

Confronting Curbed Trauma and Attaining Catharsis through a 'Ghost'

in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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ABSTRACT

The pivotal character Beloved in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a mysterious character. The other characters in the novel interpret Beloved as the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter, restored in the form of a young woman who wants to take revenge on her mother for killing her. There is another interpretation that she is a survivor of trauma from a white man who had kept her captive. Sethe's alienation from the society, grief, and guilt lead her to give the identity of a ghost to Beloved, the fugitive slave who also wants to hide her real identity. Beloved also represents the collective trauma of 'Sixty Million and more' enslaved Afro-Americans who lost their lives in 'the Middle Passage.' Beloved is also interpreted as the ghost of Sethe's mother, who had been captured long ago in Africa and brought to America. So, the longing for a murdered daughter by Sethe and longing for a lost mother during captivity by Beloved leads to mutual misrecognition of reality and acceptance as daughter and mother, respectively. Beloved is also interpreted as a catalyst that forces the characters to meet the suppressed trauma of their past and attain a catharsis. Thus, study of other possible identities of Beloved may lead to further exposure of varied human psyche to trauma.

Keywords: Trauma, Guilt, Suppressed memories, Stream of consciousness, Catharsis, Magical realism.
