

Embodiment of Pain: The Physical and Emotional Effects of Slavery in Toni Morrison's "Beloved"

Dr Shantanu Siuli, Assistant Professor, Swami Vivekananda University

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Toni Morrison's "Beloved" is a 'complex narrative expressing the long-term, the physical as well as psychic, effects of slavery'. In this paper, I shall critically engage with the concept of embodied trauma using Morrison's technique of intertwining physical suffering with emotional pain, the human body serving as a locus of historical memory and a center of narrative resistance. The novel generally centers on the effects of slavery, not only as some brutal institution but as an insidious power that continues to define identity, memory, and intergenerational trauma. The scarred body cannot, however, be divorced from the emotional and psychological wound as evidenced in Sethe's obsessive desire to save the children from the horror of slavery, which results in infanticide action fueled by the psychological suffering that slavery imposes. Another such representation through the ghostly figure of "Beloved" as a manifestation of unreconciled sorrow and guilt is how pain dramatically haunts and distorts the present, turning personal tragedy into a collective reckoning with history. Through this reading, the enslaved body is rediscovered as a source of narrative agency and a medium for articulations that speak silenced histories. This paper also relates the novel's engagement with healing and memory, reasoning that even though the body is continually a site of battle regarding pain, it also becomes a point of resistance and survival.

Keywords: African American Identity, Healing and Survival, Emotional Pain, Psychological Fragmentation, and memory