرض دراسة تأثيرات الماضي على الحاضر. ويجادل الباحث بأن دراسة التجارب المؤلمة لسيت، الشخصية الرئيسية للرواية، يكشف التاريخ المؤلم الذي تحاول الرواية تقديمه من خلال بنية فانتازمية. كان مجتمع العبيد السابقين ينظر إلى سيت، من خلال تجاربها بدءاً بهروبها الأسطوري وولادة ابنتها دنفر الملحمية وصولاً إلى قتل طفلتها "محبوبة"، على أنها تمتلك قوة الحياة (الولادة) وكذلك قوة الموت (قتل طفلها). تمثل السيناريوهات والحوادث المتكررة في الرواية، على الرغم من وجود بعض الاختلافات، أحد أشكال الشفاء كما اقترح دولوز. شفاء سيت لا يعني فقط إعادة ترجمة حبها المفرط لأطفالها، ولكن أيضاً تفكيك وإعادة ترجمة مفهوم الحياة بالنسبة لمجتمع السود بعد العبودية.

تاريخ الإيداع: 2024/05/29

تاريخ القبول: 2024/05/28



حقوق النشر: جامعة دمشق -  
سورية، يحتفظ المؤلفون بحقوق  
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الكلمات المفتاحية: توني موريسون، رواية (محبوبة "Beloved")، الفانتازم، التحليل النفسي، جان لابلاش، وج.ب. بونتاليس، جيل دولوز.

## A Phantasmatic Reading of Toni Morrison's Beloved

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper deals with the structure of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in terms of the model of the 'phantasm' based on Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis's essay "Fantasme Originare, fantasmes des origines, origine du fantasme". The study focuses on the novel's shifts from the present to the past which work on revising the past experiences through the light of later events, rather than enforcing the reading of the past influences on the present. Examining the traumatic experiences of Sethe, the novel's main character, this study exposes the traumatic history which the novel tries to construct in a phantasmatic structure. Starting from her legendary escape and the epic birth of Denver to the killing of her 'already-crawling?' baby, Sethe was seen by the ex-slave community as possessing the power of life (giving birth) as well as the power of death (killing her child). Repeated scenarios and incidents in the novel, though with some differences, constitute one form of healing as suggested by Deleuze. The healing of Sethe does not only represent a retranslation of her excessive love for her children, but also a deconstruction and retranslation of life for the black community after slavery.

Received: 29/05/2024

Accepted: 28/05/2024



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**Keywords:** Tony Morrison, *Beloved*, Phantasm, Psychoanalysis, Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, Gilles Deleuze.

This paper is an attempt to discuss the structure of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in terms of the model of the 'phantasm'. The notion of the phantasm first appeared in the field of psychoanalysis in the works of Freud. Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis were the first who presented a detailed developed explanation of the model of the phantasm in their essay "Fantasy and the origins of sexuality".<sup>1</sup> The phantasm is not to be articulated in the imaginary/real opposition, but rather in "what is not yet real", to use Butler's words (Butler, 105). Morrison's *Beloved* lends itself to psychoanalytical criticism with various readings. Many theories were drawn in interpreting the characters of the novel and some critics argue that *Beloved* is the invasion of the present by the past.

*Beloved* is a story of a black ex-slave woman whose present is haunted and invaded by the past. The novel starts with a 'spiteful' house inhabited by Sethe, her daughter Denver and a baby ghost. This present is invaded by figures from the past represented by memories of the dead grandmother Baby Suggs and the two run-away sons, Howard and Buglar, "124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of a 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" (*Beloved*, 3).<sup>2</sup> The backbone story of the novel goes back into a farm called Sweet Home in which a fragile black community faced a catastrophic end. Sethe was the only woman among five men who more or less contentedly lived under the rule of their reasonable masters, the Garners. The kind Mr Garner agreed to free Halle's crippled mother, Baby Suggs, but charges Halle for more than her market value justified. The Eden-like life in which the slaves lived in Sweet Home came to an end with the death of Mr Garner and the arrival of 'schoolteacher'. The brutality of schoolteacher drove the slaves to a mass escape that ended with some men killed, others tortured and some imprisoned and experiencing what is worse than death. Sethe was the only one who benefited from that plan of escape as she managed to send her three children ahead of her to her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. However, Sethe had to pay for that as she was tortured and brutally beaten by schoolteacher and his nephews.

This is the novel's background into which we come through flashbacks and memories. In this light, the paper would like to focus on the shifts from the present to the past. These shifts do not work to enforce the reading of the past influences on the present, but rather to revise the past experiences through the light of later events. Peter Nicholls approaches Morrison's *Beloved* from a psychoanalytical perspective. He sees the history that comes back in the novel not as a presence which was once lost, but as a 'past which was never present'.<sup>3</sup> Nicholls also argues that the history of enslavement that *Beloved* attempts to reconsider is "less a matter of cultural allusion than of shock or trauma." (*Beloved*, 134) This can be explained in the Freudian concept of 'Nachträglichkeit'. As explained by Laplanche and Pontalis, the 'Nachträglichkeit' structure consists of two events, the effect of the first is delayed and this 'between' of the event and its 'afterward' realization is what Laplanche calls the "time of the 'phantasm'". (Laplanche and Pontalis, 24).

The novel constructs a phantasmatic structure to depict the traumatic history that has led to Sethe's experiences. If we agree that *Beloved* is the baby ghost who comes back to life, we can see the act of love between Sethe and Paul D, which was witnessed by the baby ghost, as a primal scene.<sup>4</sup> The elements of a primal scene are present through "the dimness of the room in which they sat" (*Beloved*, 11), the description of Sethe's girlish behaviour "swinging her feet and being girlish" (*Beloved*, 13) and the intimacy between the two, Sethe and Paul D, talking about the ghost and remembering Sweet Home. It is also the interruption of the baby ghost which ends the scene that comes as a noise adding to the possibility of seeing this episode as a primal scene, "his legs were not shaking because of worry, but because the floorboards were" (*Beloved*,

<sup>1</sup> Laplanche Jean and J. B. Pontalis. "Originary Phantasms, Phantasms of Origin, Origin of the Phantasm", a revised translation by Musselwhite of "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality".

<sup>2</sup> Morrison Toni. *Beloved* [1987] (Vintage 1997). All references in parentheses are to this edition.

<sup>3</sup> This concept of the past is from Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*; trans. by Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 83

<sup>4</sup> In psychology, the "primal scene" refers to a child's witnessing of parental sexual activity or intimate behavior. It is considered to be a formative experience that may influence an individual's attitudes towards sexuality, relationships, and intimacy.

18). Musselwhite writes: "Interruption is another characteristic of the phantasm of the primal scene" ("Tess: The Phantasmatic Capture", 113). The primal scene in the novel leads to the ghost being exorcized by Paul D to come back again but in a physical presence through the character of *Beloved*, as some critics argue. In their work, Laplanche and Pontalis emphasize the significance of the primal scene as a pivotal moment in a child's psychosexual development. They argue that this phantasm or mental image of the primal scene plays a crucial role in the child's transition from biological to human understanding of sexuality and relationships. This interpretation underscores the impact of early experiences on an individual's psyche and sexual development. (Laplanche and Pontalis, 17). *Beloved*'s return can be understood as a manifestation of the primal scene phantasm described by Laplanche and Pontalis. They draw on Freud's insight that phantasms are formed through an unconscious blending of lived experiences and heard narratives, which encompass not only spoken words but also familial history, legends, and secrets. This suggests that *Beloved*'s reappearance is shaped by a complex interplay of personal and inherited memories. This perspective underscores the impact of family narratives and concealed conversations on the psyche and actions of individuals. (Musselwhite, "Tess: The Phantasmatic Capture", (Musselwhite, "Tess: The Phantasmatic Capture", 110). *Beloved*, thus, embodies the tragic history of slavery lived by the novel's characters and heard in the legends and tales of their parents and ancestors.

Another interpretation of the character of *Beloved* is provided by Stamp Paid, one of the characters in the novel, who hears and understands the voices in 124 and though "he could not decipher but one word, he believed he knew who spoke them. The people of the broken neck, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who lost their ribbons" (*Beloved*, 181). In her belated appearance, *Beloved* embodies excessive uncontrollable desire "to love anything that much was dangerous" and "not to need permission for desire-well now, that was freedom" (*Beloved*, 45, 162). In her figure, *Beloved* is the past history which comes back with all the force of unfulfilled suppressed desire. This fierce desire, which manifests itself in *Beloved* non-negotiable excesses of love and dependence on Sethe, turns *Beloved*'s/Sethe's relation to a predator-prey relationship. Morrison expresses this destructive desire in the language of ingestion and orality 'chewing and swallowing': "*Beloved* ate up her life, took it, welled up with it, grew taller on it" (*Beloved*, 250). Right from the start, it is evident that the baby ghost is associated with excess: "who would have thought that a little old baby could harbor so much rage? Rutting among the stones under the eyes of the engraver's son was not enough" (*Beloved*, 5). Sethe realizes that the ghost of her baby has an excessive fury that would not have been silenced even by her sacrifice in the ten-minute sexual discourse with the engraver for one word, 'beloved', on the tombstone of her baby.

It can be argued that *Beloved* is the object of Sethe's desire, thereby these excesses in *Beloved* can be traced back to Sethe's excesses manifested in her 'too thick love' (*Beloved*, 164), as Paul D calls it. Žižek explains this relation between the subject and the object of desire as follows: "As for late Lacan, the object is precisely that which is in the subject more than the object itself." ("The Seven Veils of Fantasy" 9). However, *Beloved* should be seen not only as the object of Sethe's desire but also as the past history which is longed for as a bad, painful past to be exorcized. *Beloved* first appears in the novel with 'new skin' (*Beloved*, 50) to match her 'new shoes' (*Beloved*, 66). In regard to her return after being lost, *Beloved* can be seen as the lost object which is never found but refound: "my girl come home" (*Beloved*, 201). This characteristic of the lost object is essential: "the immediate object lost in reflection", Žižek quotes Hegel, "only comes to be through being left behind" (Žižek, 13). In this sense, the disappearance of *Beloved* at the end of the novel asserts the nature of the lost object and its tendency to withdraw and be lost again. It is the emergence of the phantasm, according to Laplanche and Pontalis, which coincides with the loss.

Though Sethe's life is marked by a series of traumas and sufferings, two key recurring scenes can be identified as particularly significant. Sethe's murder of her baby girl can be seen as the first traumatic event that she has faced with pride, and as a result she was expelled from the black ex-slave community. After her legendary escape and the epic birth of Denver, Sethe thinks that she has left Sweet Home with all the brutality and abuse practiced upon her by schoolteacher and his boys through the act of milking her breasts and the whipping which almost killed her. The appearance of schoolteacher with the aim of recapturing

Sethe and her children put her in a state of a 'forced choice': either to kill herself and her children or to return to slavery and dehumanization. Driven by her excessive love for her children who are her 'best thing' and motivated by the mother instinct of protecting her children, Sethe cut her baby's throat. She explained it to Paul D as "I couldn't let her nor any of them live under schoolteacher" (*Beloved*, 163). The scene of the loving murder shows how Sethe was caught between the coming danger represented by her owner and the slave catchers, on the one hand, and the freedom and love she experienced with her children on the other:

Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stick needles beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple she just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. (*Beloved*, 163).

This scene is repeated at the end of the novel when Sethe attacks Mr Bodwin who comes to give Denver a ride to work. This is particularly important in light of Laplanche and Pontalis's idea of the 'phantasm', as highlighted above. In this scene, Sethe mistakes the abolitionist Mr Bodwin for schoolteacher and this time she learns how to defend her children:

She sees him. Guiding his mare, slowing down, his black hat wide-brimmed enough to hide his face but not his purpose. He is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing. She hears wings. Little hummingbirds stick needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thinks anything, it is no. No no. Nonono. She flies. (*Beloved*, 262).

This scene that is "the final tableau of the novel" is however, not an identical repetition of the loving murder scene. (Peach, Toni Morrison, "The Middle Passage: *Beloved*", 114). In the second scene, Sethe's response is different; she realized that in order to protect her children she has to kill the Whiteman not her children and so she attacks Mr Bodwin. This repetition with difference is what Deleuze stresses as essential in as far as the phantasm is concerned. Deleuze asserts the importance of difference between the two events when he writes: "what is Originary in the phantasy[m] is not one series in relation to the other, but the difference between series in so far as this relates this series of differences to another series of differences, in abstraction from their empirical succession in time" (125). According to Deleuze, the identical repetition leads into traversing the phantasm and turning it into the "eternal return of the same" (125). For Deleuze, this concept goes beyond a simple repetition of events; it represents a profound philosophical idea about existence and becoming. It leads to an exploration of how individuals respond to these repetitions and whether they can transform their relationship with them. The phantasm, thus, can be seen as an opportunity for transformation and healing rather than merely recreating past experiences. In other words, when individuals confront their traumas or deeply ingrained patterns through repetitive processes, there is potential for psychological growth and resolution.

Back to Morrison's novel, Sethe in the second scene moves from the mother's instinct of protecting her children by killing them to the realization of the right way of defending by attacking the danger itself embodied by the white Bodwin. This same incident presents another repetition of the women's gathering in front of Sethe's house. This black community of singing women is a repetition of the Clearing scene. Sethe thinks that "it was as though the Clearing had come to her" (*Beloved*, 261). In Baby Suggs' Clearing, we met the women singing and providing Baby Suggs with the music to dance, "Saying no more, she stood up then she danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music" (*Beloved*, 89). The women's 'voice building' in the second event is like the music produced to support Baby Suggs' dance at the Clearing. Again the repetition here is not a dull identical copying, but with some difference. The singing of the women in the Clearing was in response to Baby Suggs' method of healing the traumatized ex-slaves of their sufferings through celebrating and loving themselves. On the other hand, the purpose of the women's singing in front of Sethe's house is to rid Sethe of the 'devil child' and by the way bring her back to the black community.

For Deleuze, the healing is an operation of 'transference' which is "still repetition" and in this transference: "repetition does not so much serve to identify events, persons and passions as to authenticate the roles and

select the masks.” (Deleuze, 83) The healing of Sethe does not only mean a retranslation of her excessive love for her children, but also a deconstruction and retranslation of life for the black community after slavery. Sethe's attack on the abolitionist Mr Bodwin can be seen as Morrison's interest in showing the black people's realization of their reality. Sethe after all understands what Baby Suggs means in referring to the white as the worst luck and danger one might face.

Repetition of events is not the only type of repetition to be found in the novel; the novel itself can be seen as a repetition of Margaret Garner's true story. As is commonly known, *Beloved* is based on the true story of a slave mother, Margaret Garner, who slit her two-year-old daughter's throat with a butcher knife, killing her in 1856. In her novel, Morrison is not only interested in retelling Margaret Garner's story, but also in exploring the reactions and responses of people like Reverend Bassette, a to such events.<sup>5</sup> By highlighting Reverend Bassette's misunderstanding and ignorance about the experiences of enslaved women, Morrison sheds light on a broader history of how women were treated during slavery. In doing so, she challenges traditional historical narratives and exposes the biases and misconceptions that have shaped our understanding of this period. This interpretation underscores Morrison's intention to not simply replicate historical accounts, but to offer a deeper exploration of the social and cultural dynamics surrounding these stories. Peach thinks that what concerns Morrison in rewriting Margaret Garner's story is not “the details that he reports but his reaction to them. Indeed, his response is as important as the story itself for it reflects a history based on misunderstanding and ignorance in how women were treated under slavery.” (Peach, “The Middle Passage: *Beloved*”, 106-7). This interest in the setting of the story rather than the heroine herself can be understood in terms of the ‘desubjectivization’ of the phantasm as explained by Laplanche and Pontalis: The phantasm, however is not the object of desire, but its setting. In the phantasm the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images .... As a result, the subject, although always present in the phantasm, may be so in a desubjectivized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question (27).

The concept of 'desubjectivization' as described by Laplanche and Pontalis refers to the idea that in a phantasm, or mental image, the subject is not actively pursuing an object of desire or its representation. Instead, they become entangled in the sequence of images themselves. This leads to a form of subjectivity that is decentered within the phantasm - present but not as a focused or individualized entity. In relation to Morrison's novel *Beloved*, this concept sheds light on her particular focus on the setting and broader experiences of slave mothers rather than solely on individual characters. The haunting and traumatic setting becomes central, shaping and influencing the characters within it. Morrison herself said that she was inspired by the story of Margaret Garner though she does not know what eventually happened (Peach Linden, Toni Morrison (1998), 147). The wide interest Garner's story had captured at the time of the story shocked Morrison in the way the story was dealt with as a case to be exploited by the media, anti-slavery movements and lawyers.<sup>6</sup> Morrison shifts the importance that the mother killer has gained in Margaret Garner's story to other characters in *Beloved*. She gives the murdered baby a voice through the character of *Beloved* and provides hope for the future through Sethe's other daughter Denver, ‘the daughter of history’, as Peach puts it (Peach, Toni Morrison 1998, 145).

In the skating scene, these three women (Sethe, Denver, and *Beloved*) are portrayed as a unified entity as they skate together. They were “holding hands, bracing each other, [swirling] over the ice” (*Beloved*, 174). This unity is significant as it reflects their interconnectedness and shared experiences, creating a quasi-phantasmatic scene. After the interface with Paul D about the murder of her baby girl, Sethe realizes that her children, her best thing, are tied to her not in subject-object relation but as one unity into which all elements are fused and merged into each other. In these moments ‘Nobody saw them falling’ as there were no gazer or gazed upon. This moment of identification, I would argue, can be thought of as a ‘transcendental

<sup>5</sup> Reverend Bassette is a fictional character in *Beloved*. He is representative of the role that religious figures and preachers played in the lives of enslaved individuals during the historical period of slavery in America.

<sup>6</sup> For further details see Peach (1998), p. 146-8

consciousness'. (Deleuze quoted in Musselwhite, "Tess: The Phantasmatic Capture", 118). The elements of nature acted in that scene in which the three women were conscious of neither time nor space:

Each seemed to be helping the other two stay upright, yet every tumble doubled their delight. The live oaks and the souging pine on the banks enclosed them and absorbed their laughter while they fought against gravity for each other's hands. Their skirts flew like wings and their skin turned pewter in the cold and dying night ... The sky above them was another country. Winter stars, close enough to lick, had come before sunset. For a moment looking up, Sethe entered the prefect peace they offered. (*Beloved*, 174).

However, this unity is described by Carl Plasa as "fragile as the ice they skate upon" (Plasa, 130). This is true in as far as the end of the novel with *Beloved*'s disappearance, and Denver's survival by returning to the black community from which she was expelled with her mother. The exile in which Sethe chooses to live is the result of the phantasmatic scenarios in her life. Starting from her legendary escape and the epic birth of Denver to the killing of her 'already-crawling?' baby, Sethe was seen by the ex-slave community as possessing the power of life (giving birth) as well as the power of death (killing her child). Trudier Harris argues that it is Sethe's strength and power associated by her pride, self-sufficiency and independence which exiled her from the tribe (*Fiction and Folklore*, 159). Harris thinks that it is only when Sethe lost those qualities and sought the help of the black women after the return of *Beloved*, does she return to the community. Musselwhite explains this as: "The whole function of the phantasm is to integrate the subject into what is, in effect, the symbolic order of the tribe". (Musselwhite, "Tess: The Phantasmatic Capture", 122) Harris thinks that *Beloved* returns and brings with her a destructive excessive desire of vengeance manifested in her plump body and pregnant-like tight belly and directed towards Sethe's power and strength. Having this destructive and excessive desire for vengeance, *Beloved* might be looked at as the double of the sweet friendly figure of Amy Denver who helps Sethe in her escape and the 'magical birth' of her daughter, Denver. The contrast between these two women is drawn in the novel in Amy's "raggediest-looking trash" her "good hands" and "her tenderhearted mouth" compared to *Beloved*'s "new shoes" and "her new skin" (*Beloved*, 31, 81, 78, 66, 50 respectively). However, Amy has everything that *Beloved* does not: Amy has practical skills, bravery and emotions, while *Beloved* does not know how to and/or cannot tie her shoes' laces. In addition, *Beloved* is introduced to the text as a twenty-year-old, but occasionally "behave[s] like a two-year-old" (*Beloved*, 98). It is in fact the goodness associated with Amy together with the fact that she is introduced to the novel as a voice "The voice saying, 'Who's in there?'" (*Beloved*, 31), and the idea of her as a mixture of black and white that entice the suggestion of her as being the 'Good Object'. This is similar to what Musselwhite concludes about the 'Good Object' as "an amalgam of the both parents, of the beneficent breast of the mother and the potent phallus of the father". (Musselwhite, "Tess: The Phantasmatic Capture", 126) In this sense, Amy and *Beloved* would be seen as doubles.

Yet, *Beloved*'s uncontrollable excesses and her destructive desire can be explained in the context of what Abraham calls the 'phantom'. (Abraham and Torok, 166) Torok writes about the theory of the phantom: "Abraham's theory of the phantom enlarges upon Freud's metapsychology by suggesting that the unsettling disruption in the psychic life of one person can adversely and unconsciously affect someone else. Abraham likens the foreign presence to ventriloquism and calls it a 'phantom'."<sup>7</sup> The phantom as shown by Abraham is not the dead but the gaps which are left by him/her that haunt us and remain safe and alive in us. Like Freud, Abraham relies on the idea of transmission through which secrets and experiences from earlier generations transfer to their descendants. Abraham writes: "The phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious-for good reason. It passes in a way yet to be determined from the parent's unconscious into the child's". (Abraham and Torok, 173).

*Beloved*'s pregnancy can be understood, as Nicholls argues, in relation to the concept of mourning. He looks at Sethe's attempt not to remember the past as a kind of refusal of mourning. Nicholls also considers the dead person: "a phantasmatic presence within the self". (Nicholls, 55) *Beloved*, as explained earlier, holds not only Sethe's secrets and desires, but also the secrets and traumatic experiences of the whole history of

slavery. *Beloved's* return uncovers the contents of Paul D's 'tobacco tin' which he thought were safe and concealed. Not only did *Beloved* drive Paul D out of Sethe's house, but also forced him to reveal his hidden secrets. In this sense, *Beloved* seems to evoke not only Paul D, but also Stamp Paid and Ella to speak of things they have long decided about as unspeakable. Only after *Beloved's* arrival do we know about Stamp Paid's dead wife and the horrible sexual abuse Ella experienced in a house where she was shared by her owner and his son. Osagie writes about *Beloved's* presence in the novel: "In fact, through *Beloved's* own life, we are given a retrospective look at events in other people's lives in the community ("Is Morrison also among the prophets?", 15). Žižek explains the relation between symptoms and phantasms: "Interpretation and construction stand to each other as do symptom and fantasy: symptoms are to be interpreted, fundamental fantasy is to be (re) constructed ... interpretation aims at the truth of the subject's desire, while construction expresses the knowledge about drive." (Žižek, 36-7).

Regarding Denver, it is *Beloved's* potent role in Denver's life that breaks the boundaries which Denver strongly constructed around the house where she lives with her mother. Denver started to keep her "sweet secrets" in a round empty room formed by five boxwood bushes. Her secrets were safe behind the fifty-inch walls of murmuring leaves, "Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. Wore her out. Veiled and protected by the living green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish" (*Beloved*, 28-9). In this quiet place which Morrison describes as: "closed off from the hurt of the hurt world" (*Beloved*, 28), we come through a quasi-phantasmatic scene in which the picture of her birth drawn by her mother is now articulated by elements of nature:

Once when she was in the boxwood, an autumn long before Paul D moved into the house with her mother, she was made suddenly cold by a combination of wind and the perfume on her skin. She dressed herself, bent down to leave and stood up in snowfall: a thin and whipping snow very like the picture her mother had painted as she described the circumstances of Denver's birth in a canoe straddled by a white girl for whom she was named. (*Beloved*, 29).

This scene in which Denver lives in the phantasmatic scenario of her 'magical' birth marks the start of her individuality, especially when we think of the white dress which she returns home to see embracing her mother's waist. The 'tender embrace' of the dress moves her further to the details of her birth.

In conclusion, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* employs the concept of the phantasm to explore the structure and dynamics of its narrative. The novel delves into the past and present experiences of its characters, particularly Sethe, whose life is haunted by traumatic events from her time as a slave. Through these shifts in time and perspective, Morrison examines how memories and history shape individuals and communities. The repetition of certain scenes in the novel, such as Sethe's act of killing her own child, highlights the transformative potential of confronting traumas. Rather than simply recreating past experiences, these repetitions offer an opportunity for healing and psychological growth. The phantasmatic structure allows for a reconsideration and revision of past events through later perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, *Beloved* herself can be seen as embodying not only Sethe's desires but also the collective history of slavery experienced by the characters. *Beloved's* excessive desires for love and dependence reflect this history as she seeks to fill the void left by years of trauma and oppression. Ultimately, *Beloved* challenges traditional historical narratives by emphasizing personal experiences over factual accounts. Through her exploration of phantasms in relation to slavery and its aftermaths, Morrison sheds light on the complexities surrounding individual identities within larger historical contexts.

#### **Funding Information:**

This research is funded by Damascus University – Funder No.: 501100020505.

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