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Tesis de Licenciatura en Lengua y Literatura Inglesa
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Universidad Católica Argentina

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

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**“Wading into Semantic Depths: A Poststructuralist
Approach to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. ”**

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Introduction

Make it possible for a heaven and hell to be I'll stroll down the paths in paradise with my little boy and my beloved daughter and they will twist in the flames of envy I'll see them roast and groan I'll laugh and the children will laugh with me. You owe me that revenge my Lord. I demand that you give it to me. (De Beauvoir, 1968, p. 95)

To fully grasp the semantic depths of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a change of perspective concerning history, social dynamics and racial assumptions has to take place in the reader.

Simone De Beauvoir envisaged an alternative life, 'the road not taken', in order to write her collection of novellas *La Femme Rompue*. She created a cautionary tale or a sympathetic manifest for those women who had been oppressed by their marital circumstances. Even though De Beauvoir was writing twenty years earlier than Morrison and the "Monologue" is set some hundred years later than *Beloved*, in both texts we can witness an imprisoned woman whose motives for allegedly killing her daughter are questioned by the society that condemns her. The ability in the reader to come to terms within the same work with the term *motherhood* and *murder* depends on how the process of deconstruction is put to work. The first steps would be to read *mother* against itself, against the social turmoil the narrative presents and the psyche of the characters as deployed in the novel.

What is the story behind the title of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*? Challenging the assumptions each reader may attach to this particular word, *Beloved* defies the established semantic bonds and subverts language so as to depict a crude reality.

From a strictly Poststructuralist perspective, I have chosen to analyse how language in *Beloved* is deconstructed and de-centered for descriptive purposes and under particular social circumstances, as well as in order to wade into semantic depths.

The aim of this work is to provide a brief account of poststructuralist theories which work best in connection with the language in the novel and to study how social/ political events constitute a framework for language. Furthermore, it is worth analysing how the process of deconstruction serves communicative purposes in the narrative in order to find an answer to Toni Morrison's need to write a novel set in Kentucky (a border State) during the American Civil War and in post- Civil War Kentucky, which was not part of the Confederacy. (fig. 1)

The first part of this work will explore notions of post- structuralism that affect linguistics, i.e. how it originated, the role of a deconstructive reading, and how linguistics has profited from it. The next section will refer to the use of language in connection to the place (The South, 1870s), and some of the devices used to convey feelings in a fragmented narrative.

The third part will proceed to analyse the need for a fragmented narrative and thus fragmented language. If language represents reality, and reality appears to be ripped to shreds, language reflects in those fragmented arrangements the feelings the author is willing to evoke. That those feelings be decoded by the readers effectively is only a matter of chance, since the impact on readership is as manifold as reader's own circumstances and backgrounds.

Anything dead coming back to life hurts.

(Morrison, 1987, p. 42)

The attempt to frame a poststructuralist reading of *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison (born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931) stems from a myriad of facts. To begin with, Poststructuralism is concerned with the radical instability of subjects, that is to say in this particular case, how subjectively and erratically connections are made between the label or signifier that is used to name an object and the thing in the world, the signified. "Language is always inscribed in a network of relays and differential 'traces' which can never be grasped by the individual speaker." (Norris, 1982, p. 29)

In *Beloved*, voice is given to voiceless subjects: to Sethe, while she was a slave and to Beloved, who emerges into life from the world of the dead. So, the signifier - signified traditional connection is challenged in favour of a fluctuating relationship between signs¹. The protagonist is no longer a slave towards the end of the narrative; however, that designating label will hover around her to haunt her existence in different ways. Therefore, the term *slave* is re-accommodated according to the constant sliding of the signified under the signifier. In this passage, Sethe, consumed by guilt, is willing to trade places with her daughter Beloved. But the place her daughter is eager to fill is the one of the master. Sethe is free at last to lead her life and make her own decisions, but Beloved is back to dominate her and oppress her life in order to obtain the satisfaction that had proved delayed. A new kind of slavery is born together with Beloved.

¹ [...], to do sign ificante, y en p rimer lu gar el sig nificante escrito, se ría deri vado. Sie mpre seria téc nico y representativo. No tendría n ingún sen tido constituyente. Tal derivación es el origen d e la noción de "significante". (Derrida, 1979, p 18)

Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. That she would trade places any day. (Morrison, 1987, p. 284)

This takes us to another feature of Poststructuralism: the play of indeterminacy within and around meaning. In *Beloved*, the analysis of the title is subjected to the context in which the reader decides to insert it.

Belovéd is an archaic form of an adjective that in fact has two spellings and consequently two pronunciations. In nominal phrases, it can be used as a direct modifier with an elided nucleus. So, by becoming the nucleus of the phrase it functions as an attributive adjective. We can see an example of that in phrases such as: “Dear beloved, we are gathered here together...”, which are mainly found in religious celebrations. In that case, the last syllable *-ed* is pronounced /id/, which is an exception to the general phonological rule for simple past regular verbs. This is considered the archaic form, which is also present in Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets or in works of poetry as a means to add one more syllable to the verse for the sake of meter. *Beloved* can also be used as a predicative adjective and both the spelling and pronunciation would stay unmarked.

In the narrative, *Beloved* is spelt as in the attributive form, but when it comes to pronunciation, the reader is at a loss. *Beloved* is the only word on Sethe’s baby’s tombstone, meant as the attributive form. But as for financial reasons Sethe is not able to have any other word inscribed, the attributive adjective becomes the name of a child who had never been christened. This deferral of the syntax and therefore the semantics of *Beloved*, at a constant flux, are gradually grasped throughout the narrative as the reader fills gaps in it and reconstructs the fragmented text.

According to John Caputo, the editor and co- author of *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, letters are not bound to fixed senses or contexts. In fact, letters have too many meanings and that is why they are rarely grasped and only to a certain

extent. But this fluctuating feature, he adds, releases countless readings and answers, re readings and repetitions.²

Curiously, the fact that the word *Beloved* was inscribed on the tombstone gives way to its fixation on the protagonist's life. She cannot rid herself from loving Beloved in any way and Beloved will always be exactly that. Paralysis is aided by the inscription on stone. It is a relationship which cannot either be erased or evolve. This paralysis leads very easily to repetition. That is to say, the characters find themselves back at the beginning, under the influence of Beloved. At first, the protagonist feels elated to have recovered her daughter from the hands of her irremissible past actions. But as time progresses, she realises Beloved becomes a source of power over her and severs her freedom. Hence the repetitive quality of paralysis in this narrative. At the same time, the consequence of Beloved's *rebirth* is the deferral of the concept *Beloved*, which is used to qualify an object of affection, yet after her *rebirth*, she becomes a presence to be dreaded.

Sethe's dead daughter, the one whose throat she cut, had come back to fix her. Seethe was worn down, speckled, dying, spinning, changing shapes and generally *bedeviled*. [my emphasis] (Morrison, 1987, p. 300)

It is clear from the passage above how the narrative appropriates the deferral of the word *Beloved* and how a new meaning is attached to it after the members of the community have witnessed the effects Beloved had caused in Sethe's life. Hence the use of the word *bedeviled*. The narrative, through disregarding of conventions traditionally attached to motherhood, liberates the characters from the paralysis that the tombstone symbolises. So, not loving Beloved any more will enable characters to live their lives freely. The name

² Pues la letra, por su estructura, es estable, diseminadora, pública, incontenible, no está encadenada a cualquier sentido, definición, destino o contexto *fijs*. No sostiene que nuestro discurso *no* tenga sentido, que *todo* valga sino, por el contrario, que tiene demasiados sentidos por lo cual podemos fijar su sentido sólo de manera tentativa y en cierta medida. Y eso no equivale a la anarquía; no es una mala noticia. La letra no sólo permite sino que requiere y libera infinitas lecturas y respuestas, re-lecturas y repeticiones, comentarios y contrafirmas. (Derrida, Caputo, 1997, p. 77- 78)

inscribed on the tombstone prevents life from flowing naturally and the characters from moving on and leaving their past behind. The only thing that fluctuates is the conception of Beloved. As Norris explains,

Concepts are unfixed from their 'lawful' philosophic place, subjected to a violent 'mutation of meaning' and turned back against the sovereignty of reason. (Norris, 1982, p. 76)

Concepts constantly slide under the signifier. Rationality is not a limit to stop it from happening and logic does not take part in this phenomenon. In the novel, a written word, inscribed on a tombstone precedes reality, the embodiment of what Beloved stands for. According to Derrida, as referred to in Norris' work *Deconstruction- Theory and Practice*, the written text precedes speech.

[...] Derrida argues what at first must seem an extraordinary case: that writing is in fact the *precondition* of language and must be conceived as prior to speech. This involves showing, to begin with, that the concept of writing cannot be reduced to its normal (i.e. graphic or inscriptional) sense. As Derrida deploys it, the term is closely related to that element of signifying *difference* which Saussure thought essential to the workings of language. Writing, for Derrida, is the 'free play' or element of undecidability within every system of communication. Its operations are precisely those which escape the self-consciousness of speech and its deluded sense of the mastery of concept over language. Writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it forever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge. (Norris, 1982, p. 29)

In simpler terms, Derrida argues that the structure of written language is what frames our speech, therefore, the idea of the written text is prior to oral production and thus to any utterance, (but not chronologically speaking) as it will always be shaped according to the rules of written language.³ In this case, we are

³ La escritura es la disimulación en el logos de la presencia natural, primera e in mediata del sentido en el alma. Su violencia aparece en el alma como inconsciencia. Deconstruir esta tradición tampoco consistirá entonces en invertirla, en volver inocente a la escritura. Más bien consistirá en mostrar por qué la violencia de la escritura no le *sobreviene* a un lenguaje inocente. Hay una violencia originaria de la escritura porque el lenguaje es, en primer término y en un sentido que se mostrará progresivamente, escritura. (Derrida, 1979, p.49)

not referring to the traditional form of written language. This statement is supported by the fact that in the novel, *Beloved* is given that name because a *text* about her was to be inscribed but it fell short. Once the word is written, attachments to it are free to fluctuate.

However, to oppose this position, Post-colonial theories have demonstrated that Oral Tradition was the medium by means of which legends and folk tales were passed on in ancient cultures. With the arrival of white colonisers, Oral Tradition faded and written records were forced onto the oppressed communities which implied that they had to find their way into the written text in order to transcend.

Both perspectives are genuine for the study of a literary text such as *Beloved*. As from a Panafrican point of view, disregarding the rules of written language and embracing absence of prosody and punctuation is a way of subverting the rules of the whites and their civilisation built upon violence and oppression. Black narratives are forced to explore their own identity through the language imposed by their oppressors. On the other hand, reverting the order of resistance, and anticipating the written sign over the unconscious utterance, freed from rigid semantic and syntactic bondages, is appropriating signs in order to make them work to express this dichotomy: I am free to use written language before speech. According to Derrida, language is interpreted as it is written in order for deconstruction to take place, and this is evident in *Beloved*, as the written sign comes into existence before the word is actually uttered.

Poststructuralism also celebrates the openness, plurality and difference in systems, as a way to challenge prior stern classifications. This tenet concerns the genre of the narrative and the form of its content. Absence of a lineal chronology and a chaotic layout were not considered features of a well-written novel towards the mid-nineteenth century, whereas nowadays both of them are devices that enable the author to portray characters' psyches.

Furthermore, from the very beginning, *Beloved* could be considered a naturalist outlook of slavery at its crudest. But as the narrative progresses and the

reader encounters *Beloved's second coming*, naturalism is no longer the style under which one would place a text like *Beloved*. Elements of the Southern Gothic tradition, such as violence, isolation and imprisonment, as well as of Magic Realism – even though Morrison does not like this label⁴- take part in a postmodern juxtaposition of devices and stern classification serves no purpose at all.

It was one thing to beat up a ghost, quite another to throw a helpless colored girl out in territory infected by the Klan. Desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it could not live, the dragon swam the Ohio at will. (Morrison, 1987, p. 79)

In this image, the sense of space is combined with the constant violent threat of the Ku Klux Klan. The movement of this group is equaled to a dragon, thirsty for black blood, which found the limits to its power in the Ohio River.

But once Sethe had seen the scar, the tip of which Denver had been looking at whenever *Beloved* undressed- the little curved shadow of a smile in the koochy-koochy-coo place under her chin- once Sethe saw it, fingered it and closed her eyes for a long time, the two of them cut Denver out of the games. (Morrison, 1987, p. 282)

The Southern Gothic tradition also makes use of violence as an isolating device. In the above passage, once Sethe becomes aware of the scar she had left under *Beloved's* chin, the symbiotic bond that she shares with *Beloved* is not to be relinquished. Both of them grow oblivious to their surroundings and do without them. As for Magic Realism in the narrative, it generally appears in order to endow

⁴ Perhaps theirs (Morrison's grandparents) was the most obvious family influence to reveal itself in her fiction. While John was a skilled musician, Ardelia's magic book and the stories of ghosts and magic which they both told acquainted Morrison with black lore. These stories must have been at least partly responsible for the blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and reality and between fact and fiction in Morrison's novels, which some critics have taken, despite Morrison's own objection to the label, for "magic realism". (Peach, 1998, p. 3)

memories with a certain mysticism, which shrouds a nightmarish past with unaccounted for nostalgia.

A shudder ran through Paul D. A bone- cold spasm that made him clutch his knees. He didn't know if it was bad whiskey, nights in the cellar, pig fever, iron bits, smiling roosters, fired feet, laughing dead men, hissing grass, rain, apple blossoms, neck jewelry, Judy in the slaughter- house, Halle in the butter, ghost- white stairs, chokecherry trees, cameo pins, aspens, Paul A's face, sausage or the loss of a red, red heart. (Morrison, 1987, p. 277)

Paul D is the character in which all the past converges. He shows up in 124 Bluestone Road to re-enact the past and to convince Sethe that they “need some kind of tomorrow.” (Morrison, 1987, p. 322). In fact, some of the memories that converge in him and caused his “tobacco tin” to shut forever are rendered with the aid of magic elements. From the passage, the smiling rooster, said to mock Paul D while he had an iron bit in his mouth, was used to portray a phantasmagorical representation of racial inferiority, and the ghost- white stairs, which were the ones associated with the angry baby in 124 Bluestone Road and therefore endowed with supernatural powers, are images that comprise a complex tapestry of Magic Realism elements. Thus, a strict classification of this narrative into one style would prove pointless and inconclusive. Furthermore, a poststructuralist reading of a text like *Beloved* aims to a constant questioning of the signifiers and their absences in order to get to the true meaning of the novel. But is this possible?

The end point of deconstructive thought, as Derrida insists, is to recognise that there is no end to the interrogative play between text and text. (Norris, 1982, p. 84)

What critics have come to find by carrying out a poststructuralist study of certain texts is a dead end street, a stage of *aporia*. In other words, they have come to find the end of the free play among texts and to the contradiction of one of

the main tenets of Poststructuralism: there is no ultimate meaning to be grasped, as concepts keep fluctuating. The fact that one of the bases of this theory would backfire, is to be expected in such a dogmatic framework.⁵ So, this *aporia* or paralysis stands for the stage at which deconstruction can no longer be enforced. This stage can be associated with the concept of *difference*, a container both “vast and devoid of meaning.” (Derrida- Caputo, 1997, p. 122)

Poststructuralism is not to be considered a reaction against Structuralism, but a continuity in the latter’s reasoning. Poststructuralism gets hold of all the terms and notions Structuralism coined but from a *deferred* perspective.

[Derrida’s] object is not to deny or invalidate the structuralist project but to show how its deepest implications lead on to a questioning of method more extreme and unsettling than these thinkers wish to admit. (Norris, 1982, p. 79)

The term *diférance* was first used by Derrida, in order to explain the way poststructuralists study a text. They break down the text into its constituents and identify its differences and notional centres, especially in terms of binary oppositions, e.g. white/ black, master/ slave, man/woman, etc.

Where Derrida breaks new ground, and where the science of grammatology takes its cue, is in the extent to which ‘differ’ shades into ‘defer’. This involves the idea that meaning is always *deferred*, perhaps to the point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification. *Diférance* not only designates this theme but offers in its own unstable meaning a graphic example of the process at work.

Derrida deploys a whole rhetoric of similar terms as a means of preventing the conceptual closure- or reduction to an ultimate meaning- which might otherwise threaten his texts. Among them is the notion of ‘supplement’, itself bound up to in a supplementary play of meaning which defies semantic reduction. (Norris, 1982, p. 32)

Traditionally, one of the notional centres is privileged, so a poststructuralist reading would be concerned with inverting those differences, deferring the notional

⁵ Las leyes son siempre deconstruibles, pero el juego de rastros, en sí, si es que se tiene un en sí, no es deconstruible. (Derrida, Caputo, 1997, p. 122)

centres and looking from alternative centres. In addition to the inversion of those binary oppositions, a poststructuralist reading reopens the play of differences between the terms and discourages exclusive binary thinking. That can be achieved by resorting to gaps, absences and silences, that is to say holes in the text, what has been left unsaid, which, according to poststructuralists, is where the real interpretation of the text can be found. However, this statement is a paradox, as for poststructuralists the real meaning of a text is always fluctuating, hence the impossibility of determining a fixed way of being able to interpret it.

Deconstruction can never have the final word because its insights are inevitably couched in a rhetoric which itself lies open to further deconstructive reading. (Norris, 1982, p. 84)

Furthermore, it is suggested by Derrida in the “Round Table” he participated in at Villanova University in 1994 and which was recorded in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* by John Caputo that absolute norms should be disregarded and rules should be invented. The breach between old and new conventions should be perpetrated without forgetting what should be preserved, as there is always an old concept that aids the formulation of the new norm.⁶

The polarities to be taken into account in *Beloved* are the following:

Man/ Woman

Master/ Slave

White/ Black

Free/ Bound

Past/ Present

Alive/ Dead

⁶ Es de eso de lo que está hecha la deconstrucción: no la mezcla, sino la tensión entre la memoria, la fidelidad, la preservación de algo que se nos ha dado y, a la vez, la heterogeneidad, algo absolutamente nuevo, y una ruptura. La condición de al gún éxito en el desempeño, que nunca está garantizado, es la alianza de lo preservado y lo novedoso. (Derrida, Caputo, 1997, p. 17)

To begin with, Toni Morrison is a woman writing in the later half of the twentieth century, about slavery and the post civil war period. The reason why she construed such a narrative is in order to cast a different look on the reality of those post- war years.

By providing the outlook of a female slave, one of the notional centres is deferred, privileging woman. But does this woman depicted in *Beloved* correspond with the signified of woman, that is to say the traditional immanent concept of woman in our western, modern white society?

I think now it was the shock of liberation that drew my thought to what “free” could possibly mean to women. In the eighties, the debate was still roiling: equal pay, equal treatment, access to professions, schools...and choice without stigma. To marry or not. Inevitably these thoughts led me to the different history of black women in this country- a history in which marriage was discouraged, impossible, or illegal; in which birthing children was required, but ‘having’ them, being responsible for them- being, in other words, their parent- was as out of the question as freedom. Assertions of parenthood under conditions peculiar to the logic of institutional enslavement were criminal. (Morrison, 1987, p. XI, Foreword to *Beloved*)

I would say that the answer to the above question is no. Sethe does not correspond with the traditional concept of woman. For a start, Sethe kills her child to spare her the horrors of slavery. Besides, the act of killing on Sethe’s part can be interpreted as a rebellion against her master, because, in so doing, she is depriving him of part of his property. However, we learn from the narrative that Sethe had not received ill-treatment from her master directly but from the men who took over “Sweet Home” after Mr. Garner died. In her mind, those abuses were bound to enslavement. Indirectly, her masters let that happen.

On a more general tone, an imbalance is sensed when it comes to Black women’s narratives, on account of their experiences, according to Carole Boyce Davies.

I am asserting consistently that all the postmodernist questions of redefinition of the meaning of identity, of home, of linear history, the metanarratives of the self

and identity are destabilized in the writing of Black women's experiences.
(Boyce Davies, 1994, p. 116)

In order to make sense out of Sethe's deed, the reader should have lived through the same experiences the protagonist did, and that is very unlikely to happen. As a result, unless one is deeply immersed in the narrative, this particular semantic bond will remain untied. Furthermore, the reader is unlikely to succeed in making the associations that will result in sympathy with the text. In Derrida's words, deconstruction takes place inside the text.⁷

The narrative is focused on the slave, so a myriad of impressions and notions will be subverted as from the perspective of the ones who were not entitled to make any decisions. This outlook is an interesting one as the protagonist is freed after an exceptional effort to escape and arrive in a safe place with her baby, but after that, she ties herself to another kind of slavery: guilt. Her victim comes back in the shape of a 20-year-old woman and the protagonist is compelled to satisfy her daughter in a subservient way, against her will. Her daughter was reborn, seemingly, in order to become her mother's master. Therefore, the differences between master/slave are challenged again, and deferred in such a way that the meaning of slave is emptied of its original semantic value. In addition, the word *master* is attached to Beloved and that bond needs to be analysed in detail.

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked baby to her chest with one hand and one infant by the heels in the other. (Morrison, 1987, p. 175)

That is the scene where Sethe killed "the crawling already? baby" and

⁷ La deconstrucción no es un método, o una herramienta que se aplique a algo desde afuera. La deconstrucción es algo que sucede y que sucede desde el interior. (Derrida, Caputo, 1997, p. 20)

Stamp Paid saved Denver from being killed as well. Sethe clings to the older baby, not wanting to let go of it as she feels that by killing it she has already given her something dearer than life. She has saved her of an existence under enslavement.

Little nigger-boy eyes open in sawdust; little nigger-girl eyes staring between the wet fingers that held her face so her head wouldn't fall off; little nigger- baby eyes crinkling up to cry in the arms of the old nigger whose own eyes were nothing but slivers looking down at his feet. (Morrison, 1987, p. 177)

So, by means of the semantic bonds established in this narrative, being *killed* is equaled to being *freed* and remaining *alive* means becoming *enslaved*. Therefore, Sethe's crime entails implications that cannot be envisaged without getting immersed into the character's framework and background.

African Americans were a silenced minority in the US at the time the narrative is set, but at the time it was written, being African American in the United States had few disadvantages, not to mention the fact that they are generally associated with music and the arts. But if Toni Morrison decided to write about African American slaves in the 1980s it is because some wounds had not healed yet. From an abject being to exotic artist, being black carried with it the imprint of savagery in the white Anglo-Saxon readership. Needless to say, the associations of black with unholy or uncivilised have been erased, but it is significant to analyse how the term *black* has shifted from one semantic difference to another. In the narrative, which is focalised on black characters, some expressions that marginalize white characters can be found. For example, in Baby Suggs' account of how white men had oppressed her existence: "Those white things had taken all I had or dreamed," she said, "and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks." (Morrison, 1987, p. 104) Baby Suggs lowers white people to the category of things. The white man is objectified in the narrative, thus deconstructing the master/slave binary opposition. The black character is the master of the narrative and exercises his/ her power over the white object, who is bound to obey the black narrative assumptions.

Furthermore, the fact that *Beloved* comes back from the dead in order to live among the living is a symbol that seeks to perpetuate the myth of Middle Passage for Black Community. In other words, the journey by sea that brought black slaves to America is symbolised under a different significance in order to de-centralise it. As a reverse journey to Africa has never been done, this passage endeavours to grant freedom to the descendants of the formerly transported slaves.

According to K. Kanneh, as she refers to black slave communities in the Caribbean, the journey back to Africa needs to be substituted for other forms of escape.

Freedom is continually described in terms of travel and escape, and rarely in terms of return to an original African ancestral home. Return to Africa presents itself as the release of death rather than as the hope of a liberated future, and the ultimate return to sources which suicide offers on the West Indian plantations is a direct expression of the impossibility of escape. (Kanneh, 1998, p. 71)

This desperate substitution in search of freedom can be applied to any case within the black Diaspora that started with the trading of African slaves. In the case of *Beloved*, *Beloved's* journey through water towards the realm of the living was meant to bring freedom to her but despite being powered by a liberating force, the kind of slavery it brought about was devastating.

In the section where the homodiegetic narrator is *Beloved*, she refers to white men as “the men without skin”. (Morrison, 1987, p. 249) and this expression is used widely throughout the text. This expression, apart from being a defamiliarising metaphor, is another instance of binary opposition deconstruction. A white man is considered such an abject presence that cannot be regarded as normal. What this expression intends to convey is that he must have been deprived of his skin, because he does not look like us. He seems to be skinless or transparent due to his whiteness. The use of such defamiliarising metaphors is meant to conjure up the power to re-name a world that had already been named

and on which the African American slaves' identity had not been bestowed. This re-naming of the world is an attempt to bring their identity back to life.

What is undeniably present can be masked and camouflaged by the activity of re-naming, and the narratives are littered with accounts of lost or changed names, of forced re-identifications, hidden genealogies. (Kanneh, 1998, p. 80)

The time *Beloved* is set is of paramount importance as:

[...] it is possible to analyse the United States in which *Beloved* is situated as a place where the present is disrupted by the traumatic incompatibilities of variant cultural pasts. (Kanneh, 1998, p. 117)

So, an attempt to re-symbolise the Middle Passage is a deconstructive device that enables the reader achieve a deeper understanding of the traumatic experiences the characters deal with in the narrative. According to K. Kanneh, this attempt is a dreaming of the Middle Passage which engenders the Black American consciousness.

This dreaming of the Middle Passage as the unfixed yet eternal space from which African-American origin can be traced makes the wide and uncertain journey away from the shore, rather than the reality of Africa's shore *itself*, into the founding moment of Black American consciousness. (Kanneh, 1998, p.123)

What can also be inferred from Kanneh's work is that the boundary that separates the *Present* from the *Past* is difficult to delimit in African-American consciousness if the Middle Passage is considered an unfixed and eternal space that needs not be related to African land itself.

The handling of time in the narrative is significant in a two-fold manner. First, the semantic associations to the term *Past* is that it has already passed, and that it will not come back. *Present* is, however, the time that can be fully grasped and employed in order to make things happen. These notions are challenged in the narrative, as the *Past* has not fully left Sethe's life and she is unable to establish a

distance from it, since the *Present* brings about a certain kind of *paralysis* on her. On the other hand, the social changes that take place between what the reader understands as *Past* and what the reader understands as *Present* provide the narrative with a seemingly solid barrier which is torn apart with the arrival of Beloved. So, an idea of *timelessness* is construed after Beloved's arrival so as to represent the destruction of logical limits. In one of the sections, where Beloved is the homodiegetic narrator, the absence of punctuation marks contribute to the post modern aesthetic of the text. But there is more than just an aesthetic reason for this.

her face is mine she is not smiling she is chewing and swallowing I have to have my face I go in the grass opens she opens it (Morrison, 1987, p. 251)

According to Kanneh, this device “allows each phrase to be read as if in a *timeless* series, where words signify *at the same time*”. (Kanneh, 1998, p. 80). I find her conclusion of utter importance since Beloved's words in this section can be analysed, a posteriori, as events that took place retrospectively in the narrative, or are still to come, such as the unfolding ending of the novel. This section is not meant to be a foreshadowing of upcoming events, yet a point where timelessness prevails, and past, present and future converge.

the men without skin are making loud noises they push my on man through they do not push the woman with my face through she goes in they do not push her she goes in the little hill is gone she was going to smile at me she was going to a hot thing(Morrison, 1987, p. 250)

Even though the concept of “a hot thing” can be accounted for in countless ways, this passage of Beloved's cryptic speech can both work as an explanation of her memories or of the events that she will witness when the whole community try to help Sethe regain her individuality and escape Beloved's reign of violence and horror. In Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, we find an analysis on the

“obligation to forget” the past some nations are forced to and how it impacts on a de centered conception of past and present times.

The anteriority of the nation, signified in the will to forget, entirely changes our understanding of the pastness of the past, and the synchronous present of the will to nationhood. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 230)

According to Homi Bhabha, having been obliged to forget the hardships of a cruel past, emergent nations or those nations formed by the Black diaspora far away from their homeland create a writing tradition in which the boundaries of time are blurred in order to achieve the construction of a unique discourse that will help them come to terms with the past. However, the act of forgetting is a key factor in these discursive strategies which will be dealt with later.

In the consolidation of what can be regarded as post- colonial communities, a certain paralysis and timelessness are evoked as common denominators to establish cultural markers. Therefore, according to Bhabha, the time of enunciation is hard to delimit, and the narrative can freely alternate from past to present, regardless of the accuracy of the memory flashbacks the post- colonial text offers. This is what Bhabha has to say about the conception of time in the post- colonial text:

I have tried to suggest that they provide modernity with a modular moment of *enunciation*: the locus and locution of cultures caught in the transitional and disjunctive temporalities of modernity. What is in modernity *more* than modernity is the disjunctive “postcolonial” time and space that makes its presence felt at the *level of enunciation*. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 360)

Modernist writing has devised a number of resources to make a narrative more vividly similar to the human psyche. Time montage, a device that enables a writer to go back and forth in time in a story, is further distorted in this narrative as the past is portrayed by means of very subjective flashbacks. That is to say, the reader relies on the characters’ memories in order to unveil past events, and it is

widely known that memory is subjected to defense mechanisms that may deform crucial information or omit it altogether. However, the erratic and chaotic juxtaposition of subjective flashbacks in the narrative constitutes a metonymy of the “time of communality” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 360) in the narrative of slave history as opposed to the Western conception of chronology imposed on the oppressed. So, this apparent chaos is a counter discursive device meant to subvert the traditional idea of chronology.

The postcolonial passage through modernity produces that form of repetition – the past as projective. The time- lag of postcolonial modernity moves *forward*, erasing that compliant past tethered to the myth of progress, ordered in the binarisms of its cultural logic: past/present, inside/ outside. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 363)

From this passage we can infer the importance of Beloved’s cryptic language. She refers to events that had already taken place, and in the same way she foresees that she is going to be separated from her mother, which is where her constant fear stems from. According to Bhabha, progress is not to be understood by only moving forward in a lineal way, but by also integrating elements from the past that represent a community, and by disregarding the past that masters had bestowed on their slaves. In the light of this conception, binary oppositions do not work as a system of contrastive meanings, but as a myriad of shades in between that will prove suitable to each community.

Another binary opposition worth analysing is Alive/ Dead. Slavery is often compared to being dead alive. Since freedom is not exercised, decisions are not made and the future is a black hole of the same humdrum doomed existence. Therefore, some slaves escaped slavery by committing suicide and therefore attaining liberation. Being dead was considered a chance to live again. However, being freed is to be born again, but *being born* in this narrative is deconstructed, hence the negative ideas that can be attached to it. Once Sethe is able to escape Sweet Home, she gives birth on her way to 124 Bluestone Road. The harsh

conditions she experiences on her journey towards “her freedom” tie negative feelings to that getaway. The pain Sethe experienced at Amy’s healing hands was a negative idea that hovered over the anecdote Denver wanted to be told. However, the text conveys it beautifully so as to endow it with the enchantment entailed in the fact that there is pleasure in pain. “Then she did the magic: lifted Sethe’s feet and legs and massaged them until she cried salt tears.” (Morrison, 1987, p. 42)

The fact that Sethe murdered her child is a perverted portrayal of what a mother should be, contrary to the pre-established figure of nurturing motherhood. Sethe was meaning to kill all of her children but she only succeeded in slitting Beloved’s throat. But according to the narrative, this was the only plausible way to spare them a lifetime of suffering. “My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma’am is. They stopped me from getting us there, [...]” (Morrison, 1987, p. 240)

Beloved’s “second birth” is welcomed with a mix of joy and surprise, since she was in fact dead. Given that her presence becomes part of their everyday life, some violent traits are evinced in her behaviour. The reason for this could have to do with the fact that her origin was violent. She was engendered under violence and oppression; it was to be expected that her presence would not bring about salvation. Thus, the term *alive* is not necessarily different from dead given the sorrow the latter might entail. In addition, the term *alive* is also deferred from its original meaning since despite being *alive*, the protagonist has felt dead in many other respects. This opposition between dead and alive is also evinced in the images of the protagonists’ dwelling place, 124 Bluestone Road, as a safe location. A place they could call home. K. Kanneh, in her work *African Identities*, relates the land to a state of peace.

Whereas land represents the possibility of home, of roots, water transmits ideas of migration, of movement, of wandering. (Kanneh, 1998, p.129)

It is worth noting that, even if Sethe has already found her place in 124 Bluestone Road, her mind is not at ease because one more migration, one more journey across water was needed. She was not meant to go back to Africa, as the United States are felt as her homeland, but one more passage through water was due. That passage was Beloved's leap into the world of the living. As she emerges from water, it can be concluded that she is a loose element, not meant to fit in any category, as she wanders between the dead and the world of the living.

According to J. Lacan, the constant sliding of the signified under the signifier can be compared to the flow of moving water. Hence, water is generally associated with elements of the unconscious level of the psyche. Given that Sethe has left something unsolved in her past, Beloved can be interpreted as a very realistic representation of a repressed unconscious feeling that combines fear, guilt and desire.

"Why I did it. If I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her." (Morrison, 1987, p. 236) In Sethe's mind, killing and dying have definitely different values, and it could be ventured that from the point of view of the protagonist, it might have been better to be killed by someone who loved you, and the act would be considered a liberating one, rather than perish at the hands of the white man. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha refers to infanticide as:

an act against the system and at least acknowledged the slavewoman's legal standing in the public sphere. Infanticide was seen as to be an act against the master's property. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 24)

In Sethe's words, the reader receives a confession which also functions as a revealing stage of Sethe's deeds and most importantly, her reasons for having perpetrated them. Sethe proceeds to explain how her duty was to bring her milk to Beloved when she ran away from "Sweet Home",

I'll tell Beloved about that; she'll understand. She my daughter. The one I managed to have milk and to get it to her even after they stole it. (Morrison, 1987, p. 236)

Sethe misses the point of the confession as she tries to atone for her guilty mind by justifying her deed. She seeks justification by expounding the horror she had to go through in order to bring Beloved her milk.

But I got you out, baby. And the boys too. When the signal for the train come, you all was the only ones ready. I couldn't find Halle or nobody. I didn't know Sixo was burned up and Paul D dressed in a collar you wouldn't believe. Not till later. So I sent you all to the wagon with the woman who waited in the corn. (Morrison, 1987, p. 233)

The omission of the past tense in the third sentence symbolises Sethe's denial to let the past be gone. In the same sentence, the verb to be is used in the form for the third person singular, when it should be in the plural form. This slippage could represent the fact that from Sethe's perspective, her children and herself constituted a single body unified in communion, which will be further described later on. It can be inferred from Carole Boyce Davies' words that Sethe's milk is the one thing she can lay claim on and make decisions about.

Sethe's violent action becomes an attempt to hold on to the maternal right and function. In a society in which the Black mother's rights and existence are already delimited, Sethe's persistent desire is to bring *her* milk to *her* children. (Boyce Davies, 1994, p. 139)

It becomes clearer why Sethe should have chosen to challenge those limits that curbed motherhood for Black slaves, and her violent deed is beheld under a less judgmental light. But is the confession worth making if indeed the person confessing has been exculpated? What is the point of preserving a confession? In the text, the explanation of the deed is fragmented. How significant does it become later on in the narrative? Guilt may be erased from the protagonist's soul as her

mind is no longer heavy with that burden, but life has in store a more cruel punishment in the shape of Beloved. Guilt is not erased from the semantic system or from the binary opposition guilty/innocent. She was once guilty; a confession will not make her innocent by simply uttering her deed. In the eyes of semantics, she is still guilty.

Caputo attempts an explanation of the essence of justice that can help clarify the contradiction in Sethe's confession. According to Caputo, justice can never be in the present, as it is one if its characteristics to be out of balance and to be out of proportion with itself.⁸ In simpler terms, justice never appears to fit reality as the latter keeps fluctuating and according to the socio-political context, justice becomes subjective and at times, unfair. Hence the difficulty to judge Sethe's deed even if taking into account the narrative setting.

According to Austin's theory of performative utterances, language serves a variety of purposes: promising, declaring a couple man and wife, or ritually naming some object or other. What sets them apart from other statements is their illocutionary force (intention), which goes along with the utterance.

Performative speech-acts derive their operative meaning from the fact that they embody *conventional* forms and tokens of utterance which are always already in existence before the speaker comes to use them. This 'iterability', or power of being transferred from one specific context to another, is evidence that speech-acts cannot be confined to the unique self-present moment of meaning. They partake of the *difference* or distancing from origin that marks all language in so far as it exceeds and pre-exists the speaker's intentions. (Norris, 1982, p.110)

The 'iterability' of performatives means that they can be explained and located only within a larger system of non-self-present signification. They belong to *writing* in Derrida's sense of the word: an economy of difference nowhere

⁸ La justicia nunca se encuentra en el orden presente, nunca está presente para sí misma, nunca se reúne consigo misma. la justicia es, por el contrario, la relación con el otro, la des-unión que abre el espacio para la llegada del otro. La esencia de la justicia es, así, no tener esencia, estar en desequilibrio, con stantemente desproporcionada consigo misma, nunca ajustada a sí misma, nunca idéntica consigo misma. (Derrida, Caputo, 1997, p. 180)

coinciding with the present intentions of individual speech. (Norris, 1982, p.110)

Performatives involve an intention and complete commitment on the speaker's part to stand by his word and acknowledge all the obligations they entail (sincerity, correctness of form and propriety of context= felicitous speech-act). They also imply the presence of good faith on the part of the one who utters them. Those spoken in jest are 'parasitic'.

Where Searle rests squarely on commonsense assumptions about how words are *used* in everyday practical terms, Derrida and Barthes see language as everywhere revealing its potential aberrations and never coming to rest in a stable order of meaning. (Norris, 1982, p.113)

As a result, it can be concluded that Sethe continues to be guilty of the crime because she fails to make a confession that exculpates her. She does not see her fault at having killed her daughter, and the signified under the signifier *confession* is deferred onto an explanation that does not involve the intention or commitment on the part of the speaker. Therefore, Sethe's confession, according to Searle, is a parasitic speech act. But if the centre of the narrative is Sethe, and therefore, the conventions are outlined by her, and besides, the present intentions and individual speech are part of a temporal continuum, it could be stated that Sethe makes a confession that is unbound from guilt. The utterance of that confession will not make her innocent. Guilt is erased by other means. That is the centre of this work: finding the notional centres of concepts in remote semantic associations. In this case, the absence of guilt will become possible by means of action and not as it is traditionally regarded, through confession.

Metonymically, the narrative becomes unbound, frees itself from the restraints of fixed meaning and fluctuates along the semantic depths, according to its expressive needs. As the present study focuses on language in this narrative, it is important to bear in mind how language is used as an aesthetic medium that

shapes the narrative freely according to the character's will. The following quotation from the "Foreword" to *Beloved*, clearly expounds why a fragmented narrative is crucial for such testimony.

To render enslavement as a personal experience, language must get out of the way. (Morrison, 1987, p. XIII, Foreword to *Beloved*)

The reason for a poststructuralist approach to this text is also implied in Toni Morrison's words. *For the language to get out of the way* can be interpreted as a twofold question. On the one hand, it can be understood as the fact that by disregarding the rules and boundaries of what language can communicate the rendition of an enslaved experience will prove most faithful, hence language and its regulations should be overlooked. On the other hand, *for the language to get out of its way may* stand for the efforts to twist language in a most uncomfortable or *fragmented* way, in order to reveal the truth gradually, being this method the only possible one for the author to remain loyal to the events she is portraying. In both senses, language should not constitute an obstacle when it comes to the rendering of enslavement, and every possible device (fragmentation, blank spaces, ellipses, disregard of punctuation marks, anachronisms) is meant for the service of truth.

The first step in order to sympathise with the characters in *Beloved* and their tragic fate is to become familiar with the setting. The Deep South was an extension of land sowed and harvested by black hands, under the strict surveillance of white landowners. The Deep South in 1870s entails not just a seamless continuum of humdrum existence under the sun but, retrospectively, a change that was to be brought about and the uncertainty of freedom that would accompany all the land to its decay. The thirteenth amendment, abolishing slavery, was passed by the Senate in April 1864, and by the House of Representatives in January 1865. It brought about a much awaited end to the horrors of slavery, yet it also enhanced poverty, isolation and neglect. Black slaves had no place to go in most cases, and

plantation owners lost handwork. Most slaves went back to plantations as paid employees, but conditions were impoverished under the northern industrial development. Going north was another costly yet plausible option.

This novel is set in two moments in history: just before the Act was passed and some 20 years later. It portrays with thorough detail that harsh reality from the point of view of an enslaved black woman. The setting becomes significant as a means to construe the feelings that predominate in the narrative. For instance, nostalgia for an oppressive past is conveyed through evoking the farm in Sweet Home. The constant need to maintain the past alive through memories deferred the real events that the characters experienced in that legendary past; their remembrance is ornamented with unrealistic characteristics.

[...], and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. (Morrison, 1987, p. 7)

Such is the distorted nature of memories that even Sethe wonders if the concept of terrible had not been inaccurately acquired by her. “Time-lag keeps alive the making of the past.” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 364). In other words, the further away the characters are from traumatising past events, the more distorted the image they retrieve from their memory is. But if that distance between past and present is not maintained, the past will inevitably perish. The characters’ emotional attachment to the place where they had suffered so much is portrayed in, for example, the way Paul D is introduced for the first time in the narrative, as “the last of the Sweet Home men.” (Morrison, 1987, p. 7)

Memory as an aid to the handling of time proves treacherous. Time, as it has already been mentioned, is an unreliable dimension that seems to lean on place in order to become significant. Hence the importance of Sweet Home and 124 Bluestone Road. In *African Identities*, Kanneh supports this idea: “As in

Morrison's novels, time is continually made meaningful with reference to space, and is constantly subject to the laws of memory." (Kanneh, 1998, p.133)

In terms of the language, feelings of oppression are portrayed in the absence of grammatical rules and often shift into loosely conveyed sentences that represent freedom of expression. When Denver questions Beloved about her reasons and methods to get to 124 Bluestone Road, Beloved's speech is evidently unobservant of grammar rules, such as using the Simple Past tense for the rendering of past events. This challenging of conventions evinces the long awaited reunion with a liberating force for Beloved, in this case, Sethe. It should also be noted that Beloved does not fully grasp the dimension of time as the rest of the characters understand it; for her, past and present may be part of a temporal continuum, hence the repeated absence of the Simple Past tense for actions taking place before the moment of speaking.

"Tell me, how did you get here?"

"I wait; then I got on the bridge. I stay there in the dark, in the daytime, in the dark, in the daytime. It was a long time."

"All this time you were on a bridge?"

"No. After. When I got out."

"What did you come back for?"

Beloved smiled. "To see her face." (Morrison, 1987, p. 88)

Loosely conveyed sentences are common throughout the narrative. What I mean by loosely conveyed sentences is that they are interrupted by pauses and sub clauses, which deploy a winding path before coming round to the subject-predicate conventional structure. As in this passage, where we are faced with the indeterminacy of events that have not been revealed in the narrative yet, such as Paul D's torments in Sweet Home and how Sethe committed her child's murder.

Her story was bearable because it was his as well- to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other - the things neither had word-shapes for - well, it would come in time: where they led him off to sucking iron; the perfect death of her crawling already? baby. (Morrison, 1987, p. 116)

That is the reason for the phrase: “the things neither had word-shapes for”. In this phrase, the play of the signifiers Derrida has referred to is constantly being evoked by the fact that these events have not yet obtained a place in neither Sethe’s nor Paul D’s speech. This phrase also symbolises the inability of putting their past into words, because accuracy in signifiers is unattainable and conventional terms would prove equivocal. The intromission of a question mark between “crawling already” and “baby”, metonymically represents Sethe’s constant puzzlement at how things had changed by the time she arrived at 124 Bluestone Road. Traumatic past experiences shape their discourse, as it is shown in the phrase *they led him off to sucking iron*. This euphemism for the punishment Paul D got, the iron bit, is a way to use the language as a defense mechanism against the distress that may cause evoking the conventional name of such torment. And even though in this particular passage the narration is focalised on Paul D, the puzzlement is general and expands on to other characters in order to represent a feeling of communal experience originated in a common past. Once more, syntactical rules are subverted in order for the characters to express their impressions freely.

A Fragmented and Silenced Narrative- Things that have no name

The need to express feelings that inevitably clash from their origin and a harsh reality where the most ordinary orders of life are perverted demands a fragmented and erratic rendition. The specific facts that gave way to a fragmented narrative in this case are violence towards children, the deprivation of human rights, extreme poverty and deplorable living conditions.

A fragmented narrative in this case is epitomised as a narrative void of exact signifiers, or swarming with deferred signifieds. Furthermore, blank semantic spaces are left to be filled by the reader and clear explanations are postponed by

the characters by means of deliberate omissions or acts of willing forgetfulness. To demonstrate this, let us study closely the following quotes.

None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but *knowing* the things behind things. (Morrison, 1987, p. 45)

A constant mist that veils comprehension of an ulterior factual truth can be sensed all throughout the novel. The unveiling of such mysteries is what justifies a fragmented narrative. Another factor that favours the choice of a gradual unveiling of facts is the erratic nature of memory and how significant it proves to Sethe and Paul D, in particular, for whom the past has not yet abandoned them. However, the rules of memory cannot be fully obeyed, so selective memory plays a role of paramount importance when it comes to events that are too traumatic to surface onto consciousness. One plausible explanation for such silencing may be the origin of slave narratives and under which circumstances they came into existence.

The coercions involved in publishing and editing the narratives extend to often radical and pertinent suppressions of what is rendered “unspeakable”. These “unspeakable” things were often related to the horrors of slavery, to raw and terrible experiences and sufferings deemed to be too extreme [...] (Kanneh, 1998, p.79)

Not to mention the fact that traumatic experiences might have to be hidden behind a “screen memory” defense mechanism, so as to prevent the subject from remembering events they may cause distress when brought to consciousness. These mechanisms are also portrayed in the characters’ discourse, in which devices to avoid getting to the point seem to abound and straightforward words are made scarce.

Denver is expecting something she has not been told according to Paul D. Denver is aware of the fact that behind the story of her birth there are revelations which fade out as soon as they are evoked by any other character. In this passage,

indeterminacy and vagueness are related as a central feature of the characters' mindscape.

"I don't know what it could be."

"Well, whatever it is, she believes I'm interrupting it." (Morrison, 1987, p. 50)

The constant use of the third person singular subject and object pronoun *it* to designate a certain unknown condition renders the state of uncertainty and lack of definition the characters feel in connection to their present state. The use of *it* also stands for the prevailing inability to give things in the world a name, because such name may not exist or may prove unsuitable. Denver has asked Paul D to *make tracks*, that is to say, to leave the house. Paul D. would like to get out of Denver's way since he does not feel 124 Bluestone Road is a home for him. However, Sethe objects to this request.

"He knows what he needs," said Denver.

"Well, you don't," Sethe told her, "and you must not know what you need either. I don't want to hear another word out of you." (Morrison, 1987, p. 52)

So, it is evinced how Sethe imposed silence on Denver, limiting meaning and exercising power over her. The way all the characters avoid mentioning a topic in a straightforward way is remarkable. Metonymically, these instances of avoidance represent indeterminacy in their identities and the silencing that they had been forced into. Having been so thrifty with language, they cannot be wasteful with words now. In a way, Sethe is emulating their masters, who used to put an iron bit in their slaves' mouths to impose silence on them. Semantically, silence becomes a punishment.

"Did you speak to him? Didn't you say anything to him? Something!"

"I couldn't, Sethe. I just...couldn't."

"Why!"

"I had a bit in my mouth." (Morrison, 1987, p. 82)

The climactic moment Paul D and Sethe are referring to is the night when Sethe ran away from Sweet Home; after she had been whipped and before she gave birth to Beloved. Until this point in the narrative, Sethe did not know what had become of her husband, Halle. Her endeavours to find out what Halle knew about her having escaped, or if he knew anything about it at all deemed futile as Paul D was unable to communicate with Halle. Silence in the story now is a metaphorical device to dodge traumatic utterances. In the past, silence meant that the master's power was being exercised and resulted in a physical impediment.

Absences are studied in depth and whatever is passionately silenced leaks into light towards the end. Besides, the narrative demonstrates that what is overtly said may not always entail the same importance as that which remains hidden. A similar example is seen in this passage, in which Sethe concentrates on her contemplation of Paul D's face rather than on practical duties, which are relegated within a parenthetical structure.

"No," is what she said. At least what she started out saying (what would her boss say if she took a day off?), but even when she said it she was thinking how much she enjoyed looking in his face. (Morrison, 1987, p. 56)

The fact that verbal responses, as in this case "No", come out on to the surface structure of speech is not enough to silence Sethe's thoughts. It can be inferred that the characters' thoughts are semantically charged in a more intense way than the words they allow to surface.

Another gap that needs to be filled in is identity. The main query in this narrative is where Beloved comes from and who she is. Her identity is not clearly defined as Sethe does not seem to have given her a name before the incident. The narrative omits this detail even when Sethe has the tombstone inscribed. In later instances, more information is asked from Beloved, but the narrative conceals what she has to say.

“Beloved. You use a last name, Beloved?” Paul D asked her.
“Last?” She seemed puzzled. Then “No,” and she spelled it for them, slowly as though the letters were being formed as she spoke them. (Morrison, 1987, p. 62)

So, another example of a silenced narrative is portrayed in this passage. Beloved’s identity remains hidden or veiled until its readership is able to deduce it. It is evinced gradually in order to bring it to the reader’s consciousness in a way that evokes how the characters come to terms with the truth. It is revealed first at unconscious or mental level long before the characters get down to verbalising it.

Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home except singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. the same language her ma’am spoke and which would never come back. (Morrison, 1987, p. 74)

Denver tended her, watched her sound sleep, listened to her labored breathing and, out of love and a breakneck possessiveness that charged her, hid like a personal blemish Beloved’s incontinence. (Morrison, 1987, p. 64)

These passages evince once more how the narrative endeavours to conceal information from the reader. In the first one, elements in a foreign tongue are repressed by memory, taking away with them a part of Sethe’s identity. These elements, being erased from her memory, will no longer define her as a part of her community. Sethe’s mother spoke that language. The things she heard from her mother are forgotten and Sethe is unable to repeat them. Metaphorically, this inability to recall let alone to repeat her mother’s words is a representation of Sethe’s inability to come to terms with the conventional role of a mother.

Denver also prefers silence when it comes to Beloved’s incontinence, as it is suggested in the second passage. Denver chooses to hide such deed as if it carried the imprint of her own personal shame, or it was her own fault. In so doing, Denver is expressing her desire for Beloved’s presence to bring along a perfect

existence for the three women in 124 Bluestone Road. By concealing blemishes, perfection can be attained, and happiness would certainly follow. Unfortunately, Beloved's intentions are to push Denver aside.

At a deeper level, all the characters hide information from other characters, which leads us to pose the following question: How important are blank spaces in this narrative? How important is it to fill them in? My answer is: it is not a matter of jumping to conclusions and find solutions to queries too quickly. Toni Morrison has portrayed in *Beloved* a constant struggle down a winding road in order for the characters to come to terms with an oppressive and more often than not humiliating past. By delaying the outcome of their memories or straightforwardly enunciating an objective truth, the struggle would not be evinced in the text, and the reader would not find an opportunity to empathise with the characters. A question the reader still has to struggle to fathom is posed to Denver during her spelling classes.

It was Nelson Lord – the boy as smart as she was- who put a stop to it; who asked her the question about her mother that put chalk, the little *i* and all the rest that those afternoons held, out of reach forever. (Morrison, 1987, p. 121)

At that moment, the narrative had not unfolded the answer to such question. It meant Denver's opportunity to define herself. But the question posed had a silencing effect and even the "I" became lower case. Her identity became diminished to everybody else's eyes and this could deem a possible explanation to Denver's introvert personality and isolated nature. In other words, she was afraid of stating I. Hence her silence and ostracised existence. The narrative, instead of providing an answer to such question, deals directly with the consequences of putting into words something that had always been avoided or silenced. The result is Denver's reserved personality. Paul D also goes through spells of silence paradoxically filled with words that are never uttered.

“Well, ah, this is not the, a man can't, see, but aw listen here, it ain't that, it really ain't, Ole Garner, what I mean is, it ain't a weakness, the kind of weakness I can fight 'cause 'cause something is happening to me, that girl is doing it, I know you think I never liked her nohow, but she is doing it to me. Fixing me. Sethe, she's fixed me and I can't break it.” (Morrison, 1987, p. 149)

This is an excerpt of what Paul D wanted to tell Sethe but never succeeded in verbalising and another argument in favour of Derrida's theory that written text is prior to speech. Paul D had been unable to resist Beloved's authoritative sexual insinuation and he then rehearses the words to explain it to Sethe. Needless to say, Paul D decides against uttering these words and the whole matter falls into oblivion.

“What you want in here? What you want?” He should have been able to hear her breathing.

“I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name.” (Morrison, 1987, p. 137)

Beloved is looking for her identity as well, and to her understanding, a bond with Sethe's past is Paul D. That is why she sets her mind on possessing him. He becomes the object of her whims, changing rooms for sleeping every other night just to stay out of her way. But she faced him and forced him to have intercourse with her in the shed behind the house. Possibly the same shed where Sethe had killed her baby. In this case, the narrative favours the reader, as he gets to know what some characters never learn about. However, it is another example as to how the truth is concealed among characters as well.

So Stamp Paid did not tell him how she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way: one on her shoulder, one under her arm, one by the hand, [...](Morrison, 1987, p. 185)

Stamp Paid stops himself from telling Paul D Sethe's true story after

realising that Paul D has denied Sethe could be capable of such a deed. However, this omission is not due to a defensive kind of forgetting act but to an act of sympathy on Stamp Paid's part. He is the only character who remembers objectively what happened on the day the white men came back to 124 Bluestone Road to look for Sethe. He can remember it so vividly because he was not emotionally involved in the incident and he was not living under the haunting spell of a traumatic past that needs to be forgotten in order to move on.

I can forget it all now because as soon as I got the gravestone in place you made your presence known in the house and worried us all to distraction. (Morrison, 1987, p. 217)

The act of forgetting also functions as relief. In the above passage, Sethe explains how she could get rid of her guilt, which constituted a burden, thanks to the fact that the dead baby kept making her presence heard and seen in 124 Bluestone Road. The act of forgetting comprises the basis for a poststructuralist reading, since a central semantic unit is deliberately hidden under the characters' unconscious and the narrative endeavours to extricate that latent content gradually as it unfolds. These passages are filled with acts of forgetting, denial or sheer ignorance of information. The characters spend the story time searching for explanations and answers to those queries, and here we have looked at some of the semantic implications of such omissions.

And since that was so- if her daughter could come back home from a timeless place- certainly her sons could, and would come back from wherever they had gone to. (Morrison, 1987, p. 215)

The presence of a timeless dimension in Sethe's life, which is begun with Beloved's return, brings about an open-endedness of possibilities. Sethe had given up hopes of being able to see her two sons. However, if Beloved is back, Sethe sees no reason why all of them should return one day. This temporal

distortion has a negative impact on Sethe as she is bound to be disappointed. Beloved's presence not only ends up enslaving Sethe in a more than cruel fashion, but also engenders dangerous hopes that Sethe will not see materialise.

Trudging in the ruts left earlier by wheels, Sethe was excited to giddiness by the things she no longer had to remember. I don't have to remember nothing. I don't even have to explain. She understands it all. I don't have to remember how Baby Suggs' heart collapsed; how we agreed it was consumption without a sign of it in the world. (Morrison, 1987, p. 216)

In the above passage, a feeling of lightheartedness invades the tone of the narrative, as Sethe bids farewell to unpleasant memories. Sethe savours the moment she is finally able to forget about explanations and making excuses for her past deeds or past omissions (such as the reason for Baby Suggs' death), as Beloved does not require them. It is in this passage that we find another instance of selective memory at work and an instance of how Sethe is willing for some moments of her life to fall into an abyss of oblivion. This can be considered a "content" omission. However, some other omissions in the narrative, are of a "structural" kind, as it can be seen in the following passage,

Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing. I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. But my love was tough and she back now. (Morrison, 1987, p. 236)

In this passage, the narrative experiences a shift from a heterodiegetic to a homodiegetic narrator. It can be concluded that these shifts are necessary as in the previous sections the narrator was heterodiegetic and highly covert. That is to say, as the narrative is focalised on various characters in the first sections of the novel, the narrative situation proves somewhat erratic and a focus is difficult to be established. Besides, the broken language and the disregard of grammar rules

could only be portrayed in one of the characters' voices. In addition, writing it all in direct discourse might prove clumsy or against style. Therefore, by shifting the narrative situation from heterodiegetic to homodiegetic, the text deems limited in ways which favour absences, silences and omissions, since there are facts the characters express in their own voice and making use of "structural" omissions in order to communicate what they cannot do openly. Note the absence of the verb to be in the present. In this way, Beloved IS not.

Beloved. Beloved. Because you mine and I have to show you these things, and teach you what a mother should. Funny how you lose sight of some things and memory others. (Morrison, 1987, p. 237)

Once again, the absence of the verb to be in the simple present tense denotes a hindrance to Beloved's existence. In Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, he expounds Heidegger's arguments in favour of the fact that the verb *to be* in the third person singular in the Simple Present tense and also in its non finite form has predominance when it comes to designating the essence of something that exists. Therefore, the meaning of *being* also entails the history behind that designated being.⁹ By eliding the verb *to be* in the Simple Present tense in the passage about Beloved, a statement is made quite clear. Beloved does not exist in the history of those who surround her and thus her history cannot be apprehended. Furthermore, the motifs of forgetting and selective memory are evoked more forcefully. In the following passage, the narrative situation changes again, and it is Denver who is the homodiegetic narrator. She speaks about Sethe, and grows gradually aware of the importance of protecting Beloved from their mother. In the

⁹ Que el "ser", tal como está fijado en sus formas sintácticas y lexicológicas generales en el interior del área lingüística y de la filosofía occidental, no sea un significado primero y absolutamente irreductible; que esté aún enraizado en un sistema de lenguas y en una significancia histórica determinada, bien que extrañamente privilegiada como virtud de develamiento y de disimulación a veces lo recuerda Heidegger: en particular cuando invita a meditar el privilegio de la tercera persona singular del presente indicativo y del infinitivo. La metafísica occidental, como limitación del sentido del ser en el campo de la presencia, se produce como la dominación de una forma lingüística. (Derrida, 1979, p 31)

sections in which Denver is the narrator, no erratic renditions or omissions are detected. In fact, hers is the most carefully framed discourse.

Don't love her too much. Don't. Maybe it's still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children. I have to tell her. I have to protect her. (Morrison, 1987, p. 243)

Furthermore, Denver is endeavouring to encourage herself to speak out. She needs to make herself heard, and she is struggling not to keep silent as regards her mother's violent acts. In fact, even though she uses a periphrasis with a certain tinge of vagueness in it to speak about Sethe's crime, *the thing that makes it all right to kill her children*, it can be stated that this is one of the few instances in which the deed is referred to in full by one of the inhabitants of 124 Bluestone Road. No full stops are seen in the section where Beloved becomes the homodiegetic narrator. The sentences or phrases are divided from one another by means of a blank space. The limits of the utterances are blurred. Their beginnings and ends cannot be identified. Beloved claims the same characteristic about herself, about her self. That is to say, Beloved does not share the same conventional limits (temporal, moral or social) as those within which the rest of the characters live.

“again again night day night day I am waiting no iron circle is around my neck no boats go on this water no men without skin” (Morrison, 1987, p. 243)

These blank spaces left in between utterances can be interpreted not only as silences but also metonymically as a portrayal of violence to black slaves and its consequences. As Bhabha deploys it in *The Location of Culture*, answering the ever present query: who is Beloved?

Now we know: she is the daughter made of murderous love who returns to love and hate and free herself. Her words are broken like the lynched people with broken

necks; disembodied, like the dead children who lost their ribbons. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 25)

So, her broken words are in fact a metonym of the instances of violence that abounded in the Deep South during the nineteenth century. And the whole narrative works as a giant jigsaw puzzle made up of chronological chaos that needs to be made sense of by the reader. Many of the clues to this puzzle are portrayed in a kind of indecipherable language, instances of which we have already observed. But some other clues are constantly changing their meanings. It is this, the most challenging part that I have left for the end.

A Deferred Narrative- How Meaning fluctuates

[...] for Lacan, desire 'behaves' in exactly the same way as language: it moves ceaselessly on from object to object or from signifier to signifier, and will never find full and present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized as full presence. (Moi, 1985, p. 101)

When Sixo stole some shoat from the Sweet Home barn, Schoolteacher, the ruthless man who ran the plantation after Mr. Garner died, gave Sixo a beating. Things like that had never been usual when Mr. Garner was around. Sixo had explained that he had stolen that shoat in order to improve his master's property; if he fed abundantly, he would work better. "Clever, but schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers- not the defined." (Morrison, 1987, p. 225). The place of the object that needs to accommodate to what the subject coins as terms to be used is reinforced by this passage. That is to say, the place slaves occupied was that of the object of the utterance; the one whose meaning is created by their masters. Only the ones who were able to escape from Sweet Home were the ones who in turn were able to become their own masters and thus take the place of the subject in their utterances. In other words, they could engrave signifiers with new signifieds and *define* the necessary meanings. Sixo's attempt to redefine his situation is of paramount importance as it

is another instance of the deconstruction and the escape from the Master/ Slave binary opposition.

Beloved's cryptic discourse is another example of how language is the ultimate deconstructive weapon. In this case, it is to be decoded and measured up against the events that leak from Sethe's mutilated memories and Paul D's repressed feelings.

She is going to smile at me she is going to her sharp earrings are gone the man without skin are making loud noises they push my own man through they do not push the woman with my face through. (Morrison, 1987, p. 250)

Beloved uses some periphrases in order to refer to Sethe (*the woman with my face*) and the white men (*the men without skin*) and also in order to avoid common usage phrases. The purpose of these is to endow her language with defamiliarising images which portray her abnormal origin. However, the power of the metaphor is unfathomable here. As far as origins are concerned, the uses of metaphor are closely related to the diaspora and the substitution for the myth of the Middle Passage.

Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the "middle passage", [...], and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation- people. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 200)

So, for the sake of communion with the original nation, Beloved's use of metaphors can be justified. The narrative is deconstructed against the rules of prosody and syntax, but is tightly closed around the plot. The pursuit of the truth deems excruciating but is attainable. These syntactical arrangements in Beloved's speech are meant to convey her mastery over her language; that is to say, how, according to her own rules, she is the one who shapes her language.

In the middle section of the novel a change of genre in the text is deployed.

It can be interpreted as a lyrical rendition of union. A metaphysical stage is rendered by the portrayal of a unified existence shared by the three surviving women in 124 Bluestone Road.

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 (Morrison, 1987, p. 255)

A poststructuralist reading of this fragment from the lyrical section in *Beloved* would lead us to notice the following features. The poetic voice is not a single voice, but a juxtaposition of voices. This chaotic polyphony emulates the blending of the three women's voices into one, in order to express that their experience has bound them together in a way nothing could have ever done so. They are bound to one another in a unique way. Sethe to her daughters because she gave birth to them, and nursed them. Beloved and Denver are united because they had their mother's milk. Beloved is bound to Denver in turn because she had her mother's milk together with her dead sister's blood.

When she [Baby Suggs] came back, Sethe was aiming a bloody nipple into the baby's mouth. [...] So, Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister. (Morrison, 1987, p. 179)

This union cannot be erased by nature. It cannot have been originated by nature either. What made this union possible is a temporal juxtaposition where the past is being negotiated by Sethe, Denver and Paul D. Beloved happens to be a consequence of their struggle to make sense out of traumatic past events. The need for atonement is also a factor that might have influenced Beloved's rebirth.

On the other hand, the blending of voices can be interpreted as an amorphous mingling which deprives each of them of their identity and leaves a

void. The fact that it is impossible to identify the poetic voice and it fluctuates in each verse of the lyrical text foreshadows the void of identity and self-determination that will dominate the last section of the novel.

I am your face; I am you. Why did you leave me who are you?
I will never leave you again
You will never leave me again
You went in the water
I drank your blood
I brought your milk
You forgot to smile
I loved you
You hurt me
You came back to me
You left me (Morrison, 1987, p. 256)

In this excerpt of the lyrical text it is portrayed how all the voices are mingled into one poetic text, in order to compose a unity. The three women involved take turns to become the object or the subject of each sentence. And from these operations it can be inferred that existence may prove unbalanced if one of them is missing from the others' lives. Furthermore, as it is written using the second voice, another fluctuating detail is the recipient. The addressee of these verses is constantly changing and at times two different addressees can overlap. Such indeterminacy leads to the central statement of this work: the signified is constantly sliding under the signifier and a definitive semantic bond is impossible to grasp.

According to Lacan, as Toril Moi explains in her work *Sexual/Textual Politics*, attachment to the mother is associated with the Imaginary Order of the psyche. If that Order is not left behind successfully, an inability to establish bonds with society is proved unavoidable. The Symbolic Order, associated with the Law of the Father and the conventions present in each community, is postponed and the consequence of such postponement is evinced in the narrative as Sethe and Beloved become willingly isolated from the rest of their community.

It is obviously cannot happen through a straightforward *rejection* of the symbolic order, since such a total failure to enter into human relations would, in Lacanian terms, make us psychotic. We have to accept our position as already inserted into an order that precedes us and from which there is no escape. There is no *other space* from which we can speak: if we are able to speak at all, it will have to be within the framework of symbolic language. (Moi, 1985, p. 170)

If, for Lacan, it is the entry into the Symbolic Order that opens up the unconscious, this means that it is the primary repression of the desire for symbiotic unity with the mother that *creates* the unconscious. In other words, the unconscious emerges as the result of the repression of desire. In one sense, the unconscious *is* desire. (Moi, 1985, p. 101)

The idea that Beloved is *the return of the repressed* and that is made up of unconscious elements can be considered. In her, the opportunity to satisfy formerly repressed feelings and to indulge in the sensual pleasures of the Imaginary Order becomes tangible for Sethe. However, we can go back to the idea that a new kind of slavery is coined after Beloved made entry into Sethe's life again. Sethe, in the hopes that she will atone for her crime, is tempted to satisfy and humour Beloved in many ways. But Beloved becomes exceedingly demanding for Sethe to tolerate the pressure.

But it was Beloved who made demands. Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire. (Morrison, 1987, p. 283)

Once Sethe undertakes the mad endeavours to grant Beloved anything she wishes for, bonds with reality are erased. A great part of Beloved originated in Sethe's unconscious, so she is sheer desire that needs fulfilling. At first, it is felt as a misty, blissfully limitless existence, in which Sethe severed bonds with her job and became even more isolated than she had ever been. This state appears to contrast with the day they had spent at the carnival with Paul D and which had left Sethe with a besotted feeling towards the life she could have together with him. That day had made Sethe a socially accepted part of their community, as Sethe

watched their “hand- holding shadows.” (Morrison, 1987, p. 156). Sethe’s refusal to maintain bonds with reality forces Denver to look for help among the members of the community. The fact that their names are not important, as suggested in the following excerpt, reinforces the idea that the Symbolic Order, that is to say, their relationship with language, has been removed from their grasp and that signifieds are unattainable and their meaning are only comprehended within a chain or *community* of signifiers that constantly fluctuates.

[...] and though there was nothing to return, the name was nevertheless there. Many had X’s with designs about them, and Lady Jones tried to identify the plate or pan or covering towel. (Morrison, 1987, p. 293)

This quote is one more example of the leitmotif which is the centre of my work: the deferral of the signifier and the constant shift from meaning to meaning. In other words, what is relevant is the fact that signs are ever changing and dynamic, and that they cannot be attached to a fixed signified.

Contrary to structuralist thinking, [language] reveals an ‘excess of the signified over the signifying’ which places it beyond all reach of reductive explanations. (Norris, 1982, p. 52)

Furthermore, the narrative is concerned with the idea that some experiences, sensorial feelings and emotions lack a name that would suit them or that can define them in full. As Toril Moi explains, this characteristic can be associated with a woman author.

It is argued that women lack this power and that, as a consequence, many female experiences lack a name. (Moi, 1985, p. 159)

Consequently, as Beloved escapes a classification, her name is deferred; and thus her identity is impossible to track down. “there is no one to want me to say my name I wait on the bridge because she is under it there is night and there is day” (Morrison, 1987, p. 251). In a system of speech used by a society

where signifiers constantly flow and relate to one another, the inability to single out a signifier concludes in regarding that concept with oblivion and absence of remembrance.

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? (Morrison, 1987, p. 323)

The importance of naming prevails in this passage. Beloved had never been properly named, and thus the narrative constantly dodges the opportunity to fill in this place of indeterminacy. Another important point made in this passage is the difference established between being *called* and being *named*. Everybody knew what Beloved meant and entailed, but the conventional idea of name did not exist for her. It can be concluded that Beloved failed to relate to a signifier (that is, a name), whereas her presence conjured up a chain of signifieds the community related to her (that is the *concept* of Beloved). Therefore, the concept of Beloved is fragmented as it is made up of various signifieds provided by all those characters who attempted to define her.

For Derrida, the language of dialectical materialism is shot through with *metaphors* disguised as *concepts*, themes that carry along with them a whole unrecognised baggage of presuppositions. (Norris, 1982, p. 75)

Everybody is the doer of the actions, and thus everybody's conceptions are to be taken into account. Those concepts are metaphors according to Derrida, and those metaphors entail presuppositions. There are as many presuppositions as there are people in the town the novel is set; therefore, the multifarious chain of signifieds that is conjured up by Beloved is infinite. The fact that the conception of Beloved is fragmented is also noticed in the structure of the word *disremembered*

(Morrison, 1987, p. 323). For instance, *disremembered* entails an interesting detail. Not only does it convey that Beloved used to be remembered but she is not anymore, but also, the fact that she is not wholly forgotten, because *disremembered* does not mean forgotten. Taking a closer look at *disremembered*, it can be noted that the word *dismembered* is contained therein, conveying the idea of physical fragmentation, which is also echoed in Denver's concept of herself as she gropes in the dark barn in search of Beloved.

If she stumbles, she is not aware of it because she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee. (Morrison, 1987, p. 144)

What people see in Beloved and what people know about her is fragmented. The fact that this conjunction of concepts is what makes Beloved's essence come into existence leads to the idea that Beloved cannot be without a community gathered around her. "Dear Beloved, we are gathered here together...".

Conclusion

The Society had managed to turn infanticide and the cry of savagery around, and build a further case for abolishing slavery. (Morrison, 1987, p. 307)

Notional centres are deferred after certain social turmoil, and a logical consequence is that differences are displaced in such a way that pre-established orders seem to be challenged and eventually subverted. In this narrative, the social turmoil, so to speak, is the Abolishment of Slavery. This event had effects on the dynamics of society and consequently on the psyche of the members of those societies.

The conceptual totality is always undone by the ruses of signification, those 'slidings and difference of discourse' that deconstruction is at pains to uncover. (Norris, 1982, p. 77)

We have looked at some of the *slidings and differences* that have been encouraged by a major social change and thus are *hidden* in the novel. Ideas such as what is Alive can be Dead at the same time, or that being a Slave does not only imply to have a white Master have been discussed as important parts of this poststructuralist study. However, there is one idea which I believe constitutes the centre of this study and it is the deferred conception of *motherhood*. The uncovering of slidings and differences in the text is the key to an explanation. How a mother, like Sethe, survives mentally after having decided to forget about her daughter, especially after she had recovered her, back from the dead, victim of her own crime is what deconstruction should be *at pains to uncover*. Here we encounter a new construction or a deconstruction of the term motherhood and its implications. Derrida challenges the fact that fatherhood is only a legal fiction as

the only bond that supposes a sensitive perception is that of a mother to her children. He maintains that motherhood is interpretation out of experience.¹⁰ So, it is possible that a mother can achieve what Sethe has, taking into account how the social construction of concepts can influence community life. What still proves challenging is *naming* that new concept of motherhood.

This is deconstruction in one of its modes: a deliberate attempt to turn the resources of interpretative style against any too rigid convention of method or language. (Norris, 1982, p. 17)

Therefore, a redefinition of the community is welcomed by its members after the incidents witnessed at 124 Bluestone Road. The crowd who were standing outside 124 Bluestone Road have become a struggling machinery force to fight Slavery in all its forms. Two unexplainable concepts that fall into “the bottomless pit of the unsaid” (Kanneh, 1998, p. 80) assist this community to welcome change. These unfathomable incidents are named, paradoxically, *infanticide* and *Beloved’s disappearance*. The former has been given a name by justice, but what has triggered it cannot be explained unless Sethe’s condition and context are fully embraced. The latter lacks a definite name. That event only comes down to what the crowd gathered in front of 124 Bluestone Road saw, or rather, stopped seeing. This takes us to one of the nodes of Poststructuralism: the study of absences. One of the concepts that needs to be redefined by this community is *motherhood*. According to Carole Boyce Davies, such redefinition is the centre of rewriting home.

Mother- daughter tensions are right at the centre of the rewriting of home. In any writing of home by women patriarchal or matriarchal cultures, the challenge to the meaning of the mother attains symbolic importance in terms of definition and redefinition. (Boyce Davies, 1994, p. 128)

¹⁰ la maternidad es algo que se interpreta, el tema de una reconstrucción desde la experiencia. [...] La madre siempre ha sido una cuestión de interpretación, de construcción social. (Derrida, Caputo, 1997, p. 38)

So, identity and sense of space are to be shaped depending on the dynamics between mother and daughter. If Sethe is embracing a new life in which she will be unbound at last, her new place has to be defined according to her whole existence. In the same way, Beloved's behaviour can be stated to have been a result of Sethe's suffering and hardships. In other words, while in the womb, a fetus experiences everything its mother goes through. According to Kelly Oliver, in her work *Womanising Nietzsche*,

Insofar as there is an intimate connection between psychic and physical processes evidenced by the ways in which emotions, traumas, and repression cause physical "symptoms," then we can suppose that the fetus is affected by its mother's psychophysical states, since it is part of her body. (Oliver, 1995, p. 182)

This narrative is Toni Morrison's way to portray those psychophysical states Oliver speaks about, which took place in Sethe's life undercover of her shyness and humility. In order for the whole community to know about them, Beloved had to prevail among them because she had been the one that had learnt and *felt* about Sethe's experiences due to her intimate relationship with her. Even though Denver has contributed with this search for definition at times, her abovementioned silences are not helpful. Beloved is made up of desire, and there are no obstacles in the way she expresses them, so her aid to the narrative is remarkable. Beloved's appearance contributed to the fragmentation of the narrative. Without her, the narrative would not have waded into the semantic depths this work has endeavoured to study. As it has been mentioned, the fragmentation in the narrative is necessary to give the reader enough time to assimilate the revelations each character faces. In addition, Beloved's fragmented speech and cryptic language prove essential as regards the time Paul D needs to open the tobacco tin, or for Sethe's decision to remember what she had erased from her memory. A presence such as Beloved's seems difficult to portray without the postmodern devices Morrison has deployed, and it is challenging to analyse without the interpretative

tools post structuralism avails us with. The reason why in the 1980s, Toni Morrison has rendered the slave experience so vividly and working at various semantic levels is far from being concealed. The tradition of slave narratives had always involved illiterate narrators, traumatic experiences that impeded description, and editing on the part of the writer. Morrison, by not having experienced these events herself, is enabled to paint a picture of slavery that is not hindered by emotional turmoil. In the same way, Simone de Beauvoir has evoked feelings aliens to her in order to create *La Femme Rompue*.

In Sethe's existence, past and present converge, and that is why Beloved came back. Sethe had left absences, blank spaces and deferral in her past. Beloved was back to fill them in and to redefine this mother/daughter- Master /Slave relationship. Once these bonds were made sense of, Beloved becomes an obsolete existence and she falls into oblivion. That community which called her into being has disremembered her.

Appendix



Fig. 1

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