

Trauma and Literature
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Lecture – 59
Toni Morrison's Beloved - Part 5

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It is surely no coincidence that the text sets this most overtly brutal manifestation of the institution of slavery in Georgia, a place not only deep in the South but also famous for the color of its soil. One of the first things which the text points out in narrating Paul D's arrival at the prison camp is that the boxes which serve as the prisoners' cells during the night are set five feet deep into the "red dirt" of Georgia (125). The plethora of abuse which is inflicted upon Paul D happens, as the novel explicitly states at the beginning of this passage, on red earth. Moreover, Paul D is actually buried in this trope of slavery every night. In his cell, his only resting place, which is highly reminiscent of a coffin, he has "two feet of it over his head" at all times (125).

A third instance of a combination of physical contact with red and an occurrence of voicelessness can be identified in Sethe's behavior when she is stopped in the woodshed. Clearly in shock, she cannot say a single word during the entire episode. She loses her voice as soon as she sees Schoolteacher's hat coming towards her up the road. She does not call out, does not warn any of the other people present, "and if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew" (192). Without a word, she grabs her children and runs to the woodshed to kill them. It is important to note here that Sethe's silence throughout the entire scene is more than just an expression of being temporarily overwhelmed by the situation. The scene creates a broad range of instances of voicelessness as it has several of the attendant characters at a loss of words at first. When Schoolteacher and his nephews arrive, they notice that while Stamp Paid is reduced to "grunting—making low, cat noises like," both he and Baby Suggs are "standing stock-still . . . staring at the same place—a shed" (175). Even Schoolteacher's nephew is stunned at first upon seeing the carnage in the shed. However, the characters regain their voices shortly afterwards. The nephew, "swallowing hard, over and over again," finally verbalizes his



This is an NPTEL course titled "Trauma and Literature", we are looking at Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved". We stopped where we're looking at the whole idea of touching red as a touch. The examination of the colour red and how that corresponds to different psychological states different emotional states and different traumatic dramatic states.

We will just continue from that point and see how in this issue this theme gets played out across the novel. A third instance of a combination of physical contact with red and an occurrence of voicelessness can be identified in Sethe's behavior when she is stopped in the woodshed. We were talking about voicelessness and how voicelessness is not.

So, much a biological condition but more of a psychological experiential condition you can't express what you want to express. We have the voice the organic voices that but the; agenda voice is missing on the missing the absence of agency is what is being indicated by the concept of voicelessness. There is a third instance where the convergence of the colour red and voicelessness happens the scene near the woodshed.

Clearly in shock she cannot say a single word during the entire episode she loses her voice as soon as she sees school teacher's heart coming towards her up the road she does not call out does not warn any of the other people present and if she thought anything it was no simple she just flew. We can see how there is almost a collapse of language a collapse of communication and this is a classic case of shock where the subject is.

So, shocked it is. So, much in a state of shut up that it just collapses and the communication collapses and there is no voice which emerges which can tell people what she is really feeling how we can seek help. So, that quality is very clearly there she just flew. It is a state of fright it is a state of absolute shock absolute panic and it also ever manifests itself in a collapse of language.

A crisis or language crisis of communication without a word she grabs her children and runs to the woodshed to kill them it is important to note here that set his silence throughout the entire scene is more than just an expression of being temporarily overwhelmed by the situation. We can see how she prefers to kill her children rather than subject them to slavery.

We can see how this novel is so bleak and depressing and tragic in so, many levels there is the political landscape of slavery the racial politics of domination exploitation. There is also the element of infanticide children are being killed to protect them perversely speaking paradoxically speaking to protect them from the horrors of slavery.

The scene creates a broad range of instances of voicelessness as it has several of the attendant characters and a loss of words at first when school teacher and his nephew arrived the nephews arrived they noticed that while stampede is reduced to grunting making low cut, cut noises like both he and Baby Suggs are standing stock still staring at the same place shed.

This shed here becomes a symbolic space a symbolic site and it is almost like the shed becomes a symbol of shedding the voice shedding the agency. There is that symbolic quality but liminal quality about the shed. It is a very important scene in the context of this novel where the subjects shed their subjectivity. The subjects shed the agency and just get exploited get consumed by trauma by shock and by the politics of exploitation



and fear. Even school teacher's nephew is stunned at first upon seeing the carnage in the shed.

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every night. In his cell, his only resting place, which is highly reminiscent of a coffin, he has "two feet of it over his head" at all times (125).

A third instance of a combination of physical contact with red and an occurrence of voicelessness can be identified in Sethe's behavior when she is stopped in the woodshed. Clearly in shock, she cannot say a single word during the entire episode. She loses her voice as soon as she sees Schoolteacher's hat coming towards her up the road. She does not call out, does not warn any of the other people present, "and if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nonono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew" (192). Without a word, she grabs her children and runs to the woodshed to kill them. It is important to note here that Sethe's silence throughout the entire scene is more than just an expression of being temporarily overwhelmed by the situation. The scene creates a broad range of instances of voicelessness as it has several of the attendant characters at a loss of words at first. When Schoolteacher and his nephews arrive, they notice that while Stamp Paid is reduced to "grunting—making low, cat noises like," both he and Baby Suggs are "standing stock-still . . . staring at the same place—a shed" (175). Even Schoolteacher's nephew is stunned at first upon seeing the carnage in the shed. However, the characters regain their voices shortly afterwards. The nephew, "swallowing hard, over and over again," finally verbalizes his

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However the characters regained their voices shortly afterwards the nephew swallowing heart over and over again finally verbalizes his incomprehension what she wants to go and do that for. Baby Suggs tries to talk her daughter-in-law out of breastfeeding Denver while Sethe is still covered in a baby's blood Sethe's silence is a more fundamental one as it lasts throughout the entire scene even though a confrontation with the equally silent black community until she is driven off to the jail house.

We can see it is a deeply disturbing scene, a scene of infanticide it is murdering a child in a way to protect the child from slavery. There are different forms of violence and abuse in all kinds of grotesque level happening over here but the important thing away is silence how silence becomes a reflective state of shock, how silence becomes a voice which is one of voicelessness a silence becomes a form of embodiment how silence becomes an activity.

All these different orders of silence converge together to create this complex soundscape in which the novel is manifested the trauma the novel is manifested along with the colours. The scholars have differed on their interpretations of this scene and set his silence regarding it whereas Morgenstern interprets the fact that the reader never learns about what happened in the woodshed from Sethe's point of view.

Instead of being answered being limited to an account through the eye of one of the other slave catches as proof that it is not the scene or at least not the actual killing that returns to haunt Sethe lucky's argument that this very fact remarks the scene as a core event seems more convincing. So, focalization plays a very important role in literary depictions as we know by focalization we mean the point of view from which the story is seen or told or narrated.

We do not get to see Sethe's point of view as some critics like Morgenstern point out the whole thing has been seen from a slave catcher's point of view. It is barbaric brutal and it is criminal how it happens but there is that other argument by Roger Locus who sees who says that this is a core event which informs entire trauma and the traumatic reputation in the novel.

It is particularly in a refusal in the novel's refusal to even once provide its readers with the narration of the event to set his eyes that her trauma and inability to face it is signified. The absence of facing something that becomes the core quality over here the refusal to face or confront the moment of trauma, the scene in the Woodshed has a central trauma of slavery to which the novel keeps returning is easily the one with the most intense red imagery.

The Woodshed scene as mentioned is a very important scene in the context of this novel and it is full of the red imagery. Inside two boys led in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a woman holding the blood soaked child. We can see how the word appears in a novel, it is done away with today but in the context of his times this is the gaze. The gaze is important, the gaze is a white gaze, the gaze is a slave catcher's gaze and they're looking at this black woman holding a blood-soaked child.

Someone that she had presumably killed at the moment of slavery's most shocking entrance into the protagonist's world. So, much blood has been spilled the Baby Suggs actually slipped in a red puddle and fell. This is like a window scene in a novel where the slave catches enter the slaves world and it is such a blood-stained world it is full of the red blood it is full of it is just it is got a dead child it is just so, gruesome and so, grotesque and so, tragic at so, many levels.

That is very deliberately done. It becomes a microcosm of the very bloody quality of slavery that it is always thought in blood it is always soaked in human death and violence and absence and the grotesque quality of slaughter now this scene is the most vivid instance of the novel's portrayal of slavery. The first stage in dealing with this trauma Sethe who barely escaped the horrors of slavery alive has been found by her owner and decides that she would rather kill her daughter.

Then have school teacher take her back into slavery which Pamela a bonnet applying Kyrie's terminology has identified as sparing her children from the crisis of surviving the trauma of slavery. As mentioned this killing of the child is also in a very perverse way emancipating the child or protecting the child from slavery. This becomes a reflection of the times where the only way a parent can protect the child from being abused by someone else is by taking away the child's life.

It becomes the core trauma point in the novel the killing of Beloved and the whole novel is about Beloved. But school teacher ironically named school teacher is a person who's a slave catcher. He is someone who comes and captures slaves and takes them back and said they had run away from the clutches of such slavery but now she's been hunted down and discovered and she realizes that her children do have a similar fate awaiting them.

She just liberates the child by taking away her life. So, to set his immediate reaction to the event is a state of complete voicelessness and passivity while she is literally soaked by red as a child pumped blood down said this dress and she can feel the baby blood pump like oil in a hand. It is just a disturbing scene it is even difficult to read this the way it is projected and portrayed by Morrison.

School teacher's intrusion and the infanticide she commits as a reaction causes a trauma or cause of trauma. So, fundamental to her psyche in the set and thus a novel cannot help but keep circling back to it and perfect definition of compulsive reputation. As mentioned this novel has a very solid classical Freudian quality to it sometimes repetitive quality of trauma how this moment keeps coming back and keeps haunting the mind of Sethe is how the novel is informed and shaped.

It leaves him in prison for her deed not physically but mentally unable to create an ongoing life for herself Lockhart's notes that in attempts to talk about the event years later well actually walking around Paul D said this account is one of avoidance delay and evasion which is split out through the agitated movements of a body as much as through language.

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rea puacie ana reu (1/9). This scene is the most vivid instance of the novel's portrayal of slavery and the first stage in dealing with its trauma. Sethe, who barely escaped the horrors of slavery alive, has been found by her owner, and decides that she would rather kill her daughter than have Schoolteacher take her back into slavery, which Pamela E. Barnett, in applying Caruth's terminology, has identified as sparing her children from the crisis of surviving the trauma of slavery (420).

Sethe's immediate reaction to the event is a state of complete voicelessness and passivity while she is literally soaked by red as her child "pumped blood down [Sethe's] dress" and she can "feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hand" (Morrison, *Beloved* 176, 295). Schoolteacher's intrusion and the infanticide she commits as a reaction cause a trauma so fundamental to her psyche that Sethe, and thus the novel, cannot help but keep circling back to it in a perfect definition of compulsive repetition. It leaves her "imprisoned for her deed, not physically but mentally unable to create an ongoing life for herself" (Kubitschek 167). Luckhurst notes that in her attempts to talk about the event years later while actually walking around Paul D,¹⁸ Sethe's account is one "of avoidance, delay and evasion . . . which is played out through the agitated movements of her body as much as through language" (*The Trauma Question* 91). Kathleen Brogan has identified Sethe's explanation that she "took and put my babies where they'd be safe" to be "an outrageous euphemism to her auditor but literal truth to Sethe, she speaks a language Paul D does not share, drawing on a vocabulary wrenched from ordinary meanings" (78). This description once again highlights the difficulties involved in narrating a traumatic event which is by definition "outside of ordinary language" (Winslow). Thus, it bespeaks the characters' need as well as the novel's choice to use troping in expressing trauma.



We talked about this in a previous session how evasion and denial and deferral all these become strategies of miscommunication and that is important over here because this is not even this is a experience which cannot be communicated which is outside the realm of normal normative communication. That is the very ontology of trauma that is the very location of trauma outside the normative category of language.

All these strategies of avoidance delay innovation these actually become strategies to inform the traumatic language traumatic landscape. These tropes keep getting informed or keep appearing throughout the novel as recursive rituals of communication and the absence of it. Kathleen brogan has identified Sethe's explanation that she took and put the babies where they would be safe during outrageous euphemism to an auditor.

But literal truth to Sethe's, she speaks the language Baldi does not share a drawing on a vocabulary ranged from ordinary meanings this description once again highlights the difficulties involved in reading a traumatic event which is by definition outside of ordinary language. This is what we are talking about how the experience of trauma is

outside the normal experience how the language of trauma is outside the normal language.

It is outside quality which translates roughly into what is called the uncanny, if we look at the timology of the word uncanny in German on Heimlich which is outside the home. There is an outside quality. Trauma by definition has an uncanny quality and that uncanniness or the outsideness of trauma is exactly what we see in this novel as well. This speaks the characters need as well as a novel's choice to use troping and expressing trauma.

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Repressing Red

The second step in which *Beloved's* characters process the wounds of slavery is the repression of its horrors.¹⁹ The novel endows both Paul D and Sethe with powerful red images of the traumas of slavery. In these instances, which serve as a transitional stage between the state of shock and the beginning of successfully dealing with the trauma, the novel turns the concrete and physical appearances of red into figurative elements, tropes as it were, portraying the internalization and the repression of slavery's cruelties.

The most conspicuous example of the use of the color red in *Beloved* in relation to repression is Sethe's contact with the pink tombstone against which she leans in the engraver's workshop, and which is explicitly denoted as a lighter shade of red in her description of the fading color progression starting with her baby's blood (46-47). The image certainly appears, similar to the ones described above, as an occurrence of physical contact with the color red: Sethe is having sex with the engraver while leaning against the tombstone, feeling its "welcoming cool" (5). There is even an instance of voicelessness or a lack of words in that Sethe has to prostitute herself so the engraver will put her daughter's name on the stone. In fact, it pains Sethe afterwards that she did not get the word "Dearly" as well, since she might only have had to ask for it in return for another ten minutes of sexual



Troping becomes an interesting category in the novel in terms of how the figurative description of trauma becomes more important and perhaps more authentic than any literal description of trauma can ever be. This section of a repressing red is something that we talked about earlier as well how repression and absence become very important categories of communication in "Beloved".

A second step in which "Beloved's" characters process the wounds of slavery is a repression of his horror. So, not talking about it, not experiencing it, is repressing in the psyche the novel endows both Paul D and Sethe with powerful red images of traumas of slavery. In these instances which serve as a transitional stage between the state of shock and the beginning of successfully dealing with the trauma.

The novel turns the concrete and physical appearances of red in the figurative elements tropes as it were portraying the internalization and the repression of slavery's cruelties now what this means in a novel like "Beloved" by Toni Morrison the difference between meta and metaphor become quite becomes quite slippery. The figurative language the literal language they keep converging with each other.

It is the trope-like quality that is language this linguistic register happens to have happens to generate the most conspicuous example of the use of the colour red in "Beloved" in relation to repression is contact with a pink tombstone against which she leans in the engravers workshop and which is explicitly denoted as a lighter shade of red in our description of the fading colour progression starting with the baby's blood.

We can see how the different shades of red becomes important become important from pink to red, red and babies blood to the blood of slavery how they all get connected in the same bloodstream and in a very biological sense it almost generates a perfect sense of kinship they all they have they are the blood kins. They are blood relatives and that that kinship can only be established by the violence which is manifested by the blood or the loss of blood.

The image certainly appears similar to the ones described above as an occurrence of physical contact with the colour red. The scene in which setting is sexually attacked by the engraver while leaning against the tombstone feeling its welcoming cool. The coolness of the tombstone which is the deadness of the tombstone that becomes more welcoming than the sexual act that she has been subjected to brutally.

There is even an instance of voicelessness or a lack of worse in that setting has to proceed herself to the engraver. So, that engraver will put a daughter's name on the stone in fact it pains Sethe. We talked about connecting it to the quality of repression that we just mentioned how the idea of being attacked in a tombstone this image which we discussed earlier.

We were talking about how the redness gets manifested as a psychological condition but also as some kind of a protective condition. So, that shed scene which we just discussed

where the liminality of the shed scene where the subject is shedding her agency shedding her voice. We have a sense of shedding agency shedding dignity shedding the body.

The tombstone too becomes a site the symbolic side where the agency or the subject is shed and what we have where is a brutal scene of sexual assault sexual attack. The terms of how she needs to get words engraved on the stone. We can see how it is a very direct and organic relationship between words as they engraved on the stone and bodily violence and voicelessness.

We can see as a conclusion to the session we can see how the liminality of different sites and the blood imagery which are that draw the novel are connected. As mentioned how the voicelessness is informing the appearance of words on a tombstone. The engraving of words “dearly Beloved” the names which are supposed to appear on the tombstone can only emerge out of the voicelessness through which the subject offers itself for sexual assault for violence for bodily and corporeal violence.