

The Quilt Woven with Repressed Memories: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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I. Introduction

The women for having known them and no more, no more; the children for having been them but never again. They killed a boss so often and so completely they had to bring him back to life to pulp him one more time. Tasting hot mealcake among pine trees, they beat it away. Singing love songs to Mr. Death, they smashed his head. More than the rest, they killed the flirt whom folks called Life for leading them on. (*B* 108–9)

Born Joshua, he [Stamp Paid] renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master's son. Handed her over in the sense that he did not kill anybody, thereby himself, because his wife demanded he stay alive. Otherwise, she reasoned, where and to whom could she return when the boy was through? With

that gift, he decided that he didn't owe anybody anything. (*B* 185)

The day Stamp Paid saw the two backs through the window and then hurried down the steps, he believed the undecipherable language clamoring around the house was the mumbling of the black and angry dead. Very few had died in bed, like Baby Suggs, and none that he knew of, including Baby, had lived a livable life. ... Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. (*B* 198)

The passages quoted above are taken from the memories of a couple of characters of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The text *Beloved*, as a whole, is weaved out of various pieces of memories of slavery. While Sethe's memories of slavery take the most part of it, *Beloved* itself embodies a number of other characters' memories such as Baby Suggs, Denver, Paul D, Stamp Paid, Sixo, and Ella, to name a few. The first quotation above is Paul D's memory of the prison in Alfred, Georgia; the second is about Stamp Paid's memory of losing his wife and changing his name. Through the last passage which is about the "undecipherable" conversation among Sethe, Denver, and Beloved at 124, Morrison suggests how her text reverberates noisy "clamorings" of the black people's voice, which has been stifled in the white-centered society. These clamorous articulations have not been able to be included into the orthodox historiography about America. *Beloved*, whose idiosyncratic style surely challenges readers, allows these voices to reverberate richly and deeply throughout the text without smoothing out their peculiar characteristics. Accordingly, this essay aims at exploring Morrison's ragged narrative style of incorporating multi-vocal and multifarious narratives of memories.

The critic Caroline Rody calls *Beloved* a “historical novel,” “the very chapter of American history of American literature: the very chapter of the African Americans who survived slavery” (93).¹⁾ As a matter of fact, in an October 1988 forum in Cambridge, Massachusetts, when Toni Morrison was asked why she wrote *Beloved*, her response was “the invisibility of black people in ‘official’ histories – there is no memorial, no place, nothing that summons the presences and absences of slaves” (Liscio 31). Rody’s insightful observation about Morrison’s overall project in *Beloved* is quite right in another sense as well because “Morrison rewrites the life of the historical figure Margaret Garner, who killed her child to prevent her recapture into slavery, and sets this story as the focus of an epic-scale recreation of African-American life under slavery and in its aftermath” (Rody 93). However, the very technique with which the novel is written, I will argue, is much more important than the mere fact that the novel is based upon a real historical event. The way the text weaves pieces of characters’ life stories based upon their memories of slavery makes the novel read as an alternative historiography revealing hidden truths of slavery in America from the experience of black ex-slaves.

The text *Beloved* which amalgamates its characters’ memories intricately resembles a sort of huge quilt woven out of various pieces of painful experiences of slavery. Just as the quilt is woven through various colorful pieces of cloth, Morrison’s text juxtaposes various characters’ traumatic experiences of slavery. This quilt-text, woven from the perspective of black ex-slaves, claims for revising the official version of American history, written from the perspective of the white historian.

1) Rody, in her critical essay “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: History, ‘Rememory,’ and a ‘Clamor for a Kiss,’” reads *Beloved* as “a mother-quest, an African-American feminist ‘herstory’ that posits a kind of ‘mother of history’” (105). However, transcending gender issues, I would like to interpret *Beloved* as an alternative historiography critiquing orthodox historiography written from the perspective of a white historian.

However, this quilt-text demands a close examination in order to be interpreted as a significant counterdiscourse critiquing orthodox historiography. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine how these pieces of cloth (personal memories) construct the quilt (alternative collective historiography), how personal memories crisscross official history, and how personal memories can revise the official version of national memory or amnesia.

II. In-Between Memories and Histories

In the introduction of a well-known study on discursive productions of memory, *Regimes of Memory*, Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin start their discussion with two quite familiar statements that "we are made of our memories," and that "a study of the way we remember is a study of the way we are" (2). Of course, the opposite view also exists that the expansion of memory signals the atrophy of the public sphere and the theoretical difficulty of conceiving of social or collective life and experience outside the terms of an accretion of individuals – a position taken up in the same volume by Michael Lambek: "Memory was the refuge of the individual" (3). However, memories are not purely personal nor have nothing to do with national history. The co-relations between memories and histories are not simple, but demand a thorough examination.

Since the 1980s the relationship between memory and history has been much discussed as a historiographical problem. As Radstone and Hodgkin explain, "While History has become negatively associated with the 'public,' and with 'objectivity,' memory has become positively associated with the embedded, with the local, the personal and the subjective" (10). In *History and Memory*, for example, Jacques Le Goff writes, "Memory is the raw

material of history ... it is the living source from which historians draw” (xi–xii). For Le Goff, memory is equated with the past itself, whereas history is considered as a reconstructed, therefore impure and imperfect, version of the past. In “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” Pierre Nora also identifies memory as a primitive or sacred form opposed to modern historical consciousness: “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past” (8). Nora goes so far as to argue that “History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it” (9). For both Le Goff and Nora, thus, memory exists as an authentic entity of the past itself, and as a devastating critique of the totalizing, equivocating aspects of historical discourse, because history exists as an ideological reconstruction of the past.

More importantly, however, it is noteworthy that memory inevitably has two dimensions: social and individual. According to Maurice Halbwachs, surprisingly enough, these two dimensions are interrelated:

[T]o be sure, everyone has a capacity for memory that is unlike that of anyone else ... but individual memory is nevertheless a part or an aspect of group memory ... to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu (family, church, community organizations, political parties, neighborhoods, ethnic groups etc.). (53)

For Halbwachs, memory is not an individual faculty but rather a technique of framing experience, generated through the group. In this sense, what appears as an individual's unique inner world of memory is in fact nothing other than the uniqueness of the layering of social memories. Collective and individual memories are deeply intertwined. Much of an

individual's memory is socially/culturally/nationally constructed; much of social/cultural/national memory is mediated through an individual's memory. Put more simply, what one remembers and forgets is, to some extent, shaped by one's larger social/cultural/national narratives. Furthermore, cultural historians have proposed that memory be further extended as the very *process* holding groups together: as the constant re-negotiation and circulation of such collective stories and practices that produces and maintains community (Radstone & Hodgkin 117). In this sense, memory works as the privileged instantiation of a space in-between. It is a space neither individual nor collective, but one that emerges as a site of intersubjectivity (Radstone & Hodgkin 117).

Contemporary scholarly interests in memory converge, then, in seeing memory as possessing "the potential to contest public regimes of History and of official narratives of the happened" (Radstone & Hodgkin 11). The character Beloved effectively represents how these two levels of memories can coincide: one as a personal level, the other as a racial/collective one. On the first level, Beloved represents Sethe's dead daughter; at the same time, she also represents the black in general who have gone through the Middle Passage and slavery. She is both an individual and the collective black people. As the critic Jean Wyatt appropriately argues in "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," "on the personal level, Beloved is the nursing baby that Sethe killed. But in the social dimension that always doubles the personal in *Beloved*, the ghost represents – as the generic name Beloved suggests – all the loved ones lost through slavery, beginning with the Africans who died on the slave ships" (479).²⁾ It might be in this sense that Linda Krumbolz mentions that

2) Ashraf H. A. Rushdy also argues, "Beloved is many things. She is Sethe's baby daughter whom she murdered at age two in order to save from a life of slavery. Beloved is also the medium of a story that was best left untold, unrecalled: 'It was not a story to pass on'" ("Rememory" 317). The critic Krumbolz

“in *Beloved*, Morrison constructs a parallel between the individual processes of psychological recovery and a historical or national process” (395).

In “Rememory’: Primal Scenes and Construction in Toni Morrison’s Novels,” Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, in a similar vein, observes that “in the world of Morrison’s novels, ... memory is neither as stable nor as intensely personal a thing as is perception” (322). Rushdy goes on to argue: “The magic of memory is that it is interpersonal, that it is the basis for constructing relationships with the other who also remembers. The reality of memory is that it must be experienced individually, first, before it becomes communal property. In individual experience, memory is painful, as ... Sethe discover[s]. In shared experience, memory is healing, as everyone in Morrison’s narratives discovers” (321). Painful and traumatic memories which might hurt and disrupt individuals could in turn console and heal each other’s traumas and challenge official history when shared collectively throughout the community.

In other words, Sethe’s painful memory in which she had to kill her daughter in order to prevent her from being captured as a slave can be expanded to become a racial history speaking for all the blacks who had to undergo this painful experience of the Middle Passage and slavery. And Sethe’s memory threatens the white male historian’s monolithic history which has attempted to leave these memories out. Sethe’s memory reverberates all the muted voices in this mono-vocal history. However, as Sethe walks out of the prison-like 124 into the village people, personal memories should be united with others’ in order to heal and critique official history. Only when personal memories get juxtaposed and interwoven along

interprets *Beloved* on three levels: first as “the incarnation of Sethe’s baby girl and of her most painful memory,” second as “everyone’s ghost,” and third as “the reader’s ghost, forcing us to face the historical past as a living and vindictive presence” (400).

with others' memories, can the national official historiography be revised into the version including blacks' voices. In this context, Morrison's novel constructs a huge quilt in which personal memories get combined with collective ones and enshrouds the official version of national history of a single, homogeneous, pattern.

III. From Parts to the Whole

Just as the character *Beloved* exists both as an individual and as a collective identity of a whole lineage of black people obliterated by slavery, the narrative style of *Beloved* in which personal memories are weaved into a collective story is based on the dynamic process of parts constructing and critiquing the whole. A number of crucial moments of the novel register this significant process of coalition on the level of its content as well. This process is tremendously significant because it nullifies the very effects of slavery which leaves blacks as fragmented pieces.

The text *Beloved* first records the painful process in which the slavery ruptures black people into fragments:

He [Schoolteacher] liked the ink I [Sethe] made. It was her [Mrs. Garner's] recipe, but he preferred how I mixed it and it was important to him because at night he sat down to write in his book. It was a book about us but we didn't know that right away. We just thought it was his manner to ask us questions. He commenced to carry round a notebook and write down what we said. I still think it was them questions that *tore* Sixo up. *Tore* him up for all time. (*B* 37,

my emphasis)

Shackled, walking through the perfumed things honeybees love, Paul D hears the men talking and for the first time learns his worth. He has always known, or believed he did, his value – as a hand, a laborer who could make profit on a farm – but now he discovers his worth, which is to say he learns his price. The dollar value of *his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future*. (B 226, my emphasis)

In the first quotation, telling her experience as a slave to Denver, Sethe mentions how Schoolteacher's scientific discourse left slaves as unhuman. He literally writes the existence of the slaves by charting and recording them in his book, with their characteristics divided into the binary opposition of "animal" and "human," their bodies measured in pseudo-scientific ways, aimed at dehumanisation as a means of social control. Under the gaze of the master who writes only his version of the narrative into his "notebook" and thereby excludes all other stories, Sethe cannot but be contained by his words.³⁾ In this way, Schoolteacher uses writing in a detrimental way (Rushdy, "Daughters" 588).⁴⁾ While the black community tries to put torn pieces together and restore their wholeness,

3) At Sweet Home days, Sethe observes Schoolteacher teaching his nephews: "Schoolteacher made his pupils sit and learn books for a spell every afternoon. ... He was talking to his pupils and I heard him say, 'Which one are you doing?' And one of the boys said, 'Sethe.' ... 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.'" (B 193)

4) However, as Linda Krumholz notes, Denver, at the end of the novel, interestingly usurps Schoolteacher's position and "take away from him the power to define African-Americans and make their history in a way that steals their past, their souls, and their humanity" (405).

the white slavery tries to rent the black community into pieces and to reduce black individuals into their body parts such as hands and legs for labor and sexual organs for reproduction, less than human beings, as the second quotation indicates. Gazed from the perspective of the slave holder, the blacks cannot but be seen merely as an assembly of bodily parts which can be converted into monetary value.

For Stamp Paid, this image of the torn body is the ribbon he picks up from the river by accident:

But none of that had worn out his marrow. None of that. It was the ribbon. Tying his flatbed up on the bank of the Licking River, securing it the best he could, he caught sight of something red on its bottom. Reaching for it, he thought it was a cardinal feather stuck to his boat. He tugged and what came loose in his hand was a red ribbon knotted around a curl of wet wooly hair, clinging still to its bit of scalp. (*B* 180)

This ribbon is probably from a black body, who has been lynched by the white. Since a bit of scalp and hair are knotted around the ribbon, this ribbon embodies a piece of the black body itself, which, again, is torn into pieces by white violence. More specifically, at the same time, this red ribbon reminds Stamp Paid of the “black ribbon on her [Vashti’s] neck” that “she used to wear put ... on every time she went to him” (*B* 233). According to his memory, Stamp Paid had to send his wife to his master’s son and his wife wore the black ribbon whenever she was sent to the master’s son. This ribbon becomes a symbol representing how Stamp Paid’s marriage life had to be disintegrated. In this way, the text *Beloved* records the debacle of blacks’ identities resulting from “desubjectification”

and “undifferentiation” (Moglen 22) under slavery.

In contrast, the text *Beloved* also registers the reverse process in which blacks restore their wholeness in their communal effects. Baby Suggs, as a central figure of this healing process, preaches to her black community about how valuable their bodies are although they are abused by the white:

“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them.” (*B* 88)

The slave’s black body, which has been reduced to a kind of property of plantation by the white slave holder, restores its intrinsic value to its real owner through Baby Suggs’ preaching. By making them caress each part of the body, Baby Suggs helps her people regain the wholeness of their body, which has been torn into pieces by the whites. Here, Baby Suggs’ sermon-ritual in the form of pseudo-religion emphasizes the collectivity of this process. When Sethe arrives at 124 running away from the Sweet Home, Baby Suggs also bathes Sethe’s body from parts to parts so that she can recover her wholeness as a human being. When Baby Suggs washes Sethe’s body, she also cleans off the dirt of slavery and gets Sethe’s body ready for her free life:

She led Sethe to the keeping room and, by the light of a

spirit lamp, bathed her in sections, starting with her face. Then, while waiting for another pan of heated water, she sat next to her and stitched gray cotton. Sethe dozed and woke to the washing of her hands and arms. After each bathing, Baby covered her with a quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen. (*B* 93)

Here, the quilt that covers Sethe's body is quite meaningful. Just as the quilt is made up of many different pieces of fabric, Sethe's body is healed by Baby Suggs' bathing of her bodily parts. Of course, the quilt also reminds the reader of the text's peculiar narrative style in which various narrators put their personal memories next to each other's. These pieces of memories, just as various pieces of fabric form a colorful quilt, construct a collective history of slavery and rewrite its official version. Earlier in the story, Sethe also sews up her wedding gown grabbing patches of fabric here and there: "Well, I made up my mind to have at the least a dress that wasn't the sacking I worked in. So I took to stealing fabric, and wound up with a dress you wouldn't believe. The top was from two pillow cases in her mending basket. The front of the skirt was a dresser scarf a candle fell on and burnt a hole in, and one of her old sashes we used to test the flatiron on. ... Finally I took the mosquito netting from a nail out the barn" (*B* 59). Both Sethe's wedding gown and Baby Suggs' quilt symbolize the regained wholeness of the black people's torn identities. Only in these instances can "fragmentation find a form of cohesion, as all the pieces are given a place of their own in the wider scope of existence" (Scarpa 103).

At the end of the novel, it is Paul D, returning to 124, reaffirms Sethe's wholeness and her value as a human being, after she suffers from the lurid confrontation with and then separation from her painful memory, Beloved:

Paul D sits down in the rocking chair and examines the quilt patched in carnival colors. ... Suddenly he remembers Sixo trying to describe what he felt about the Thirty-Mile Woman. "She is a friend of mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind."

Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that. He wants to put his story next to hers.

"Sethe," he says, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow."

He leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. "You your best thing, Sethe. You are." His holding fingers are holding hers.

"Me? Me?" (*B* 272–3)

Putting his secret memory next to Sethe's, Paul D also wants to be liberated from his own painful memories. By sharing repressed memories together, they can turn toward "tomorrows" of free life emancipated from the prison of "yesterdays" of traumatic memories. In this way, the novel repeatedly records the process in which black people lose their wholeness by the slavery's violence and recover it again with the black community's coalition. Here, "the quilt patched in carnival colors" under which Sethe lies symbolizes quite appropriately the black's collective efforts to restore their wholeness by sharing individual memories.

Of course, however, this kind of interweaving of collective memories should be distinguished from the forced collectivity through which institutionalized slavery itself disallows individuality and categorizes African American as a group without individual traits. Paul D's memory of

Georgia prison where forty six men had to remain chained and move in perfect order specifically reflects how dehumanizing this forced collectivity is. This forced collectivity rather has a lot to do with stereotyping of racial others ignoring their individual differences and potentialities. Unlike the forced collectivity, the process of weaving the quilt of collective memories out of individual painful stories is quite empowering and healing.⁵⁾ And this dynamic is reflected by Morrison's particular style in which characters' different pieces of narratives are put together to comprise the text as a sort of quilt, nullifying the narrative written from the white perspective, the part about slave-catching in this novel.

IV. The Black's Quilt vs The White's Ink

I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing (*B* 210)

5) According to Lynda Koolish, Sethe's personal memories have much to do with collective histories of blacks in general in the tradition of griots: "Both the loss and the return of her individual memories serve as well as emblems of the enormous historical loss of collective, cultural, tribal, community memories, and for memories which survived against great odds because of the African griot tradition of oral storytelling. Sethe's psychological reintegration into wholeness through the process of remembering thus also suggests an entire people's being restored to history and to wholeness" (427-8).

When the four horsemen came – schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff – the house on Bluestone Road was so quiet they thought they were too late. Three of them dismounted, one stayed in the saddle, his rifle ready, his eyes trained away from the house to the left and to the right, because likely as not the fugitive would make a dash for it. (*B* 148)

The two narratives quoted above reveal thoroughly the striking differences in both style and content between the black's ragged quilt and the white's totalizing ink. While the first narrative is woven out of fragmented pieces of unconscious memories of *Beloved* (both as an individual and as a collective black), the second one is recorded from the transcendental perspective of the Schoolteacher/slaveholder. As Lorraine Liscio notes, Schoolteacher's narrative is "the only linear, straightforward account of the murder [which] comes during a break in the narrative where a white patriarchal narrative interrupts the narrator's" (38). The narrative written by *Beloved*, the very victim of the Middle Passage, records this traumatic experience quite painfully and porously; the narrative by Schoolteacher, the very wielder of slavery, records how to catch fugitive slaves quite objectively and practically. In *Beloved*'s passage, punctuation disappears altogether, "leaving the sentence of each participant open to the sentence of the next speaker, and the personal pronouns *I* and *you* move toward each other, losing their difference first to become interchangeable and then to mesh in the possessive *mine*" (Wyatt 481). To the contrary, "the slave-driver Schoolteacher's pseudo-scientific ledgers ... transform feeling flesh into dead specimens of science and machines of (re)production" (Dobbs 564). We have seen in the previous section how blacks' collective healings turn blacks back into human flesh from the "dead

specimens” of slavery.

For another example, the pivotal tragedy in which Sethe had to kill her child in order not to be captured as slaves is also dealt with totally differently according to perspectives:

Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher’s hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle 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 the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. (B 163)

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere - in the ticking time the men spent staring at what there was to stare at - the old nigger boy, still mewling, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arch of its mother’s swing. (B 149)

According to Sethe’s version, her intention is simple: to choose death for both herself and her most beloved rather than accept being forced to

return to slavery and have her children suffer an institutionalized dehumanization. Arguably, her action results from nothing but her boundless maternal love to protect her children from danger, which in Sethe's thought is worse than death. Whether her decision can be justified or not, Sethe's narrative, at least, inscribes it as an inevitable choice. Seen from the perspective of the slaveholder's transcendental perspective, however, this same action is stigmatized as crazy violence of a former slave woman only to prove blacks' inferiority. Schoolteacher might appropriate Sethe's action as evidence to prove their animalistic instinct to kill younglings which are endangered by an outside agent. Under this totalizing discourse, blacks cannot but be contained and enslaved regardless of slavery's abolition.

Toward the end of Part II of *Beloved*, however, the passage describing silent conversation among Sethe, Denver, and Beloved exemplifies how this quilt of different people's personal memories can be weaved seamlessly:

Tell me the truth. Dind't you come from the other side?

Yes. I was on the other side.

You came back because of me?

Yes.

You rememory me?

Yes. I remember you.

You never forgot me?

Your face is mine.

Do you forgive me? Will you stay? You safe here now.

...

Beloved

You are my sister

You are my daughter

You are my face; you are me
I have found you again; you have come back to me
You are my Beloved
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine (*B* 215, 216)

This passage above inscribes the silent conversation among Sethe, Denver, and Beloved without smoothing out their peculiar characteristics. Here, Sethe's, Denver's, and Beloved's words merge into a soundless articulation of repressed memories. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy regards *Beloved* as "speakerly text," "whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral tradition and to produce the illusion of oral narration" ("Daughters" 586). Including Sethe's, all the black characters' memories in *Beloved* can be seen as "speakerly text"; Schoolteacher's narrative and the newspaper clipping⁶⁾ about Sethe's murder Stamp Paid shows to Paul D are the only examples of "writerly text" in the novel. While memories are fragmentary and symptomatic, white narratives are quite straightforward and manipulative with an aim to subject others to the white's totalizing discourse. The white's ink attempts to transform blacks into a sort of *tabula rasa*, a blank page, on which they can inscribe whatever they want blacks to signify. In this context, black people's memories can function as

6) Morrison, in fact, does not include this newspaper clipping into her text; instead, by showing Paul D's refusal to trust the article's authenticity, she reveals how the mass media underrepresented blacks at that time: "Paul D slid the clipping out from under Stamp's palm. The print meant nothing to him so he didn't even glance at it. ... Because there was no way in hell a black face could appear in a newspaper if the story was about something anybody wanted to hear. ... It would have to be something out of the ordinary – something whitepeople would find interesting, truly different, worth a few minutes of teeth sucking if not gasps. And it must have been hard to find news about Negroes worth the breath catch of a white citizen of Cincinnati" (*B* 155–6).

a counterdiscourse to disrupt this kind of organizing discourse.

As many critics have noticed, this kind of speakerly text has much to do with African oral tradition and their peculiar sense of history.⁷⁾ More importantly, however, Morrison's peculiar narrative style full of fragments surely represents the fragmented life of the blacks who had to be uprooted from Africa, transported to America, and positioned under the yoke of slavery. According to Giulia Scarpa, "*Beloved* is a novel of fragmentation. Its fragmented discourse epitomizes the experience of Black Americans since their displacement from Africa" (102).⁸⁾ This fragmentation also demands an active participation on the part of readers.

V. Conclusion: The Quilt Readers Weave

Morrison's quilt weaved out of repressed memories of slavery, after all, blots out the white man's ink inscribing blacks from the totalizing perspective. Morrison's novel makes us redefine the concept of history as

7) For example, the sense of time is quite unique in African history resisting its chronological order. This peculiar sense of time is also reflected throughout the text. For instance, it is quite interesting that Denver's grandmother is called "Baby Suggs" or "Grandma Baby." Moreover, "the mother-daughter structure also surfaces in a surprising interchangeability of generational positions among female characters" (Rody 107). Lorraine Liscio also notes that "Lacking a chronological, linear perspective, individual stories unfurl, move forward, convolute, and start up again, only to merge with others' stories" (37).

8) In this way, Morrison's text makes up a huge text of memories: "The narrative of the novel is structured as some aspects of memory are structured: disjointed, circular, insistent, urgent. Morrison is conscious of writing from a black folk tradition in which a story is told meanderingly, constantly retold, constantly imaged within a framework. As images and memories pile up, collide, and re-emerge, as rusted hearts and bruised bodies opens, as characters bump into one another's memories, ... Morrison in her impulse as a writer repudiates the linear, the monologic, the uninterrupted narrative ..." (Koolish 422).

“as an amalgamation of local narratives, as a jumble of personal as well as publicly recorded triumphs and tragedies” (Davis 246). Of course, this alternative historiography redefined in this way should not be necessarily in the form of writing. The scars growing in the form of a chokecherry on Sethe’s back also should be incorporated into this alternative historiography. As Sethe’s physical pain is transformed into aesthetic beauty, the symptoms of pains and traumas of blacks should be sublimated into a vast quilt of aesthetic beauty, much like *Beloved*.

Reading *Beloved* as a “poststructuralist critique of the idea of a single totalizing Truth or History” (246), Kimberly Chabot Davis argues: “Morrison’s novel does not aim to fill in all the gaps of the historical past; the result of the literary archeology is not a complete skeleton, but a partial one, with pieces deliberately missing or omitted” (252). Regardless of Morrison’s theoretical position, however, these gaps certainly invite readers to participate in interpreting and filling in gaps of the text quite actively. The quilt Morrison provides in her novel is left incomplete, perhaps, strategically; it needs to be weaved further along with readers’ interpretations. The quilt weaved out of characters’ tragic memories of slavery can be completed only when readers juxtapose their own memories along with the text and reconfigure history itself. Morrison ends her novel with the repeated statement that “it was not a story to pass on,” reemphasizing readers’ participation in filling in gaps and stitching in their own pieces of memories into the novel, not to “pass on” the text as incomplete.

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Abstract

**The Quilt Woven with Repressed Memories:
Toni Morrison's *Beloved***

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The text *Beloved* which amalgamates its characters' memories intricately resembles a sort of huge quilt woven out of various pieces of painful experiences of slavery. Just as the quilt is woven through various colorful pieces of cloth, Morrison's text juxtaposes various characters' traumatic experiences of slavery. This quilt-text, woven from the perspective of black ex-slaves, claims for revising the official version of American history, written from the perspective of the white historian. Morrison's peculiar narrative style full of fragments represents the fragmented life of the blacks who had to be uprooted from Africa, transported to America, and positioned under the yoke of slavery. More importantly, this speakerly text invites readers to fill in gaps in the text, incorporate their own memories and interpretations into it, and reconfigure the official version of national memory or amnesia.

Key Words: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, history, memory, slavery, quilt, alternative historiography

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