

REVISING THE HISTORY OF SLAVERY IN *BELOVED* THROUGH MAGICAL REALIST TECHNIQUE

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Abstract: *Whilst there exists a remarkable body of research on Morrison narratives, comparatively little is known about magical aspects of her works. The chief focus of this article is to explore the magical realist aspect of *Beloved* and how the author has employed non-realistic narrative techniques to recreate the traumatic past. It also enlightens the fact that why even if Morrison attempts to illustrate a historical even, her non-mimetic literary techniques do not contradict her central theme. Morrison's *Beloved* is affiliated with magical realist works in the way it questions the notion of history and the linear narrative time through unrealistic elements that contradict scientific and traditional received realities. The article concludes that through some magical realist techniques Morrison presents an alternative version of the reality about the history of slavery in America to the dominant one imposed by the mainstream discourse.*

Key terms: *Magical Realism; *Beloved*; History of Slavery*

INTRODUCTION

Hunting effects of slavery as a hallmark of the United States betrayal of its own democracy is pervading in the entire oeuvre of African American literature. It has left its trace from the original slave narrations and the first novels of African American literature to the recently published works by Lorene Cary (*The Price of the Child*, 1995), Lalita Tademy (*Cane River*, 2000) and Edward P. Jones (*The Known World*, 2003) among many other. In fact the negative slavery myth seems to be unforgettable for African American people, although as a national shame and a troubling subject has been an issue of avoidance and erasure in the history of America. This “unspeakable thing”, a familiar term for Morrison’s readers, has become a popular theme and frequently “spoken” in American literature.

Rarely do African American authors view slavery as a finished past issue. Toni Morrison is an outstanding African American author who has revisited the history of slavery in her novels specifically in *Beloved*. Her outstanding endeavor to subvert long-established racial discourse through presenting alternative voices and visions

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became a new trend of the late twentieth century. To fulfill this, many contemporary African American authors attempt to re-imagine and recreate the history of slavery from minorities' point of view and are considered to be the inauguration of a new genre of neo-slave narrative. Unlike earlier works written about slavery in America, neo-slave narratives are written by authors whose focus is on the amelioration of the psychological wound left behind by slavery institute long after abolition.

One of the great sources of interests in neo-slave narratives as a new genre is novelty of the form and style of the narratives. The authors employ contemporary narratological techniques to revise the history. Through applying new techniques and styles to rewrite the distorted story of slaves and their lives, contemporary authors create a comparatively more understandable and reliable version out of traumatic situations experienced by slaves. In fact, the focus of this article is exploring how black authors generally and Morrison specifically handle magical realism as an aesthetic technique to deal with the crisis of representation and the limitation of language as a tool for reflecting the truth of the slaves' lives. In order to create an alternative discourse, Morrison deviates from the well-established form and structure which have been serving the western philosophy till recently. More significantly the present research tries to highlight how the formalist techniques are adopted to express the social and political problems of black community in America.

Many African American writers mistrust the term 'magic realism' as a postmodernist term that deals not with political issues rather with escaping from real life. However numerous African American authors have employed similar techniques to express deeper meaning due to the fact that it not only is magic part of African American heritage which is considered to be a source of power but also it, as a narrative technique, is used by minority groups in America including African Americans to challenge colonial discourse. Morrison has deployed magical moments and elements which partially roots in African American heritage and partially considered as a postmodernist technique. Perhaps the main goal of the author in using supernatural and unrealistic elements is to uncover a deeper layer of the truth of slavery in America and to present the repressed history. Like most postcolonial authors, Morrison goes beyond realism to represent a different version of reality. Magical realism for her is not a genre but it is an aesthetic technique to recover the erased part of colonial history. Many critics concur with Lyn Di Iorio Sandin and Richard Perez who in their *Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literature* believe that the magical elements employed by minority authors "provide a deeper understanding of a violence otherwise covered over, contained, repressed or dismissed" (3). In other words, rather than classifying *Beloved* as a novel of magic realism, the present research tries to highlight the authors abilities to employ unrealistic powerful techniques to decipher the traumatic history that has been covered and hence to render a more accurate aspect of the past.

MAGICAL REALISM: A POSTCOLONIAL MODE OF WRITING IN *BELOVED*

Even though Toni Morrison cannot be typically classified as magical realist writer and even she openly deny to be labeled, she has employed numerous magical moments and has broken the rules of real life in her narratives to represent her aesthetic interpretation of the history of black people. In other words, generally magical realism is one of many techniques that African American narrative writers have utilized to challenge the authoritative colonist standpoint and to render an alternative viewpoint to Eurocentric account of the system of slavery. To pursuing it, this research explores this author's attitude to exploiting effectively the magical elements as a technique of representation or as a politic attitude in order to decolonize the mainstream discourse and to depict the long-term-erased voices of salve generation.

What is Magical Realism¹? Why do many writers reject the label? Is it a genre, a style, a technique, cultural concept or politics? It is still a controversial contemporary debate. The term 'Magical Realism' has been recognized by different and even contradictory definitions since the 1920s when was first applied to painting. It later became a significant feature in Latin American literature in the 1960s and next it permeated through the postcolonial literary works. Moreover, it continues to have a unique appeal for critics in contemporary fiction, poetry, painting and cinema in spite of the conceptual confusion of the term and its boundaries. Although the term is distinctive from, very often is connected to other aesthetic categories such as fantastic, surrealism and metafiction.

Franz Roh, German art critic, is known by majority of contemporary critics to be the first to apply magical realism to a group of painters in 1925 and he detected it as a feature of the dissolution of Expressionism (Hart and Ouyang, 1). Comparing to the more abstract style of Expressionism, Roh regarded magical realism a return to Realism. "For the new art" he stated, "it is a question of representing before our eyes, in an intuitive way, *the fact, the interior figure, of the exterior world*" (Roh, 24 [emphasis original]). Contrary to the latter notion of the term, for him magical realism is not a combination of fancy and reality. Rather it is a way to unearth the hidden mystery of everyday reality that associates his notion to that of surrealists whom were influenced by psychoanalytical interior reality introduced by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

In term of literary practice, it was in the 1940s and the 1950s that the term was considered to associate with a major literary period in Latin America and Caribbean culture. There, it departed from the European concept and infused with indigenous culture and myths. Maggie Bowers claims that Alejo Carpentier, the Cuban writer, is observed as the originator of Latin American magical realism. Carpentier in his prologue to his novel *Kingdom of this World* (1949) introduced *la real maravilloso* (the Marvelous Real). Impressed by extraordinary cultural atmosphere of America,

he admitted that a land abounded with marvels would automatically and naturally produce marvelous literature. As Bowers notes, Carpentier was influenced by both Roh and surrealist movement which was an attempt to draw hidden interior aspects of reality into art. However he moved away from both and emphasized on the reality that transferred through coexistence of traditional and mythic aspects of ethnocultural groups and modern rational mentality.

William Spindler's typological account of magical realism throws a light on the perplexities of the subject; he classifies magical realism into three categories, even though he indicates there are many overlaps between them. His first distinctive magical realist narrative is *metaphysical magic realism* which corresponds to Roh's ideas and relies on representing uncommon elements of familiar objects, events and acts. Adeleke Adeeko states that masters of *metaphysical magic realism* are Borges, James, Conrad and Kafka and he believes few postcolonial writers practice this mode. *Anthropological magic realism* is the second to which main postcolonial authors corresponding to magical realism belong. In this category, myths and cultural background of social and ethnic groups are the source of magic which is received at the same level of Western rationalism. Spindler's final type of magical realism is ontological magic realism which does not refer to any particular cultural perspective. In fact, there is no reference to mythical imagination and the word magic refers to fantastic and inexplicable occurrences which contradict the laws of the natural world. (Spindler, 82, Suhaili, P.Ahmad, E., & Ainah, 2015).

Interestingly, magical realism has been most widespread in Latin America and due to popularity of its practitioners it was erroneously labeled as a regional genre limited to Latin America. Even though it was inspired and encouraged by Latin American authors, many writers all over the world are now categorized as magical realist and it became an international technique to overcome dominant discourse. The term is, as Faris States, now "Perhaps the most important contemporary trend in international fiction" (1). However, David Punter observes that magical realism carries a "Third World connotation" (142).

What makes magical realism pertinent to contemporary literature, according to Maggie Ann Bowers, is the fact that as a narrative mode it offers alternative approaches that frequently contradict the Western standpoint and paves the way for a postcolonial discourse. She attests that "magical realism has become a popular mode because it offers to the writer wishing to write against totalitarian regimes" (Bowers, 4). Magical realism resistance to totalitarian and fundamentality accompany with being practiced in diverse contexts causes the difficulty of generating a definition for it. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Zamora, other magical realist critics, emphasize on the effectiveness of it as a contemporary decolonizing mode of writing to reflect the hybrid nature of postcolonial society. They state that magical realism forms a third space out of two contradictory worlds of real and magical which is both simultaneously: "The propensity of Magical realist texts to admit a

plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among these worlds" (Faris and Zanora, 6). Magical realist writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, and Leslie Marmon Silko among many others expose their readers to some non-Western and non-European cultural perspectives as alternatives to the dominant one. In fact, those who have been historically suppressed and culturally marginalized are able to articulate an unprecedented standpoint to express their versions of history through this appropriate literary mode. As Linda Kenyon observes this literary practice is closely linked with the Margins "Where different forces are mixing" (Kenyon, 15).

Stephen Slemon believes that magical realism provides liberty through its lack of theoretical specificity and discusses it not as a genre rather as a postcolonial discourse in which at the same time two incompatible worlds co-exist, though "neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continues dialectic with the 'other'" (408). He equates magical realism to a 'speaking mirror' that reflects the actual social relations between the dominant culture and the other cultures.

As a postcolonial mode magical realism seeks to debunk the appropriateness of rational-scientific perspective of realism as a means of reflecting reality of life. It emphasizes on inadequacy and narrowness of realism through destabilizing its monologic structure. Furthermore, it establishes multiplicity and plurality by creating a state of equal coexistence of contradictory worlds. In such a world the conflicting hierarchy of realism is challenged.

However, as some critics believe, restricting magical realism to the postcolonial world would be practically inaccurate. Since marginalized modes of thought do exist within the first World, there are examples of fiction exploiting the same style of writing such as those of Angela Carter, Gunter Grass and Italo Calvino that are sharp critiques to dominant worldview within Western philosophy, though marginalized minorities' standpoints are "rarely attributed the exotic tag of magical realism" (Takolander, 176); rather they are "more commonly ascribed the cosmopolitan label of postmodernism (D'haen, 200).

Amaryll Beatrice Chanady and Faris are among literary critics who have rendered distinctive features of magical realist narratives. Chanady proposes three main criteria to determine whether a text can be labeled magical realism or not; presence of two different levels of reality, simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text and absence of author's obvious judgment of the authenticity of the world view presented in the text. While emphasizing on the same characteristics, Faris added some other pivotal features of the mode. For her, magical realism has five characteristics. First, the narrative contains an irreducible element of magic. Second, by extensive use of details, it presents a strong presence of phenomenal

world. Third, the reader experiences some confusing doubts about two contradictory interpretations of events. Fourth, the text merges different realms. Finally, magical realism disturbs the received knowledge about time, space and identity. Here some of these features which are particularly pertinent to the discussion are explained in details.

One of the primary characteristics that constitute 'magical' in magical realism is "irreducible element" of magic (2004: 7) to use Faris's term; something that cannot be explained with the laws of the universe which is also a realm of western discourse. Thus, in magical realism daily life can be the scene of extraordinary happenings and unfamiliar events to logic. However, they are integrated into ordinary daily circumstances. The author of such text "abolishes the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural on the level of textual representation" (Chanady, 1985: 25) and the reader is suspended between rational and irrational, unable to distinct them. Since the line between them is blurred. In *The Satanic Verses* Salman Rushdie describes how Saladin Chamcha is 'demonized' as an illegal immigrant and therefore when the British police arrest him, he transforms into a devil-like goat literally. Milkman Dead, the central character in Morrison's *The Song of Solomon* explains how his great-grandfather escaped slave life by flying away back to Africa literally: "He didn't need no plane. He just took off; get fed up. All the way up! No more cotton! No more bales! No more shit! He flew, baby. Lifted his beautiful black ass up to the sky and flew on home (328). The very Character of Beloved and her returning in flesh and blood as a dead child in *Beloved* is another obvious example of the irreducible element in Morrison's fiction. These fantastic elements are represented on the same narrative plan as other ordinary events without questioning by narratives or characters. In other words, natural and supernatural are mingled in a way that none is superior to the other.

For Faris, 'unsettling doubt' is another significant element of magical realism. There is a matter of hesitation between contradictory understandings of events and settling the doubt is not feasible. However, since the author attempts to represent reality as a subjective issue, the credibility of the events would be a matter of degree; that is to say, some readers hesitate less depending on their cultural background. Hence, contemporary Western reader's primarily response to the black man who could fly back to Africa in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, for instance, might be merely daydreaming or hallucination although a reader of African American community whose heritage is bound to slavery, transatlantic experience and its aftermath with a tradition rooted in African spirituality may not question its credibility.

Interrogating the received ideas about time, space and identity, transgressing and intersection of two contradictory realms, fusion of incompatible elements and simultaneous presences of two codes of reality all of which can be traced in magical realist fictions, results in thematic and textual hybridity as the dominant feature of

magical realist narrative. Considering the significance of this element, Brenda Cooper declares that hybridity is the heart of magical realist narratives. She further explains that:

Syncretism between paradoxical dimensions of life and death, historical reality and magic, science and religion, characterizes the plot, theme, and narrative structure of magical realist novels. In other words, urban and rural, Western and indigenous, black, white and Mestizo – this cultural, economic and political cacophony is the amphitheater in which magical realist fictions are performed. The plots of these fictions deal with issues of borders, change, mixing and syncretizing. (32)

The very fact that many African American narrative works amalgamate Western philosophy with black tradition violates the hegemonic form of representation. In other words, authors like Morrison employ the techniques of magic to recreate a new version of reality; probably the part which has been suppressed or ignored by mainstream discourse. Morrison's work doubtlessly abounds in extraordinary and unexplained fantastic elements main part of which roots in African tradition. Like any other magical realist text, *Beloved* is interwoven extraordinary events with ordinary occurrences. Perhaps the most famous magical subject in Morrison narrative is the character of Beloved, Sethe's dead child who returns in flesh. The very presence of this character violates temporal and ontological possibilities of the real world through which the author tries to revise the history of slavery as established by white hegemony.

MAGICAL MOMENTS IN MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

To describe bicultural facets of African American community, W. E. B. Du Bois, a brilliant Afro-American historian and socialist, proposed the term of 'double-consciousness' in his book, *The Soul of Black Folk*. Double-consciousness refers to African American "two-ness_ an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving; two warning ideas in one black body" (1994: 5). Du Bois reinforces that this 'double-consciousness' is the root of African Americans's long-term struggling with a multi-faceted conception of their identity. Although for African slaves, adapting to Western cultural system became a way of survival, they tried to preserved their African culture and heritage as much as it was possible for them. Hence, the hybridity of neo-slavery roots at least partially roots in African heritage. In addition to Du Bois's 'double-consciousness' which emphasizes on the binary of the coexistence African and American culture, another source for the multiplicity of African American culture reverts to the very fact that early Afro-Americans were neither biologically nor culturally homogenous because transatlantic slave trade was a business that led to forced-immigrations of people from many different African regions each of which had had their own distinctive culture. However, these heterogeneous ethnic groups not only had already shared some non-Western heritage and philosophy but they also experienced migration

forced-immigrations, Middle Passage, slavery, emancipation and reconstruction equally.

Similar to Afro-American cultural pattern, An African American narrative is inevitably an amalgamation of two very different worlds of Afrocentric and Eurocentric to create a distinctive voice. A significant part of the plurality of African American culture derives from the indigenous tradition which has been reserved mainly through oral arts and folklore that has been transferred from one generation to another. In most of African American narratives those characters that have been able to retention their link with ancestral history are empowered and inventive and accordingly capable to go beyond ordinary rules; their experiences of reality transgress the conventional limitations.

Magical moments play a pivotal role in destabilizing realistic representation in Toni Morrison's narratives. The Neo-slave narratives both thematically and narratologically affiliate with the plurality and diversity created by magical realism. Her work celebrates co-existence of multiple discourses and overlapping worlds. In order to revisit the silent and the gaps of the history of slavery she deploys some magical elements. Morrison's *Beloved* strives to give a new dimension of African American life and another aspect of the system of slavery through violating the Western realistic tradition.

Interestingly enough, even though Morrison's novels are frequently discussed as magical realist work, she has persistently disagreed with those who label her work as magical realist. However, since there are some aspects of her work that cannot easily evade the mode there are still some tendency to make a link between them. In her work there are plenty of moments of fantastic and magic and even though these magical moments remain unexplained according to conventional rules, they are treated as normal events. Elements such as ghost appearance, supernatural healing power and other spiritual and mythical factors can be traced abundantly in her work.

Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Beloved* (1987), fits aptly into the recent subgenre of neo-slave narrative. It is set in antebellum America and tells the story of the challenging lives of slaves during slavery system under sever oppression and its aftermath. This non-linear narrative as Morrison has mentioned repeatedly in her interviews and speech demands the reader's participation in recollecting the fragmented pieces of story to make a whole.

Beloved is abounded with African (American) myth and heritage in order that utter those experiences that have been failed to be expressed through the Western notion of reality seeing that the Western philosophy strive to maintain the discourse of hierarchy. Elizabeth A. Beaulieu claims that Morrison deploys magical realist technique to "achieve a new and emancipatory vision of blackness" (211) and she also asserts that magical realism (as a tool for constructing a counterhegemonic

Blackness of unlimited possibility) is evident to varying degree, in all of her fiction, but two of her novels, *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* stands out as particularly strong examples of the trend (211).

Through a brief exploration of her *Beloved* the authors of this research attempt to illustrate firstly the main reason for labeling *Beloved* as a magical realist narrative and secondly how this technique helps Morrison to render an alternative version of the history of slavery.

Sethe's main traumatic experience in the narrative during her tragic transition from slavery to freedom is her infanticide action that was committed out of fear and love when her previous slave-owner came to capture her and her children. The spirit of the two-year-old girl comes back and haunts Sethe's house and at the end of the novel she returns in flesh and blood twenty years after her death. Sethe and her eighteen-year-old daughter live in the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road along with the baby ghost of Sethe's older daughter. 124 is where Howard and Buglar Suggs, Sethe's sons, had left because of uneasiness of living in that haunted house. Having a central position in the narrative, the spectral figure in *Beloved* has been interpreted much more beyond an episodic antirealist gesture. Danial Erickson in his *Ghost, Metaphore, and History in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude* asserts that the ghost main function is "to metaphorically represent the past and the way that the traces of the past persist in the present" (21). Considering the thematic structure of the novel, Erickson's claim seems convincingly plausible. Morrison uses the metaphor of the spectral to represent and interpret the main theme of the novel, which is the problematic history of slavery, not in a chronological and realistic way of narrating but through magical interactions between contradictory realms.

The confrontation of paradoxical realms which is central to magical realism overlaps partially with the postmodernist technique of ontological plurality formulated by Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction*. He confirms that the intersection of "different ontological levels", a distinctive postmodern feature, in the structure of postmodernist texts problematizes the conventional representation. Accordingly, he raised the controversial questions of "What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (10). In *Beloved* the characters and the readers encounter this ontological instability, although for Morrison it is more a thematic structure rather than a postmodern aesthetic to sophisticate the narrative.

Ghosts, which bother scientific and materialistic assumption of Western philosophy, represent past and absence and they foreground basic concern in magical realist narrative. The novel starts with a brief ambiguous introduction about the ghost:

124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old – as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). (3)

It also terminates with its exorcizing though both reader and characters of the narrative are not fully understand what it was. The people outside 124 have trouble to identify it, "Was it the dead daughter come back? Or a pretend? Was it whipping Sethe?" (258). Whatever it represents, this presence of the ghost blurs the line between the dead and the living.

On one hand, a reasonable explanation for the issue of ghost that is intensely permeated through the narrative, whether in its invisible presence or as a physical outside agent, is a magic trespasser on realistic world that transgress the logical rules of traditional novels which the author considers too limited to represent the history of "other". On the other hand, some critics including Daniel Erickson believe that Morrison employs the ghost metaphorically and it can be at least partially taken for a psychological 'posttraumatic' condition that Sethe experienced. However, the textual plurality of the work leads to manifold interpretations of the spectral. It alludes to "both conceptions: the ghost is alternatively an actual ontological realization or merely a mental reification brought about by emotional intensity" (Erickson, 275). Considering Faris's notion of relativity of the credibility of magical events in magical realist narrative, one concludes that the author urges the reader to go beyond the rational concept of reality. The final remark about Beloved at the end of the novel that people forgot her "Like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep" (275) arises the question "wasn't it more than a dream?".

One justifiable interpretation of the coexistence of the two discursive system of magic and real in the novel is illustration of the binary of the oppressor and oppressed. By giving a voice to the marginalized which are represented through the dead or the ghost, the author decentralizes the hegemonic discourse of colonizer and provides a way to fill the gaps. Beloved is reincarnation of the whole system of slavery, it represents that part of the history of slavery that was never written and told. Recreating and revisiting that part of history can never be portrayed through realistic means. The presented world is a plural one in which the dead live with the living, absent coexist with present, the past stands next to the present and the hierarchy is totally violated.

In Morrison's work like in any other contemporary black narratives the source of plurality and multiplicity is cultural at least in part. Hence, since Morrison narrative is heavily influenced by African American tradition, the problematic issue of the ghost and the appearance of Beloved (the character) in *Beloved* can be

interpreted through her use of myth, folklore and other African indigenous elements through which she reestablishes African American communal identity. In this viewpoint, magical character of *Beloved* roots in West African Yoruba mythology and it can be interpreted as “an abiku child, which is a child from West African mythology who returns from the dead to be born to the same mother” (83) as Bowers puts it. Abiku is a supernatural character who lives in-between the two worlds of the dead and the living.

Moreover, the multi-layered aspect of *Beloved* as a complicated character and her affiliation with many different issues link her to other archetypal characters. In her critical study, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* Trudier Harris claims that Morrison’s work has firm roots in African American folklore and tradition and she specifically sees *Beloved* a trickster²-like character. With the plurality of her identity, her amorality and her supernatural power, *Beloved* has no limits and escapes any definition. Hallett even goes further and believes that “the trickster motif is everywhere” in Morrison’s fiction and she labels her “an-author-trickster”:

A fundamental element of Morrison’s style is her strong trickster aesthetic, which she augments with a powerful sense of what it means to be African American. Toni Morrison weaves details, memory, dreams, history, and tropes into stories so rich in texture that identifying a single thread is an impossible task. Behind the mask of the author, deep within the fabric of her complex narratives, we find Toni Morrison, storyteller and trickster extraordinaire. (358)

Another non-European literary technique deployed by Morrison in her work and connected to magical realism, which is also part of her African American experience, is nonlinear storytelling strategy as a means of representation. As part of oral tradition, storytelling is a dynamic form of cultural expression that is transferred from one generation to another. Hence, as Bowers argues it “is thought to promote communities by binding people together in a creative act” (2004:85). She also states that because each time the story is told it undergoes some degree of changes, there is no one account of it. Accordingly, it is not static and is multi-layered in its essence. Thus, since it contradicts the basic concepts of Enlightenment rationalism, it is particularly pertinent to the structure of magical realist narrative. In other words, storytelling technique can be considered a magical realist technique that is rooted in African American oral tradition and contradicts.

Beloved, like Morrison’s other novels, demands participatory reader; the reader “must actively construct the meaning of the novel by sorting through and evaluating information gained” from the characters’ individual stories (Beaulieu, 269). Each character in the narrative forges his or her story or sometimes the same story or event is presented in different or even contradictory perspectives. Sethe’s murder of her child, for instance, is explained through the perspectives of Stamp Paid, Baby Suggs, schoolteacher and Sethe. When *Beloved* asks Denver to tell her

“How Sethe made you in the boat”, she knows that her story is only fragmentary because her mother “never told [her] all of it (Beloved, 1987: 79). Then Denver with being aware of the fact that her story is just secondhand “Swallowed twice to prepare for telling, to construct out of strings she had heard all her life a net to hold Beloved” (79). Moreover, Beloved questions Denver asking about the “color of things” and she emphasizes the participatory aspects of constructing stories. She visualizes and helps Denver to visualize through retelling the story.

The very structure of storytelling is that there are numerous pieces of stories all of which are linked and interweaved. Its narrative voices are complex because the politics at the core of its content is contradictory and complex. However, Morrison’s objective is not merely to create a playful aesthetic pattern of narration. Rather, she challenges the monologue pattern of dominant discourse and allows individual contradictory voices being uttered in a fresh heterogeneous discourse. The created world is more like a hall of mirrors. Through this labyrinthine voices, through telling, retelling and revisiting, Morrison and her characters achieve some sort of healing and recovery. Part of healing process from historical wounds is unearthing the realities that had suppressed and never been expressed by changing them into speakable utterances.

CONCLUSION

A large number of minorities of the United States who have experienced the condition of oppression have taken up magical realism as a mode of writing to illustrate their opposition to the dominant hegemony. Contemporary African American authors have applied some techniques of magical realist narratives in order to depict new aspects of being black and the trauma of slavery. They employ some magical strategies as a technique in their narratives to address the issues of slavery each in different ways. Thanks to these preeminent authors’s neo-slavery narratives, the history of the system of slavery has been redefined and they produced other dimensions of reality. These authors, among whom Morrison is a prominent one, fortified the plurality and hybridity of their texts via employing the mode of magical realism though like most of other African American literary techniques, this mode at least partially roots in Afro-American tradition.

The very narrative and thematic strategies that Morrison employs in *Beloved*, take the advantage of both realism and magic. To reincarnate the erased part of the history of slavery, she juxtaposes contradictory worlds. Her paradoxical narrative world composes of the spirit and material world, distinguish of which is not an easy experience for her characters and her reader. Morrison’s *Beloved* is affiliated with magical realist works in the way it questions the notion of history and the linear narrative time through unrealistic elements that contradict scientific and traditional received realities. The presence of the ghost, which is central feature of the narrative, goes beyond fantasy, dream or hallucination.

In short, in order to reclaim their unique identity black artists have to uncover new aspects of the history of slavery and to do that they frequently employ non-Western tools of representation. Magical realism allows the author to render hybrid reality and it widens the reader perception of real life; as Lois Parkinson Zamara points out: "Magical realist texts amplify the very conception of the 'experienced reality' by presenting fictional worlds that are multiple, permeable, transformative, animistic" (Zamara, 500). In other words, in *Beloved* Morrison transgresses realism and by employing magical realist technique she attempts to present a more complex and diverse reality of black issues in America.

Notes

1. Even though many critics have used 'magic realism' and 'magical realism' interchangeably, Bowers in her *Magic(al) Realism* distinguishes between them; she linked the former to Roh's concept that applied on art form in search of a comparatively clearer reality. However the latter applied to narrative fiction and associates with Salman Rushdie's notion of the term.
2. 'Trickster' is an archetypal character rooted in Yoruba mythology brought to the United States by African slaves. It has long been a significant part of African and African American storytelling and only recently evoked in African American criticism specifically through Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s critical study of signifyin(g) monkey. The term is used as a destructive force in text and in culture.

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