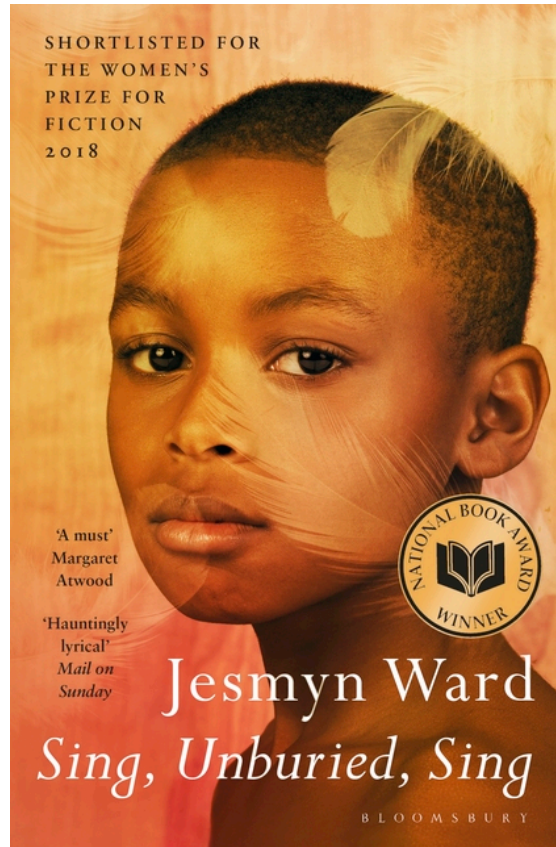
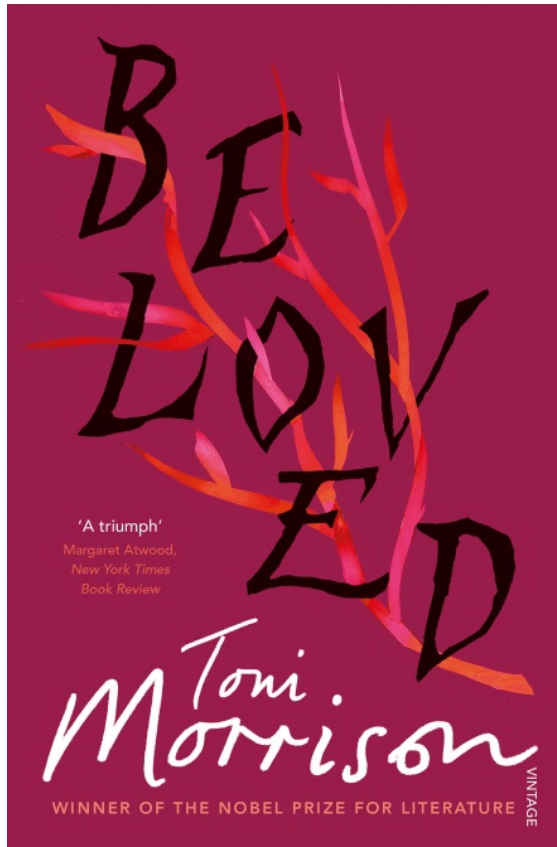


**The Transgenerational Ghost of Slavery Haunting America:
Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing***



Sanne Steele-Nicholson
4090446

MA Thesis - Literature Today
Utrecht University

Supervisor: Dr. Susanne Knittel
Second reader: Dr. Paul Bijl

20 June 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>ABSTRACT</u>	3
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	4
THEORIZING TRAUMA	9
<u>CHAPTER 1: MORRISON'S <i>BELOVED</i></u>	17
MORRISON'S <i>BELOVED</i> : BABY SUGGS, SETHE AND THE MOTHERLY LOVE	23
MORRISON'S <i>BELOVED</i> : DENVER AS THE REPLACEMENT CHILD	27
<u>CHAPTER 2: <i>SING, UNBURIED, SING</i></u>	33
WARD'S <i>SING, UNBURIED, SING</i> : PAST AND PRESENT GHOSTS	39
WARD'S <i>SING, UNBURIED, SING</i> : REPLACEMENT CHILDREN OR REMEMBRANCE?	45
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	48
<u>WORKS CITED</u>	52

Abstract

This thesis explores the literary representation of transgenerational trauma in novels written by African-American authors. Trauma has often been represented in literature through the use of ghost stories. Since Toni Morrison's award-winning novel *Beloved* (1987), many other authors have used the ghost as a vehicle to represent enduring (transgenerational) trauma in American society. In *Beloved*, the title character rises from the dead, representing the country's past coming back to haunt it. More recently, Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017) similarly deals with the collective trauma America suffered during – and after – slavery using ghosts to embody said trauma. This study aims to show different ways in which the figure of the ghost is used as a literary device to represent the trauma and disremembering that is woven into life and art in the United States. To do so, the study will engage with work in the academic field of trauma theory. Caruth, Schwab, and Craps, among others, argue that trauma can be unconsciously transferred to the next generation. Morrison and Ward illustrate this literary representation of transgenerational trauma in their novels with ghosts.

Introduction

Ghost stories have always had a prominent place in folklore and literature around the world. Ghost stories are protean: they shape-shift because they flow from cultural fears and anxieties. According to Nina Auerbach, ghost stories belong to the Gothic genre (280). This assertion, however, is contradicted by Srdjan Smajic, who argues that ghost stories fit in every literary genre, and therefore, they fit nowhere (1107). In the Elizabethan era, ghosts represented social conservatism, and their goal was to enforce norms. The ghost of Hamlet's father, for example, explained the offense of murder: murder being "most foul, strange, and unnatural" (*Hamlet*, 1.5, 28). In times of constant change, such as the Victorian era,¹ ghost stories reappear to reassure Victorian readers by affirming certain beliefs about an afterlife, and by "reentrenching social and moral conventions" (Gavin 20). Ghost stories, therefore, reflect certain aspects of the time in which they were written. They may shape-shift over time, but ghost stories are not merely a reflection of the past: they are social critiques "camouflaged with cobwebs; the past clamoring for redress" (Sehgal 2). Though often using the supernatural, hauntings are meditations of the way grief and trauma maim the living. Exploring the unquiet unconscious and traumatic memories that haunt people, ghost stories are inextricably linked to the past² and therefore are also an effective vehicle for (literary) examinations of trauma and memory.

An example of ghost stories that explore the way trauma maims the living are post-slavery ghost narratives written by African-American writers that deal with America's 'original sin' of chattel slavery. These literary ghosts specifically are used as ways to give agency to those who no longer have a voice. As Parul Sehgal describes it, "ghosts protest norms – slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration – the norms that killed them" (2). These are

¹ A time in which industrialization and the rise of science made people doubt their religious beliefs.

² Even our daily language surrounding the past can be related to horror stories: exorcizing your demons, being haunted by memories, conjuring up the past.

ghosts of America's own making that are the result of norms accepted in the past: deaths from police brutality, poverty and racist violence that all lead back to the nation's original sin of slavery and genocide – as well as its “energetic amnesia”: America's attempt actively to forget and ignore slavery (Sehgal 2). Historian Thomas Laqueur, in his article “Lynched for Drinking from a White Man's Well” (2018), argues that there is no other country that is so committed to amnesia as the United States. The Equal Justice Initiative has recently opened a museum in Montgomery, to encourage people to remember “the sordid history of slavery and lynching and try to reconcile the horrors of our past” (Laqueur 1). In 2012, with the opening of the museum and memorial, its executive director, Bryan Stevenson hopes to change the cultural narrative and make people more aware of the past.³

The importance of making people more aware of America's slavery past relates to the enduring effects trauma has on the nation. Gabriele Schwab argues for a dialogical turn in trauma discourse as the transmission of trauma haunts both black and white America, including what she calls ‘perpetrators trauma’: “[Trauma discourses] have commonly focused almost exclusively on victims of trauma. We need trauma discourses that look at the dynamic between victims and perpetrators and see both are suffering from the psychic deformations of violent histories, albeit in different ways” (72). When unbearable, unspeakable events or losses are too overwhelming to deal with – slavery is an example of this – people, both victim, and perpetrator, bury this trauma in a ‘crypt’ within their subconscious: “It is as if in this psychic tomb they harbor an undead ghost” (Schwab 1).

This unconscious act of keeping a traumatic event alive inside can be passed down from generation to generation. This unconscious transmission is what Nicolas Abraham and

³ In 2013, Stevenson published a report entitled “Slavery in America: The Montgomery Slave Trade” and “Lynching in America” in which he brought to light over eight hundred lynching cases that had never before been documented. Bryan Stevenson said the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum should be a place for reflection on the sins of our past to make people “better understand their connection to a history of unmitigated violence against humans” (Montgomery Advisory 2)

Maria Torok define as the dynamic of transgenerational haunting (130). In understanding the dynamic of transgenerational trauma and haunting, this thesis will use Schwab's theoretical framework to analyze two novels: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017). In doing so, this thesis aims to establish the ways in which authors in America use hauntings to illustrate the transgenerational trauma of slavery. Subsequently, this thesis will use these two novels to discuss the literary representation of the traumatic transgenerational effect slavery has had in the United States and how it still haunts its citizens today. The thesis focuses on Morrison and Ward's novels because they are important examples of "novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import that give life to an essential aspect of American reality" (Grimes 1).⁴ It is this essential aspect of American reality that gives a better understanding of the effects of slavery as represented in literature. Similarly, where Morrison addresses "classic" slavery and racism, Ward offers the reader a window into the effects of slavery and racism in America today. Annalise Quinn, in her article "*Sing* Mourns the Dead, Both Buried and Unburied", argues that Ward's ghosts are similar to those of Toni Morrison in that they are a kind of heightened memory as apposed to something supernatural, but her article only superficially touches on the similarities between Morrison and Ward. This thesis will, therefore, continue and expand upon this comparison.

Both Morrison and Ward use the figure of the ghost to illustrate the undeniable influence that slavery – abolished in the US over 150 years ago – still exerts on that country's society. *Beloved* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, in dealing with larger, cultural hauntings, such as slavery, represent not a personal, but a political history. In such literature, dealing with collective trauma, the ghost plays an important role. For example, in Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the protagonists' daughter, Denver, represents the transgenerational transmission of collective trauma. The secret of slavery is buried in the tomb, as Schwab calls it, and yet it

⁴ This was the announcement made by the Nobel Prize Committee with regard to Morrison winning the Nobel Prize for Literature.

comes back to haunt the characters in *Beloved*. This silence that is personified by the ghost is what keeps Denver from moving into the future, and not until she confronts the ghost, and her mother, does she begin to shape her own identity and move forward. Similarly, in Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, the ghost that haunts the protagonist symbolizes the intrusiveness of the past in the present, and that the traumatic effects of slavery are yet ever-present in America's society. Morrison and Ward both use their novels as vehicles to address the necessity of historical memory, even though there might be a desire – or even compulsion – to forget the terrors of slavery: “There is a necessity for remembering the horror in a manner in which the memory is not destructive” (Taylor-Guthrie 247-248).⁵ Yet, the past needs to be addressed. The ghost narratives compel readers to consider the enduring suffering that trauma inflicts over several generations and into the present. Morrison and Ward both – in effect – urge the reader to re-examine and re-interpret it to limit racist attitudes in the United States.

This thesis consists of a theory section which will engage with the academic field of trauma studies, giving an overview of what has already been written concerning trauma theory and transgenerational trauma. The subsequent chapter will discuss Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and explore the literary representation of transgenerational in this novel. First, it will give a summary of *Beloved* and illustrate the way trauma has been presented in the characters. Then, it will discuss how this trauma can be seen to have been passed down from one generation to the next, from Sethe to Denver.

Similarly, Chapter three will give a summary of Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and discuss the literary representation of trauma brought to life through its characters. Then, it will demonstrate that the trauma endured is a result of the intrusion of the past into the present, illustrating the continuation of the traumatic effects of slavery in America's society

⁵ A quote from Morrison describing her own novel, as she says in an interview: “The art of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting [slavery] and making it possible to remember” (Taylor-Guthrie 248, *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, 1994).

today. The final chapter, the conclusion, will tie these chapters together and offer suggestions for further research regarding the subject of transgenerational trauma.

Post-slavery literature that illuminates the traumas suffered and transferred to the subsequent generation, such as the ones mentioned above, are important not only for what they tell us about African American history in the United States but also because they reveal the complexities of the dialogue between blacks and whites since the abolition of slavery. The current sociopolitical climate is still greatly influenced by the effects of trauma, and literature specifically dealing with this topic is a vitally-needed vehicle for dialogue about the racial issues that plague America. The analysis of these two novels, therefore, can vividly illustrate the notion that today's social and psychological oppression in the United States can be laid at the feet of the festering wound that the institution of slavery inflicted upon that country.

Theorizing Trauma

Considering the large body of work describing trauma, a theoretical framework discussing trauma and its transgenerational inheritance is useful in order better to comprehend the continued effects of trauma through generations. The field of trauma studies, which explores the impact of trauma in literature and society, has been influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic theory of trauma. The concept of trauma is generally understood as a "severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self's emotional organization and perception of the external world" (360). The traditional model of trauma theory was pioneered by Cathy Caruth, who claims that trauma is inherently unrepresentable in language and "irrevocably fragments consciousness" (3). Caruth's understanding of the term trauma⁶ is characterized by a wound of the mind: "The wound of the mind, however, is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that [...] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (Caruth 3). Only in the early 1980s did psychiatry start to show increasing insurances of the direct effects of external violence. It was at this time that psychiatry coined the term "post-traumatic stress disorder" (Caruth 24). This disorder reflects the mind's inability to control the unavoidable reality and effects of horrific events. Caruth continues to argue that the wound of the mind is not consciously available, but imposes itself repeatedly, in the form of nightmares and repetitive behavior (3). This wound presents trauma in two ways: the immediate wounding and the belated effects of that wound (Murphy 53).

Though most psychoanalysts, such as Freud, have characterized the limit of a trauma's effects to the life of the survivor who personally suffered the "wound", more recent studies have come to understand that these wounds of the mind can be passed down through generations. One of these critics is Marianne Hirsch, who discusses the transgenerational

⁶ Cathy Caruth is one of the founding figures of trauma studies, and she is described as "one of the most innovative scholars on what we call trauma, and on our ways of perceiving and conceptualizing that still mysterious phenomenon" (Lifton)

effect of the Holocaust on children of survivors: “Though the second generation did not personally experience the Holocaust, they lived with the constant haunting specter of that traumatic era in their lives nonetheless” (Hirsch 103). Hirsch calls this second-generation trauma “postmemory”, arguing that the second-generation survivors feel the need to remember, rebuild, replace, reincarnate and repair (Hirsch 243) even though they are distanced from the actual trauma and are therefore unable to prevent or alter it. Hirsch argues that postmemory describes the second generation’s relationship to the traumatic experiences that preceded their births “but [that] were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch 103). She uses the Holocaust as her historical frame of reference but iterates that her analysis is relevant to many other contexts of traumatic transfer.

Transgenerational trauma, therefore, occurs when trauma is passed down from the first generation to the second (and further) generation(s) through the complex post-traumatic stress disorder mechanisms. It was first observed in 1966, when, shortly after *concentration camp syndrome* – also known as survivor syndrome – was established, doctors noticed a large number of children of Holocaust survivors seeking treatment in clinics in Canada (Fossion et al. 519). It is also noted that the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors were “overrepresented by 300% among the referrals to a child psychiatry clinic in comparison to their representation in the general population” (Fossion et al. 520). Children of traumatized parents can be affected, either directly or indirectly, through their parents’ PTSD symptoms, which some authors call “secondary traumatization” when referring to the second generation (Fossion et al. 525). When referring to the third generation,⁷ child trauma researchers such as Daniel

⁷ The descendants of both immediate witnesses and victims of genocide, colonial suppression, slavery, political totalitarian control, clerical abuse in religious organizations, and many survivors of terrorism had to deal with the victimization symptoms themselves, without the transfer of original trauma being recognized and help offered. Symptoms of unresolved grief and/or trauma that are passed from one generation to the next along include depression, self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts and actions, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, or substance abuse (Mullan-Gonzalez 4).

Schechter, Inge Bretherton, and Byron Egeland use the term transgenerational transmission of trauma (Schechter 115; Bretherton 237; Egeland 1123). They have empirically identified “psychological mechanisms that favor intergenerational transmission, including dissociation in the context of attachment [...] as an effect of parental efforts to maintain self-regulation in the context of post-traumatic stress disorder and related alterations in social cognitive processes (Frazier 22). According to Frazier, West-Olatunji, St. Juste and Goodman, in their article “Transgenerational Trauma and Child Sexual Abuse: Reconceptualizing Cases Involving Young Survivors of CSA”, enslavement and slavery, civil and domestic violence, sexual abuse, and extreme poverty are “also sources of trauma that can be transferred to subsequent generations” (Frazier 28). They give as an example the notion that survivors of sexual abuse in childhood might be dealing with untreated or unresolved trauma that can negatively influence their children and subsequent generations due to their own feelings of loneliness, isolation or mistrust, feelings that children can absorb from a very young age.

When parents are unable to deal with their own trauma, and, in effect bury it, this can have a substantial influence on their children. Gabriele Schwab, in her book *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, argues that people bury their trauma – namely, unbearable, unspeakable events, losses or injuries – in a kind of crypt within their subconscious: “It is as if in this psychic tomb they harbor an undead ghost” (1). This unconscious act of keeping a traumatic event alive inside can be passed down from generation to generation (Schwab 4). Though her research focusses mainly on second-generation narratives about the Holocaust, she also includes examples of transgenerational legacies from other periods, histories, and cultures, in the hopes to contribute not only to debates surrounding Holocaust studies, but also studies of colonialism, slavery, and torture. Her

theories can – arguably – be productive as well for the analysis of transgenerational haunting of descendants of both victims and perpetrators of chattel slavery.⁸

Schwab bases her theory on that of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. In their book, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, they elaborate on the unconscious act of keeping a traumatic event alive inside and discuss psychic haunting, transgenerational trauma, and the crypt. In their theory, the *crypt* is what Abraham envisions in which people bury their trauma, namely: unspeakable or unbearable events, losses or injuries incurred during violent histories, with which they are unable to deal: “It is as if in this psychic tomb they harbor an undead ghost” (Schwab 1). According to Abraham, it is necessary to mourn a loss by *introjecting* the lost person or object, a process in which the person integrates the lost person or object into their psychic fabric. If a traumatic event is not mourned but is simply ignored, it can continue to haunt:

A person who refuses to mourn *incorporates* the lost object by disavowing the loss, thus keeping the object “alive” inside. Incorporation is a defensive operation based on a denial of loss. In a fusion of boundaries, the ego comes to identify and merge with the lost object. [In that way], the person who refuses to mourn becomes like the living dead (Schwab 1-2).

This act of introjection, therefore, allows for a certain acceptance, allowing the trauma to exist peacefully within, whereas incorporation, or refusal to mourn, turns the loss into a ghost of the subconscious where it still has the power to return and haunt its subject.

As mentioned before, the analysis of transgenerational trauma that relies on the Holocaust as a historical framework is also relevant to other contexts of traumatic transfer. Postcolonial theorists have similarly argued that internalized trauma can be transferred from

⁸ Chattel slavery, or the ownership of human beings as property able to be bought, sold, given and inherited, is perhaps the best-known form of slavery. Slaves in this context have no personal freedom or recognized rights to decide the direction of their own lives. Typically, under the chattel slave system, slave status was imposed on children of the enslaved at birth (Frost 2011).

one generation to the next. For instance, Laura Murphy, in her article “The Curse of Constant Remembrance: The Belated Trauma of the Slave Trade in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments*”, argues that the trans-Atlantic slave trade had not only an immediate devastating impact on African societies and cultures but continues to do so well into the twenty-first century (52). She argues that although there have been equally devastating collective traumas in history, such as the Holocaust as discussed above, the long-term effects of transgenerational inheritance can be analyzed by looking at the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Murphy concludes by arguing the importance of exploring these long-term effects of trauma and those traces of memory that rise to consciousness generations after the traumatic event.

This transference of trauma is elaborated in Joy DeGruy’s book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, in which she argues that PTSS⁹ describes a set of behaviors, beliefs, and actions associated with, or related to, transgenerational trauma experienced by African Americans “that include but are not limited to undiagnosed and untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in enslaved Africans and their descendants” (DeGruy 95). Her research posits that the effects of centuries of slavery in America, followed by “systemic and structural racism and oppression” (DeGruy 102), as – for instance – embodied in the subsequent Jim Crow laws,¹⁰ lynching and the racially-motivated mass incarcerations of African Americans continuing to this day have resulted in “multigenerational maladaptive behaviors, which originated as survival strategies” for those then held in slavery (DeGruy 103). According to DeGruy, the syndrome is visible in children whose parents suffer from PTSS as well, because they have been subjected and indoctrinated into the same behaviors, long after the behaviors have lost their contextual effectiveness. Modern behaviors can be traced back finding its origins in slavery.

⁹ In this case the acronym PTSS will refer to Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, as not to be confused with PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

¹⁰ Jim Crow laws were state and local laws (enacted in both previously-slave-holding and non-slave-holding states) that enforced racial segregation in the United States.

An example DeGruy uses to illustrate modern behaviors that have been shaped by historical events and have been passed down through generations is the following. While waiting in line at the bank, DeGruy sees little three white children playing and running around. A black mother with a young child of the same age as the white children insists that her child stays with her, instead of playing with the other children. Without explicitly saying so, the black mother sends the message to her children that “little white children can safely run and play but you cannot because it is not safe for you”. Starting from a very young age, this teaches black children that somehow this world does not belong to them; it belongs to the little white children (DeGruy 6). DeGruy, therefore, concludes that to understand how African Americans adapted their behavior over centuries in order to survive the stifling effects of chattel slavery, it is important to look at history. She believes that “the behavior in the scenarios described above, as well as many others, are in large part related to trans-generational adaptations associated with traumas, past and present, from slavery and ongoing oppression” (DeGruy 8).¹¹ Therefore, if America’s collective trauma is not dealt with, it will continue to be passed on from generation to generation.

The continuation of trauma through generations is elaborated on by memory scholar Stef Craps in his book *Postcolonial Witnessing* (2013). Craps dedicates a chapter to postcolonial haunting in which he argues against the idea that there is a linear progression from a colonial slave past to a liberated “postcolonial” present, but rather that ghost stories dedicated to the theme of slavery “open up a space of remembrance in which historical losses are neither introjected nor incorporated, neither ‘properly’ mourned nor melancholically

¹¹ A critic might argue that it is not transgenerational trauma but direct trauma which resulted from ongoing oppression. And indeed, ongoing oppression can result in traumas, yet this thesis aims to illustrate that the present-day system of oppression is a symptom of the transgenerational legacy of slavery. The current system is not ‘broken’, but that it was built to be racial unequal. Ava DuVernay, creator of the Netflix series *When They See Us* says about the American criminal-justice system: “[The] system is not broken, it was built to be this way” (Ava DuVernay in conversation with Oprah Winfrey). She argues that the aftermath of slavery created an unequal justice system in the United States that has yet to be dealt with. Further evidence for this can be seen in the Black Lives Matter movement, which deals with racial profiling of police officers with regard to black citizens.

entombed within the self, but constantly re-examined and re-interpreted” (60). Instead of affirming that there is a distinction between the past and present, he states that racist attitudes and practices continue throughout the ages (Craps 60).

Similarly, poststructuralist theorist Homi Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture*, argues that the colonial past continues to intrude on the present (78). He also argues that the dynamics of post-colonial fiction links the individuals’ sufferings and trauma with their community: “Beloved with its historical resonance transcends the problem of a few characters” (Bhabha 80). Similar to Craps, who argues against a linear progress from past to present, Bhabha argues for something he calls “the timelessness” of the postcolonial passage through modernity: “It may appear ‘timeless’ only in that sense in which, for Toni Morrison, Afro-American art is ‘astonished’ by the figure of the ancestor” (254). The ghost of *Beloved*, being the ancestor that rises from the dead in the guise of the murdered child, represents the “furious emergence of the projective past” (Bhabha 254). Bhabha argues that the presence of the ghost is time-lagged, “moving forward yet continually encircling that moment of “not-there” which Morrison sees as the stressed, dislocatory absence that is crucial for the remembrance of the narrative of slavery” (254). This is a continuation of the argument set forth by Craps, whose theoretical framework will be used for the analysis instead of Bhabha’s, who will only be touched upon briefly, in which there is no such thing as a linear progression from a colonial past to a post-colonial present, but that the past continually circles back to the haunt the present.

This thesis will draw on Craps’ interpretation of postcolonial haunting to analyze how these two literary works memorialize slavery without leaving the reader with the feeling that the story is finished and can, therefore, be forgotten, but rather – as Craps argues – needs to be constantly re-examined and re-interpreted in order to limit racist attitudes. Similarly, using Schwab’s framework, this thesis will argue that post-slavery ghost narratives, in particular,

compel readers to consider the enduring suffering that trauma inflicts over several generations by depicting the relationship between slavery and contemporary suffering and racism. The next chapters will delve deeper into post-slavery literature – specifically *Beloved* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* – to provide evidence for the statement that literature can expand our notion of the long-term consequences of transgenerational trauma. First, an analysis of *Beloved's* form and content will aim to illustrate the ways in which Morrison represents the trauma suffered by her characters using Caruth's definition of trauma.

Chapter 1: Morrison's *Beloved*

Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief – *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Beloved*, is regarded as one of the most influential works of African American literature: "Dedicated to the "Sixty Million and more" who are believed to have died on slave ships and in captivity, it reclaims the ascendancy of memory and history in black identity, resolving symbolically issues that are still swept aside in present-day reality" (Canton 307). The story is inspired by the real story of a fugitive slave, Margaret Garner, who kills her baby after being recaptured by marshals in Cincinnati, Ohio.¹² Morrison creates her own feminine narrative which centers around womanhood, motherhood, and sisterhood. She incorporates African folklore, mythology of black Americans and speech patterns of African American discourse (Canton 307), adding tribal rites and ghosts: "she asks the reader to engage with a retelling of history that is built on an easy intimacy with the supernatural" (Canton 307). This use of magical realism is a way to reflect the absurdity of slavery and to force the reader to re-evaluate the 'reality' of real-life (Canton 307). Similarly, the form of the novel – written in fragmented sections, jumping back and forth between past and present – strengthens the content. The fragmented narrative is constructed to illustrate the notion that the tales set out are too terrible to relate as a consecutive narrative, supporting Craps' argument that there is no linear progression in post-colonial ghost stories due to the nature of trauma.

Beloved's main storyline takes place in 1873, in a house in Cincinnati, Ohio. Slavery has been abolished but racism is still rife. The novel shifts between past and present, showing fragments of earlier events. Chronologically, eighteen years prior to the novel's opening

¹² Margaret Garner escaped a slave plantation in Kentucky in 1856 and fled to Ohio, which was a free state (that is, a state in which slavery was prohibited). Yet, under the Fugitive Slave laws, owners were allowed to cross into free states to reclaim their 'property'. The case of Margaret Garner was described as being "the most complicated case of its kind" (Weisenburger 1).

scene, slaves Sethe and her husband Halle plan to escape from the Sweet Home¹³ plantation in Kentucky. They are unable to endure the tortures of their plantation life any longer – having already sent their children away to live with, Halle’s mother, Baby Suggs – but their escape attempt fails. When Halle does not show up at the agreed-upon location, pregnant Sethe attempts the escape alone. She gives birth to her daughter, Denver, on the journey towards Cincinnati. Temporary relief is found when Sethe and Denver reach Baby Suggs’ house on 124 Bluestone Road,¹⁴ Cincinnati, but soon the slave owner comes back to reclaim Sethe’s children. Rather than have her children be taken back into slavery, Sethe takes them out back to a shed and attempts to kill them all. She is only able to kill her two-year-old daughter, before someone steps in. For the next eighteen years, her house is haunted by this child’s spirit. Her older children are driven away because of the ghost and Baby Suggs passes away soon after. Until one day, another former slave from Sweet Home, Paul D, arrives and rids the house of its ghost. Paul D’s arrival starts a process that will unlock the past and confront the characters with their – until then – suppressed trauma: *Beloved*.

The painful past Paul D and Sethe share is presented to them in the embodiment of *Beloved*, a young woman whom Sethe discovers in front of her house one way, and who then manages to insinuate herself into the household after Paul D drives away the baby ghost. This selfish, attention-seeking woman knows things about Sethe’s past that have until then been left unuttered: “Sethe is slow to realize what for Denver is obvious. *Beloved* is a revenant (a person who has died but come back to life): Sethe’s dead baby grown to womanhood and craving the love she has been denied” (Canton 309). She personifies Sethe’s guilt and drives her nearly insane, but also coaxes stories from the past out of her, that previously have been too difficult to say aloud, and, as one of the characters says early on in

¹³ The name Morrison gives to the slave plantation is ironically ‘Sweet Home’: a name that conveys warmth, happiness and a sense of safety, though, in reality, Sweet Home was a brutal place.

¹⁴ The naming of Sethe’s home is also symbolic, as the 124 represent Sethe’s children: the third child no longer present after the infanticide.

the novel: “anything dead coming back to life hurts” (Morrison 42). Sethe suffers from what Caruth calls “a wound of the mind” (3), which, until *Beloved* appears, was not consciously available to her, but presented itself in the form of nightmares and repetitive behaviors (Caruth 3). According to Caruth’s definition of trauma, Sethe’s wound of the mind is personified in the ghost of *Beloved*, who acts as the belated effects of the wound slavery inflicted upon her. *Beloved*’s background story of being locked in a dark place¹⁵ also echoes the cramped slave ships which make her character seem to be more than just Sethe’s projected guilt and trauma, but also a personification of the suffering experienced by all slaves. As Bhabha argues, Morrison transcends the individual in *Beloved* and represents the suffering and trauma of a collective history (80).

Beloved’s representation of a collective history is further supported by the novel’s magical realism. Magical realism fiction offers a realistic rendition of the world while adding magical elements to the novel, such as ghosts. The novel’s magical and haunting qualities are most prevalent in the character of *Beloved*. Near the end of the novel, Morrison illustrates the traumatic impact that slavery had on the enslaved by showing the haunting affect the characters in the novel experience after meeting *Beloved*:

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. They forgot her like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her. It took longer for those who had spoken to her, lived with her, fallen in love with her, to forget, until they realized they couldn’t remember or repeat a single thing she had said [...]. So in the end, they forgot her too. Remembering seemed unwise (Morrison 274).

¹⁵ In the novel, there is a rumor that a slave owner kept a slave baby in a shed her entire life and raped her repeatedly. This might be from where *Beloved* escaped, but is left ambiguous in the novel. It echoes the beginning of chattel slavery: too many people trapped in cramped, dark ships, being mistreated and raped repeatedly.

The ghostly figure of Beloved represents slavery and its aftermath. As Morrison described above, everyone knew that she was called, but they forgot her like a bad dream. Through the fragmented narrative, slipping between present and past, it becomes apparent that remembering the past is a painful, but necessary step in order to heal from trauma.

The fragmented form of the novel, as mentioned above, which jumps back and forth between past and present – strengthens the content. The fragmented narrative is constructed in such a way that it illustrates that the content is often too terrible to relate as a consecutive narrative. For example, one paragraph reads:

She might be hurrying across a field to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be in her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard (Morrison 6)

Sethe is thinking about a hypothetical situation, and yet through the negation – she is not thinking about how she was attacked and robbed of her breast milk, or why her back is full of scars – the reader is made aware of the violent sexual act and the fact that she has been physically abused. Also, very suddenly, a memory hits her that takes her back to her past:

Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, 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 made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. [...] Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. When the last of the chamomile was gone, she went round to the front of the house (Morrison 7).

Sethe would rather remember the trees than “the boys”, while the reader is confronted with the image of lynched bodies hanging from the trees. The paragraph ends with Sethe being back in the present tense, going around to the front of the house, and Morrison seamlessly

moves from the hypothetical situation to a memory, and back to the present. Throughout the novel, she moves between past and present in a similar way, switching between present tense and memories, while “shifting from third-person narration to omniscient narration to interior monologue” (Burns 108). Through weaving backward and forwards through the lives of the different characters, Morrison gathers the fragmented memories, thoughts, and actions of her characters as they try to deal with their individual traumas. The form of the novel is in line with Craps argument that there is no linear progression from a colonial slave past to a “postcolonial” present, but rather that the past continually interrupts and continues in the present (60). He argues that postcolonial ghost stories, such as Morrison’s *Beloved*, “open up a space of remembrance in which historical losses [are] constantly re-examined and re-interpreted (Craps 60). Similarly, Morrison has created a fragmented narrative to illustrate the constant re-examining and re-interpretation necessary to come to grips with this historical trauma.

In Craps’ theory of a continuous space of remembrance in which there is no linear progression between past and present, the act of remembering plays an important role. Remembering and, in turn, not remembering, is also a continuous theme within the novel. Memory, or what Sethe calls *rememory*, keeps her from moving forward: “But her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day” (Morrison 83). She uses the term *rememory* to emphasize the fact that the memory keeps being recalled, again and again: “I used to think it was my *rememory*. [...] Some things you forget. Other things you never do” (Morrison 43). Through the process of what Sethe calls *rememory*, we are confronted with the reality of what life looks like in a world twisted by the atrocities of slavery, and it shows us the unassailable resiliency of human beings to continue in the face of all attempts to dehumanize them. These years of sociopolitical repression brought on self-repression: “Slaves were stripped of their

humanity and treated like animals: Sethe struggles to build a sense of self” (Canton 308). This complete suppression led to a psychological self-repression in which the psychological chains left after the literal chains have been removed hinder Sethe from moving on. Morrison suggests that African Americans can only begin living in the present when they have confronted the past.

The next section will continue to discuss how trauma is represented in *Beloved*, and take a closer look in which ways Morrison illustrates how the psychological self-repression caused by slavery also disrupted the bond between mother and child.

Morrison's *Beloved*: Baby Suggs, Sethe, and the Motherly Love

If I hadn't killed her, she would have died – Beloved

The system of slavery intentionally tore apart families and thereby disrupted the mother-child relationships. In Sethe's case, she is driven to murder. "If I hadn't killed her, she would have died" (Morrison, 236). These are the words Sethe speaks in an attempt to explain why she was driven to kill her baby daughter. It is not only her personal history as a slave that triggers the killing of her baby, but "it is also the history of her mother, who was never allowed to keep any of her own children" (Schwab 78). Sethe's mother passed down to her the sense that it is better to be dead than to be a slave, and better as a slave not to attach yourself even to your children in the way a free mother would. Though their theory mainly emphasizes the familial framework of transgenerational trauma, Abraham and Torok's theoretical framework is also suited to include collective traumatic histories, such as Morrison describes. The concept of the phantom, as described by Schwab, is similar to the way Morrison uses the figure of the ghost to trace the effects of a collective history "that the protagonists enact unconsciously" (78). The struggle to love in an inhumane system that breeds children like pigs results in inhuman choices, though it could be argued that infanticide was the humane choice over slavery. Vajdi and Joodaki (2014), argue that the infanticide in *Beloved* is a romanticized act of heroism: "It may be defined as a form of resistance to slavery, a way for mothers to redefine their infants as their own rather than properties or commodities to be used by slave owners" (86). Sethe describes what drove her to infanticide as follows:

And if [Sethe] thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over

there where no one else could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe (Morrison 192).

The act of killing Beloved put her on the other side, where whites can no longer touch her. Sethe believes that whites “will dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore” (Morrison 295) and wants to spare her children from those atrocities. Paul D argues that “unless carefree, motherlove was a killer” (Morrison 155) and being a mother in slavery, Sethe is faced with a decision that makes her a killer, and yet protects her child from slavery.

The trauma caused by slavery put a strain on the mother-child relationship. For in a system where your children literally do not belong to you, what does it mean to be a mother? Children were often sold separately from their mothers, marriages were not recognized, and, in the era of the Fugitive Slave Act,¹⁶ even in freedom, Sethe’s children were still subject to being claimed as property. Baby Suggs, Sethe’s mother-in-law, has also been profoundly impacted by slavery’s disruption of families. She explains that everyone she has ever known, let alone loved, has been rented out, bought up, hanged, won, stolen or shot. They have been moved around like checker pieces. What she calls the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that “nobody stopped playing checkers, just because the pieces included her children” (Morrison 28). After a while, Baby Suggs does not even bother to look at her children when they are born, as she realized that, at some point, they will be taken away from her:

The last of [Baby Suggs’] children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn’t worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own – fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a

¹⁶ The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required that all escaped slaves, upon capture, be returned to their masters and that officials and citizens of free states had to cooperate. Abolitionists nicknamed it the “Bloodhound Law” for the dogs that were used to track down runaway slaves (Nevins 346).

mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads when they walked (Morrison 163-164). The disruption of the slave families slowly makes Baby Suggs immune to the motherly bond, because loving her children too much will simply end up hurting her when they are taken. According to DeGruy, it is important to understand that African Americans were forced to adapt their behavior in order to survive the stifling effect of chattel slavery (6). Baby Suggs has been forced to stop loving her children, for it only tears her apart.

Similarly, Paul D – who has shielded himself off from his emotions for much of his life, which will be elaborated on in the following chapter – expresses the danger in loving your children too much: “For a used-to-be slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love” (Morrison 54). Paul D has also learned not to get too attached to people, because – as Baby Suggs has remarked – slaves were moved around like checkers: “The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; [...] so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one” (Morrison 54). According to Paul D, shielding herself from her emotion would help Sethe, yet exactly this denial of emotions and mourning is what causes the ghost to appear. When trying to put into words why she murdered her daughter, Sethe tells Paul D “it came from true love” (Morrison 296). Paul D responds by saying that her love is “too thick”, arguing that in order to survive you need to keep your “tobacco tin”¹⁷ shut tightly to which Sethe's replies that “thin love ain't no love at all”. Though Paul D does not at that point agree with her, by the end of the novel he will understand that shutting yourself off from love does not help. Sethe – and by the end Paul D – come to realize that remembering and mourning their past will help them move forward. As Paul D says to Sethe at the end of the novel: “We got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of

¹⁷ Paul D refers to his heart as a tobacco tin, which has been shut tightly in order to keep the trauma of his past from making him vulnerable and emotional (Morrison 258).

tomorrow” (Morrison 322). He realizes the past is behind them and they can no longer let it haunt them if they want to move into the future.

The next section will discuss how transgenerational trauma is represented in *Beloved*, and how Sethe has transferred her trauma onto her daughter, Denver. Similarly, it will discuss Schwab’s definition of the *replacement child* and how Denver can be seen to embody this.

Morrison's *Beloved*: Denver as the Replacement Child

I never talked about it. Not a soul. Sang about it sometimes, but I never told a soul – Beloved

Baby Suggs is one of the characters who illustrates the devastating effects slavery has on families and these effects can be seen to influence the different generations in the novel. The horrible things Baby Suggs and Sethe went through at Sweet Home continue to influence their lives after they have escaped, and are passed down to Denver. Slavery still – quite literally – haunts their house and her mother, which affects Denver as well – even though she never directly experienced slavery. She is afraid of leaving the house, and afraid of her own mother who is capable of murder, and not until the end of the novel does she start to grow up and confront the trauma she has suffered in her life.

As mentioned before, Schwab argues that if a traumatic event is not mourned, but is simply ignored, it can continue to haunt and be kept alive within a person. This unconscious act of keeping a traumatic event alive inside can result in haunting. In *Beloved*, when asked about his past, Paul D responds: “I never talked about it. Not a soul. Sang about it sometimes, but I never told a soul” (Morrison 85). The suppression of his traumatic past is similar to Schwab’s crypt. His inability to mourn has turned his heart into a closed tin, which opens every once in a while, rendering him immobile, in the way trauma comes back at unexpected moments in the form of flashbacks or nightmares: “His tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their play and prey” (Morrison 258). His heart is usually shut tight against the pain of memory, but, every once in a while, it flies open at the sight of something that reminds him of his past life at Sweet Home. This makes him vulnerable. Yet this act of telling Sethe about his experiences seems to offer him a momentary release, an opportunity to open his “tobacco tin” (Morrison 133). Similarly, Sethe tries very hard to suppress her trauma: “To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay” (Morrison 51). The act of suppressing traumatic memories does not offer healing. Traumatic

memories that have been suppressed can come back in the form of flashbacks or nightmares, they can entrap a person in the prison of repetition compulsion: “Where there is no grave, one cannot mourn properly; one remains forever tied to a loss that never becomes real. [...] The damages of violent histories can hibernate in the unconscious, only to be transmitted to the next generation like an undetected disease” (Schwab 3). Therefore, in sharing stories about their past, Paul D and Sethe have a chance to be liberated from their traumas.

Schwab builds on Abraham and Torok’s theory using Jacques Derrida’s elaboration of it in his article “Fors”, in which he develops a concept of cryptonymy, i.e. a traumatic designification of language to ward off intolerable pain (4). She argues that “language, as Derrida asserts, inhabits the crypt in the form of words buried alive, that is, defunct words relieved of their communicative function” (Schwab 4). In that way, traumatic silences and gaps in language express trauma otherwise shrouded in secrecy or buried in the unconscious. They are mutilations, distortions, attempts to conceal. Abraham argues that it is the children or descendants who will be haunted by what is buried in the familial tomb, even if they do not know what the tomb contains. Denver is never told explicitly what her mother and grandmother went through during their years at Sweet Home. She is quite literally on the edge between slavery and freedom: she was born on the river that divided slave land and “free” land. Even though she is technically free, she is still very much connected to the trauma of slavery: she drinks her murdered sister’s blood with her mother’s milk and goes to jail with Sethe. When she is asked about her time in prison, she goes deaf and lives in seclusion, with only her family and the ghost. In this isolation, she is confronted daily with Sethe’s inability to deal with her past. Sethe, in turn, keeps Denver in the dark: “As for Denver, the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered” (Morrison 42). Both Baby Suggs and Sethe keep the secret of slavery buried in the tomb, fearfully guarding it from Denver – as the final pages of the novel state “it was not a story to pass on”

(Morrison 324) – in the hopes of saving her from the trauma while also being unable to confront it themselves, even though it is exactly what holds Denver back: “It is through the unconscious transmission of disavowed familial dynamics that one generation affects another generation’s unconscious. This unconscious transmission is what Abraham defines as the dynamic of transgenerational haunting” (Schwab 4-5). But this silence, as Schwab explains, is what keeps Denver from moving into the future.

Another argument that illustrates that Denver’s character represents the transgenerational transmission of collective trauma is Schwab’s theory regarding *replacement children*. Replacement children refer to the widespread response to the traumatic loss of a child, especially prominent during or after violent histories such as the Holocaust or other genocidal wars (Schwab 120). Schwab uses Art Spiegelman’s famous graphic novel, *Maus*, to illustrate the symptoms of a replacement child. Spiegelman, referred to as “one of the best-known replacement children born after the Shoah to Jewish parents” (Schwab 120), is himself a replacement child, growing up with the idea that he was competing with his “ghost-brother,” Richieu. The short dialogue from *Maus* that she quotes contains the most prominent symptoms of a replacement child, being: the fact that the brother is a “ghost-brother”; his parents’ refusal to accept their child’s death; and them never mourning the child properly, because they could not believe he was actually dead (Schwab 121). Schwab continues her argument by explaining the effect this inability of the parents to properly mourn a deceased child has on the so-called replacement children: “It is a prevalent form in which parental trauma is transmitted to the next generation and often to generations to come” (121). In *Maus*, Spiegelman’s parents, in refusing to believe their firstborn is actually dead, keep him *alive* as a nostalgic, “almost hallucinatory presence that denies his actual death” (121). They have created a crypt, in which their dead child has been turned into a ghost-brother, who haunts Spiegelman throughout his life. Similarly, Sethe’s inability to properly mourn the death of her

baby daughter results in her coming back to haunt 124 Bluestone Road. Denver, the replacement child in *Beloved*, feels the immense pressure of this loss her mother is unable to process. She is never able to come into her own, as the presence and force of the ghost – and later of Beloved herself – in the house is so overpowering. Where Paul D was able to rid the house of the ghost in the beginning, the power dynamic has shifted and Beloved is able to force Paul D out of the house, and as she continues to grow, Sethe seems to shrink. Denver witnesses this power-shift and struggles seeing her mother suffer as Beloved takes over.

Though she does not know how, Denver feels the need to repair power dynamic in the household.¹⁸ Hirsch describes the effect on the second generation as *postmemory*, arguing that the second-generation feels the need to remember, rebuild, replace, reincarnate and repair (Hirsch 243). Though Denver has never (consciously) lived through slavery, she feels the need to replace and repair her mother's pain. Hirsch argues that postmemory describes the second generation's relationship to the traumatic experiences that preceded their births "but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 103). Even though Denver never consciously interacted with her baby sister before she was killed, she is confronted with this personification of the effect slavery had on everyone in her surroundings. This personification, therefore, represents the collective memories of slavery that were transmitted to her in such a way that they constitute a memory in its own right. Usually, parents are supposed to function as protective shields against trauma for their children, yet the unspeakable horrors and violent traumas slavery imposed, tearing apart the normal bonds between mother and child, traumatized the parents in such a way that – rather than shielding their children from the trauma – they inadvertently infected their children with it.

¹⁸ Which she ultimately does when she finds the courage to leave 124 and find help.

Even though Sethe has not been able to shield Denver of the trauma, by the end of the novel, though Denver has suffered herself, she begins to understand what drove her mother to infanticide. She says that she knows now what Sethe's greatest fear is, namely that Beloved will leave before Sethe is able to make her understand what it took "to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin" (Morrison 295). Denver sees now that what Sethe did was an act of true love, as killing Beloved was not as bad as letting her be taken back to slavery:

Far worse [...] was what Baby Suggs died or, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though [Sethe] and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own (Morrison 295-296).

Denver can see that being dirtied so badly by the white men to the point where you do not know yourself anymore, is a fate far worse than death. Sethe's motherly love is strong enough to try and shield them from this loss of identity, which she believes is worse than dying.

All the characters' identities have been shaped by the atrocity of slavery. The sense of self – or lack thereof – is a symptom of the transgenerational transmission of trauma with which Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Denver all struggle: "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (Morrison 111-112). Reclaiming one's sense of self is, in the end, what redeems the characters. Slaves are defined by their enslavement, having been robbed of everything they own and are. Being able to confront the past is the first step towards dealing with the present: "Starting with these first tentative steps taken in freedom, the events in the novel presage the long road ahead" (Canton 309). It is this claiming of the self that are the first steps towards freedom, which can be found in Baby Suggs' sermons: "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love

it. Love it hard” (Morrison 103). In this world where loving is made almost impossible, for family will be taken from you, Baby Suggs preaches to ‘love yourself’. Pride in the self is what needs to be achieved, pride in race and sex is what heals, because, as Paul D says to Sethe at the end of the novel, “you is your best thing” (Morrison 323).

The following chapter will discuss the second novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and illustrate the ways in which Ward represents trauma in her characters. It will aim to show how transgenerational trauma is represented in the novel and has shaped American society.

Chapter 2: *Sing, Unburied, Sing*

I didn't understand time either, when I was young – Sing, Unburied, Sing

Where Morrison's *Beloved* gives a better understanding of the effects of (historic) slavery through her literary representation of trauma, Ward offers the reader a window into the *current* effects of slavery and, subsequently, racism in America. Similar to Morrison's novel, Ward represents the ongoing effects of the trauma of slavery and how these effects can be seen to influence the present. More specifically, this chapter will argue that Ward's novel reflects America's contemporary society, which is flawed due to the aftermath of slavery. Ward's prize-winning novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, deals with America's deep South (set in the state of Mississippi) and its history of racism. Her novel is another important literary representation of intergenerational transmission of collective trauma in the United States. The novel is set in the fictional town of Bois Sauvage, near the Mississippi River delta, which is filled with mud, bayous, heat, and death: "It stinks like possums or armadillos smashed half flat on the road, rotting in asphalt and heat. [...] It's the smell of death" (Ward 6). The protagonists Jojo, a thirteen-year-old boy from a mixed-race family, and his little sister Kayla live with their maternal grandparents. Their grandmother, Mam, is dying of cancer and, by the opening scene in the novel, she is no longer able to get out of bed. Their grandfather, Pop¹⁹, is afflicted by memories of his past. When Pop was just fifteen, he was arrested on a false charge and was sent to Parchman prison, which at that time still operated as if it were a slave plantation. As the novel opens, Jojo's (white) father, Michael, is serving a three-year sentence at this same prison, which has evolved "only superficially from the long-ago days when it was like a plantation" (Smith 1). His (black) mother, Leonie, is hardly ever home, disappearing for

¹⁹ Pop's real name is River, but he is only sporadically called this in the novel, so will, therefore, be referred to as Pop throughout this thesis. Additionally, the fact that Jojo calls his grandparents Mam and Pop, whereas he calls Leonie and Micheal by their actual names, illustrates the nature of their relationship. Their grandparents feel more like parents to him and Kayla.

days on end, dealing with drug addiction. As Michael is to be released from prison soon, Leonie wants to take her children on a road trip up to Parchman prison to visit her husband, using this as an opportunity to buy and sell drugs on the way with her friend Misty. As mentioned previously, symptoms of unresolved grief and/or trauma that are passed from one generation to the next include, among others, substance abuse (Mullan-Gonzalez 4). Leonie's drug addiction can be seen in part to represent the transgenerational trauma suffered.

Throughout the novel, Leonie's drug addiction also represents her trying to suppress the (more direct) trauma she experienced when she was younger. Her older brother, Given, was killed by Michael's cousin while they were drinking out in the woods. They had bet each other who could shoot a buck first, and when Given won, Michael's cousin shot and killed him. Michael's family subsequently covered up the murder, by arguing it was a hunting accident. Given the cultural environment there, one could argue that the police could — and did — accept that story: Michael's cousin was white and Given was black. Similar to Morrison, Ward uses magical realism: for every time Leonie gets high, the ghost of her brother, Given, appears to her: “And that's when Given came back. [H]e smiled at me, this Given-not-Given, this Given that's been dead fifteen years now, this Given that came to me every time I snorted a line, every time I popped a pill” (Ward 34). According to Caruth's description of the “wound of the mind” (3), Leonie is confronted with the belated effect of Given's death, which represents itself to her in the form of nightmares, and specifically, drug-induced hallucinations. Given's ghost represents Leonie's trauma that she desperately wants to ignore. As Schwab describes, when trauma is ignored it — that is, the unfinished business — can come back to haunt an individual: “People tend to bury violent or shameful histories. They create psychic crypts to stay sealed off from the self, interior tombs haunted by the ghosts of the past” (Schwab 49). Leonie's trauma of losing her brother is the result of a larger collective trauma the South is dealing with, namely the aftermath of slavery. The justice

system, even though Jim Crow laws have been abolished, still echoes the inequality put in place in the years after slavery. Since the country has yet to heal, its inhabitants continue to suffer.

Similarly, Leonie's inability to deal with her personal past, resulting in her drug abuse, subsequently affects her children, Jojo and Kayla. Both children feel the absence of their mother throughout the novel, and when they are forced to drive up to Parchman with her, they continually express their disdain for her. Jojo's grandparents are better parental figures to both children, which is evident from the way he talks about Leonie: "She ain't Mam. She ain't Pop. She ain't never healed nothing or grown nothing in her life, and she don't know" (Ward 107). The disdain Jojo feels towards his mother is underscored by the fact Leonie notices it too: "It feels good to be mean, to speak past the baby I can't hit and let that anger touch another [Jojo]. The one I'm never good enough for. Never Mama for. Just Leonie" (Ward 147). Though Leonie's parenting choices throughout the novel are questionable, it becomes apparent she is struggling with her own past traumas and trying to help her family the best she knows how. She describes her struggle as follows:

We are all sinking, and there are manta rays gliding beneath us and sharks jostling us. I am trying to keep everyone above water, even as I struggle to stay afloat. I sink below the waves and push Jojo upward so he can stay above the waves and breathe, but then Michaela sinks and I push her up, and Michael sinks so I shove him to the air as I sink and struggle, but they won't stay up: they want to sink like stones. I thrust them up toward the surface, to the fractured sky so they can live, but they keep slipping from my hands. It is so real that I can feel their sodden clothes against my palms. I am failing them. We are all drowning (Ward 195).

As she tries to be a mother, a wife and even still a sister, she cannot keep herself afloat, let alone help her family. Abraham and Torok's basic premise, namely that, unless trauma is

worked through and integrated, it will be passed on to the next generation, applies to Leonie and her children. They will inherit symptoms that do not necessarily emerge from their own experience but from their mother's and even their community's traumas, or secrets. Just as Morrison's novel transcended the individual sufferings of her characters, so too does Ward's novel represent America's suffering. The aftermath of slavery has left a mark on American society to the extent that it continues to force families apart, and 'allows' innocent men, such as Leonie's brother Given, to be killed.

There is no escaping her political rendering of American history throughout *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. The novel, described as a poetic critique of American history (Sandhu 1), won the 2017 National Book Award and was shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2018. Ward has established herself as "one of the most poetic writers in the conversation about America's unfinished business in the black South", according to Adrienne Green. The political rendering of the novel is most palpable in the symbol of Parchman, which is subsequently the anchor of the novel. Three of the main characters serve time there at different points in the novel: namely Michael, Pop, and Richie – who will be discussed in more detail later on. The road trip Leonie and her children make to Parchman can be seen as a road trip to the past. While Pop served time at Parchman, even though slavery had technically ended, black people were still arbitrarily arrested and forced to work in conditions that were almost indistinguishable from those during slavery: "The extreme violence and brutality that characterizes life at Parchman shows how black people's lives are treated as disposable within the highly racist world in which the characters live" (Charles 1). There is a continuity between slavery and Parchman that illustrates the ongoing effects this system has in the lives of the characters. The content of the novel, therefore, emphasizes that past and present are one.

Similarly, the form of the novel, which echoes Morrison's in that it is narrated by different characters and moves between past and present, also emphasizes the recurring theme

throughout the novel: everything happens at once. “[I]nstead of allowing those memories [of their personal traumas and of America’s horrific slave history] to suffocate her characters, the novel interrogates what being tethered to a collective black experience means” (Green 3). The narration switches between three different characters: Jojo, Leonie, and Richie. The novel thus focusses on the individual, but as Bhabha argues that *Beloved* transcends the individual, so too does *Sing, Unburied, Sing* move past the familial suffering to show the collective suffering. Several occurrences in the novel reflect the country’s racist past and present, such as Richie’s remark when he sees a barking dog: “There had always been bad blood between dogs and Black people: they were bred adversaries – slaves running from the slobbering hounds, and then the convict man dodging them” (Ward 138). In referencing slavery and subsequent convicts at Parchman, Richie suggests that dogs have been bred to hate black people and therefore argues that nothing has changed much over time. Similarly, Leonie’s friendship with Misty is strained by the fact that she realizes they have led different lives because of the color of their respective skins:

You better take advantage. I hear them four words over and over again when we get in the car [...]. You better take advantage. She said them words as though decisions have no consequences, when, of course, it’s been easier for her. The way she said it, take advantage, made me want to slap her. Her freckles, her thin pink lips, her blond hair, the stubborn milkiness of her skin; how easy had it been for her, her whole life, to make the world a friend to her? (Ward 91).

Ward has the capacity to personalize a communal history and acknowledge the persistence of the past. In her novel, she illustrates that racial tensions have yet to subside in the United States and that there is no linear progression from past to present.

The next section will continue to discuss how trauma is represented in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and take a closer look at the ways in which Ward illustrates the continuity of slavery by

giving a more in-depth analysis of Parchman as a representation of past and present being one.

Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*: Past and Present Ghosts

None of them reveal their deaths, but I can see it in their eyes – Sing, Unburied, Sing

The idea that past and present are inextricably linked is further illustrated through the novel's anchor, Parchman Farm, Mississippi's state prison, which is the destination of the road trip.

The issue of modern-day incarceration and the horrible past of Parchman's oppressive conditions, when, due to the US Constitution's Thirteenth Amendment,²⁰ life in prison was slavery in everything but name, are brought into focus by the ghost of young Richie. He explains that after his death, Parchman was both future, present, and past to him:

I thought I was in a bad dream. I thought that if I burrowed and slept and woke again, I would be back in the new Parchman, but instead, when I slept and woke, I was in the Delta before the prison, and Native men were ranging over that rich earth, hunting and taking breaks to play stickball and smoke. Bewildered, I burrowed and slept and woke to the new Parchman again, to men who wore their hair long and braided to their scalps, who sat for hours in small, windowless rooms staring at big black boxes that streamed dreams. [...] I burrowed and slept and woke many times before I realized this was the nature of time (Ward 186).

Richie's inability to see one fixed Parchman – it ever-changing from past to present and back – shows the prison changed only superficially since he was first there. This idea that everything is happening at once is a recurring theme within the novel. Individual hauntings are intertwined with familial ones and by moving back and forth in this way, between past and

²⁰ The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for a crime*. This exception enabled states to – in effect – continue the institution of slavery in penal institutions, often in a manner worse than slavery. As Staples states in his article “A Fate Worse Than Slavery Unearthed in Sugar Land”, slave masters had at least a nominal interest in keeping alive people whom they owned and in whom they held an economic stake: “By contrast, when a leased [prison] inmate died in the fields, managers who had contracted with the prison system for a specific number of bodies could demand a replacement” (3).

present, Ward demonstrates the transgenerational trauma that feels impossible to escape: “It is difficult to distinguish where sorrow ends and desperation begins” (Green 3). This description of Parchman is similar to Morrison’s description of Sweet Home. Sethe describes the fact that even if the plantation were to burn down, the memory of it would continue to be. Her individual memory of Sweet Home reflects its enduring presence in American history. Ward’s description of Parchman is structured similarly and her ghosts are another manifestation of the transgenerational trauma of the collective black experience in the American South.

Most of the description of Parchman comes from Richie, the young boy who served time there together with Pop. Richie’s story is first told through Jojo’s narrative, as he continually asks his grandfather to tell him stories about his past. In these chapters, Richie is still alive. Halfway through the novel, though, Richie becomes one of the narrators and gains agency – something he lacked while he was alive. In these latter chapters, Richie is a ghost, confused and consciously trying to remember where and what he is. He sleeps and wakes trying to figure out how to move forward, as Parchman has trapped him once again: “How could I conceive that Parchman was past, present, and future all at once? That the history and sentiment that carved the place out of the wilderness would show me that time is a vast ocean, and that everything is happening at once?” (Ward 186). When he finally sees Jojo at Parchman, he comes with them: “Today when Jojo came to Parchman, I woke to the whispering of the white snake, which had dug a nest into the earth with me so he could speak to me in my ear” (Ward 191). The snake tells him that he should rise and follow Jojo, in order to be free of Parchman: “This place binds you. This place blinds you” (Ward 191). Richie decides to follow Jojo and as he climbs into the car with them, he says he is going home.

Richie does not remember how he died, and he seems to think the answer to finally being able to move on is to find Pop and figure out what happened to him. Throughout the novel, Pop has been telling Jojo stories about his time at Parchman, and with Richie by his

side, Jojo finally asks him to finish the story and explain what exactly happened to Richie. Pop has been reluctant to do this, just as Morrison's Sethe and Baby Suggs wanted to keep their traumatic past from Denver in an attempt to protect her. Pop wants to guard Jojo by keeping his past a secret, but – unlike Sethe – finally realizes that letting Jojo know about his past, and subsequently learning from it, will shape his identity and help him grow. Pop explains that Richie escaped from Parchman at the same time as Blue,²¹ a fellow prisoner, who attacks a white girl in the woods. Pop was sent out with the dogs to find them, and, as he was searching for Richie, he heard white men talking about the girl who was attacked: “I knew that when it came to Blue and Richie, they wasn't going to tell no difference. They was going to see two niggers, two beasts, who had touched a White woman” (Ward 253). Pop finally comes across Richie hiding in a tree and he learns that they have caught Blue:

I saw the bonfire they lit, and I knew what was happening. I knew before I even heard Blue start screaming. [...] They was cutting pieces off him. Fingers. Toes. Ears. Nose. And then they started skinning him. [...] And Richie hunched down. Crying. Nose up, listening to Blue and the crowd. They was going to do the same to him (Ward 254).

In an attempt to save Richie from the horrid skinning, burning, and lynching that would follow, Pop grabs a knife and stabs him in the neck, killing him almost instantly. This act would traumatize him for the rest of his life and as in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, he is unable to shake off the trauma, to rid himself of the bloodstains on his hands: “I washed my hands every day, Jojo. But that damn blood ain't never come out” (Ward 256-257). Pop's trauma is somewhat eased when he finally finishes his story. As Green points out, Ward's portrayal of death in the novel “isn't meant to expose brutality for its own sake”, but actually to show how the characters – and people in general – deal with history. Ward's reference to Parchman can

²¹ Blue is a black gunman in Parchman, and as Pop describes: “Called him Blue because he was so dark he shined like a plum in the sun, but he wasn't right in the head; that's why none of the women would talk to him. Wouldn't take no visits with him. So he caught one of the women inmates out by the outhouses, and dragged her off into a stand. [...] He raped her (Ward 252).

be understood to be references to slavery, and as Richie illustrates that Parchman is the past, present, and future, by extension Ward argues that slavery is the past, present, and future. This is a never-ending process from which not even the dead are shielded until the trauma has been confronted.

Richie's soul does not find peace after hearing how he died, even though finally telling the story slightly relieves Pop. In *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, the ghosts' purpose in the story is not to find peace – though by the end he does – it is to ask questions which cannot be answered, “to hold the present to witness” (McNamee 2), and confront the past head-on. Jojo asks his dying grandmother if she too will become a ghost, but she explains that one only become a ghost if the death was bad or violent: “The old folks told me that when someone dies in a bad way, sometimes it's so awful even God can't bear to watch, and then half your spirit stays behind and wanders, wanting peace the way a thirsty man seeks water” (Ward 236). Similarly, many of the victims of slavery that haunt America died badly and had violent deaths, like Richie. Richie finally finds solace at the end of the novel when Kayla sings. The tree²² in the backyard of their house is full of ghosts, including Richie's: “There are women and men and boys and girls. Some of them near to babies. They crouch, looking at me. [...] None of them reveal their deaths, but I see it in their eyes, their great black eyes” (Ward 282). Ward describes how they speak with their eyes in one long stream-of-consciousness scene of collective anguish:

He raped me and suffocated me until I died I put my hands up and he shot me eight times she locked me in the shed and starved me to death while I listened to my babies playing with her in the yard they came in my cell in the middle of the night and they

²² Just as the scars on Sethe's back are in the shape of a tree, bringing to mind the lynched bodies hanging from the trees, Ward's tree full of ghosts uses similar imagery. The memorial in Montgomery similarly evokes the images of lynched bodies, as the stones with names on them are hanging from the ceiling.

hung me they found out I could read and they dragged me out to the barn and gouged my eyes out before they beat me still (Ward 282-283).

The ghosts of America's haunted slave-past have all gathered in the tree and confront the protagonists. Kayla and Jojo seem to be the only characters that are able to face them, and Kayla tells them to go home. They stay, though, until Kayla raises her arm and starts to sing: "A song of mismatched, half-garbled words, nothing I [Jojo] can understand. Only the melody, which is low but as loud as the swish and sway of the trees" (Ward 284). As she sings louder, the ghosts open their mouths, as if they are crying, but no sound comes out. Kayla moves her hand in a way that Jojo recognizes as the way their mother would rub their backs when they were frightened of the world, and she seems to comfort the ghosts, who smile with "something like relief, something like remembrance, something like ease" and they say: home. What brings them ease is the younger generation finally acknowledging them and confronting the past. Similarly, the tree full of ghosts that stands in every American backyard needs to be addressed.

Ward's ghosts do not seem fantastical, but rather "like a kind of heightened memory, much like the ghosts of Toni Morrison" (Quinn 2). Morrison said in a 2004 interview: "I think of ghosts and haunting as just being alert. If you are really alert, you see the life that exists beyond the life that's on top" (Morrison 2004)²³. This, too, is the nature of Ward's characters, they are alert: "they see ghosts because they know that history and present are the same" (Quinn 2). And indeed, Morrison's *Beloved* is its logical antecedent, in which the ghost of a murdered child also returns from the dead. Morrison illustrates the difficulty of dealing with reality in a world twisted by the atrocities of slavery through her use of *rememory* and ghosts help us face and grapple with horrors that are formless and overwhelming. Similarly, Ward, too, gives shape to the formless. Through the supernatural, she illustrates how her characters,

²³ Toni Morrison's 'Good' Ghosts, NPR author interview, September 20, 2004.

and people in general, deal with their history. Ward shows us the very real racial tensions in the American South – through mass incarceration, bigotry, and racism – that continue to haunt the reader long after the story ends.

Just as Morrison writes that *Beloved* represents the disremembered and unaccounted for, Ward sings for the unburied, the nameless. The title of her novel is a nod to the *Iliad*, where Homer asks the muse “to sing of unburied bodies left on the battlefield of Troy [...], while the dead men’s souls descend to Hades” (Quinn 3). Ward asks us to sing for the unburied, for the generations of black Americans who have been harmed by history and racism, through imprisonment, lynching, rape and the horrors of enslavement. And it is during this journey that her characters – like the ghosts – find “something like relief, something like remembrance, something like ease” (Ward 284). The two authors are saying, in effect, that it is up to us to find remembrance, to find relief from this transgenerational haunting of slavery.

The next section will continue to discuss how transgenerational trauma is represented in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and elaborate on Jojo and Kayla as replacement children, and discuss in more detail the continuation of the past in America’s society today.

Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*: Replacement Children or Remembrance?

It stays with me, a bruise in the memory that hurts when I touch it – Sing, Unburied, Sing

All the characters in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* live with trauma that is personified by the presence of ghosts throughout the story, haunting each character. They exist in Pop's stories, they come to Leonie in drug-induced trips, they sit on branches like birds and sing about their past lives. The ghosts are manifestations of the different family members' traumas. Jojo has a difficult relationship with his drug-addicted mother and in turn is dedicated to protecting and raising his little sister, his mother lacking the requisite motherly instincts. His mother, Leonie, tries to deal with the trauma of losing her brother (and marrying into the family responsible for his murder) by numbing herself to reality through drugs. Pop is haunted by his time at Parchman Farm, forever failing to clean the blood off his hands after all these years because of the responsibility he feels in Richie's death. The ghost of Richie also symbolizes a collective trauma that previous generations have endured, bringing anger, restlessness, and desperation to the family.

Throughout the novel, the past affects the present in many ways. The stories Pop tells Jojo about his time at Parchman are presented through fragments, illustrating Craps theory that traumatic pasts are not linear but influence the present in fragmented bursts. Through these stories, Pop passes on his traumatic past to Jojo, along with some of the pain. This contributes to Jojo's identity and helps his transition from an innocent child at the beginning to an adult by the end of the novel. The opening lines of the book, compared to the final pages, illustrate this transition: "I like to think I know what death is. I like to think that it's something I could look at straight. [...] I try to look like this is normal and boring so Pop will think I've earned these thirteen years" (1). Yet, he when confronted with a goat being killed, he is unable to keep his composure and has to run outside to throw up.

By the end of the book, Jojo has a better grasp of the world. After resenting his mother for years, feeling like she was a bad mother, he realizes she has her own traumas she was struggling to overcome: “Sometimes, late at night, [...] I think I understand Leonie. I think I know something about what she feels. That maybe I know a little bit about why she left” (279). This is similar to Denver’s realization about her own mother’s traumas. Though Jojo’s mother’s actions have influenced him, he comes to understand that the past continually influences the present. He has seen Given, the ghost that haunts his mother, and he realizes the burden Leonie has lived with. The personification of this transgenerational trauma in the form of ghosts, the people that the characters carry with them all the time, are finally given some relief when Kayla sings to them, as previously mentioned. Kayla represents the confrontation of trauma, being the embodiment of all family members in the way she resembles them all: “Her eyes Michael’s, her nose Leonie’s, the set of her shoulders Pop’s, and the way she looks upward, like she is measuring the tree, all Mam. But something about the way she stands, the way she takes all the pieces of everybody and holds them together, is all her. Kayla” (284). When the collective confronts history, it can start to heal from trauma.

Kayla and Jojo represent what Schwab calls replacement children (121). Yet, where Jojo struggles to break free of the familial and collective trauma in his surrounding, Kayla seems to be confronting the trauma. Where Hirsch describes postmemory (243) as the second generation attempting to “remember, rebuild, reincarnate and repair” (243), Kayla has started to repair and relieve the ghosts of their traumatic past by singing to and acknowledging them.

The road trip to Parchman, a symbolic journey to the past and rememory of slavery, enables the characters to connect to the ghosts of America’s slave-past. Through her ghosts, Ward brings the past into the present day and depicts the long-term effects of trauma that chattel slavery has had on America and its people, illustrating that past and present trauma are ultimately spokes in the same wheel. She includes not only the African historical context of

the Parchman prison but also the “memory traces of the experiences of former generations” (Murphy 70). Richie, in particular, is the embodiment of the transgenerational effects of the trauma process, hoping to find solace through Jojo. It is not until Jojo and Kayla acknowledge the ghosts of America’s past at the end of the novel, that the spirits disappear. In line with Craps’ theory that there is no linear progression from a colonial past to a post-colonial present, ghost stories dedicated to the theme of slavery “open up a space of remembrance in which historical losses” and trauma need to be constantly re-examined and re-interpreted (Craps 60). The younger generation, which Ward has personified in Jojo and his little sister, needs to remember, reexamine, reinterpret, confront and sing to the ghosts of their communal past and only in doing so will America begin to heal.

Conclusion

In order to heal, the past first needs to be remembered. In writing their novels, Morrison and Ward have, in a way, confronted America's slave past and made it possible to remember. Through literature, the transgenerational preservation and transformation of traumatic memories of tragic historical pasts can be redeemed. Individual processes of remembering can be used to heal wounds of the mind, recognizing personal histories and understanding the past. Morrison and Ward use the figure of the ghost to illustrate the undeniable influence that slavery still exerts on America's society today. *Beloved* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* both use individual stories of suffering that are linked to communal traumas, illustrating the historical resonance that transcends their characters. The figure of the ghosts represents the continuation of the past in the present and the haunting effects of trauma in both novels.

In *Beloved*, a novel set during – and close after the abolishment of – slavery, the ghost represents the psychological impact this period had on the characters. The protagonists, especially Sethe, are confronted with these undealt with traumatic experiences in the form of the ghost of Beloved. In *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, Parchman is a symbolic representation of slavery, as this novel is set over a hundred and fifty years after its abolishment, yet it still has power over the characters. Richie's ghost illustrates that past and present are one and that the traumatic effects of slavery have yet to disappear out of America's society. The effort to simply forget the past would be ultimately overcome by the memory being desperate to stay alive, meaning trauma does not 'want' to be forgotten: "the order and quietude of everyday life would be violently disrupted by the chaos of the needy dead" (Morrison xiii). Both Beloved and Richie are needy ghosts because the authors want to demonstrate the necessity of remembering, both on an individual and historical level, in order to heal.

Morrison and Ward both use their novels as vehicles to address the necessity of historical memory, even though there might be a desire to forget the terrors of slavery. They

illustrate there is a way to remember the horror of slavery in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. In order to remember in a manner that is not destructive, the country needs to collectively mourn, by awakening the dead and revisiting the past trauma. Morrison and Ward have begun to do so, by giving the tragedy of slavery a shape for us to deal with, namely in the figure of the ghosts. Horrors can overwhelm and feel formless, which makes them unfathomable, yet these novels are a dialogue with America's idea of slavery. Their individual stories of suffering transcend the personal and represent a collective suffering which the country needs to mourn. Morrison and Ward recognize the necessity to mourn: "To facilitate a collective mourning, communities, and nations develop the need to establish a culture of memory. Recognizing the psychic life of our ancestors in our own psychic life means uncovering their unspoken suffering and secret histories" (Schwab 79). Morrison and Ward's novels are a way for people to better understand their connection to history.

These novels serve to memorialize slavery and through the act of reading, there is a way to remember and confront the past, as mentioned before. Morrison argues that to overcome the trauma of slavery people need to remember it and she tries to show that the past never ends. In *Beloved*, Morrison gives back the voices of those who lost them in history or who "have been denied the power of language and forced to be silent" (Vajdi and Joodaki 85). She invites – and urges – readers to re-vision and understand African American history through the lives of former African slaves and to remember the horror in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. Her novel takes place at different times, slipping back and forth between past and present which slowly presents us with the psychological impact slavery has had on the characters.

Similarly, Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* argues that past and present are one. In her novel, she illuminates the racial injustice that persists in the United States through the needy dead, who need to be heard. Any effort to forget would ultimately fail because the ghosts –

and traumas – of the past demand attention. The ghost of Richie also symbolizes a collective trauma that previous generations have endured, bringing anger, restlessness, and desperation to the family. This suggests that ghosts will continue to bring restlessness to American society until the traumas of its past are dealt with.

The collective trauma that haunts America is not only that of the victim's – and their decedents – of slavery. Bhabha and Schwab argue that colonization affects both the colonizer and the colonized and “to achieve this freeing from the past requires one first to awaken the dead and to revisit the trauma (81). In the United States, the perpetrator effects are still tangible today. Not only are African Americans traumatized by structural racism, but children who are subjected to white supremacy are equally influenced: slavery's legacy has inflicted in their hearts the burden of hatred and racism that has been taught, generation after generation.

More research needs to be done into the relationship between slavery and contemporary suffering and racism in order to examine our notion of the long-term consequences of transgenerational trauma in the United States. One novel that examines America's racial history, for instance, is Yaa Gyasi's *Homecoming* (2016) which tells the story of three generations of Asante women, and touches upon different historical events including slavery. The form of the novel – told of three different generations, and the fact that it includes the effects of slavery -- would provide a fruitful basis for analysis. Similarly, an analysis of the perpetrator's trauma, which Spike Lee's movie *BlacKkKlansman* (2018) briefly touches upon, would be useful to get a better understanding of the extent of the trauma caused by slavery in the United States. Angie Thomas' novel, *The Hate U Give* (2017), would also broaden the understanding of the current political climate in America, as it engages with the Black Lives Matter movement.

A development can be seen from Morrison's novel to Ward's in the way people think and write about slavery. Both novels reflect their respective contemporary cultures.

Morrison's novel is centered around women and, while dealing with slavery, also embraced feminism and the power of women and mothers. Morrison was similarly writing at the dawn of trauma studies. At that time, the traumatic effects of slavery were still largely ignored. Yet, even so, she was able to incorporate into her novel the (now-recognized) symptoms of trauma before such ideas entered society's mainstream. In Ward's novel, on the other hand, one sees America's evolution in the intervening decades. Since Morrison's novel was published, there has been more public attention for the traumatic effects of slavery, though the focus is still not perfectly sharp. Recently, memorials, museums and popular culture have been shedding light on the transgenerational effects of slavery that still permeates American society. That development, at the time of Morrison's novel, was unthinkable; the civil rights movement was in its infancy.

Novels and movies, such as those mentioned above, now illustrate that America is waking up to its ghosts. Where Morrison was one of the first, her novel having one ghost to represent American history as to make it digestible, Ward has many: a tree full of ghosts. Ward's multitude of ghosts can therefore also represent the spreading realization that slavery had a horrible, traumatic effect on America's people, and each day's headlines demonstrate that such effect stubbornly continues today.

Works Cited

- Auerbach, Nina. "Ghosts of Ghosts". *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32:1, 277-284. 2004.
- Bast, Florian. "The Troping of Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Callaloo*. Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 1069-1086. The John Hopkins University Press, 2011. Web. Last accessed 16 Oct. 2018.
- Berlin, Ira. *Generations of Captivity: A History of American Slaves*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003. Print.
- Berger, James. "Ghosts of Liberalism: Morrison's *Beloved* and the Moynihan Report." *PMLA* 111:3, 1996: 408-420. Web. Last accessed 5 Sept. 2018.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Burns, Marie C. E. "Toni Morrison's *Beloved* Analyzed in the Context of the African American Experience of Slavery, and Slave Narratives." *The Unspoken Spoken*, Dec. 2008, www.literature-study-online.com/. Web. Last accessed 5 Jan. 2019.
- Canton, James, ed. *The Literature Book*. DK Publishing, 2016. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy. "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History". *Literature and the Ethical Question*. Yale University Press, 1991.
- Charles, Ron. "Jesmyn Ward's powerful new novel, 'Sing, Unburied, Sing'." *The Washington Post*. Aug. 29, 2017. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.
- Clough, Patricia Ticineto. "After Slavery." *Women's Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 42, pp. 185-189. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004. Web. Last accessed 16 Oct. 2018.
- Craps, Stef. "Mid-Mourning in 'Turner' and Feeding the Ghosts", *Post-colonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013: 60-67.

- Craps, Stef, and Gert Buelens. "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, no. 1/2, 2008, pp. 1–12, www.jstor.org/stable/29533856. Web. Last accessed 5 Jan. 2019.
- Davis, Colin. *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007. Web. Last accessed 5 Sept 2018.
- Degloma, Thomas. "Expanding Trauma through Space and Time: Mapping the Rhetorical Strategies of Trauma Carrier Groups." *Social Psychology Quarterly*. Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 105-122. American Sociology Association, 2009. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.
- Dubey, Madhu. "Speculative Fictions of Slavery." *American Literature* 82:4, 2010: 779-805. Web. Last accessed 5 Sept. 2018.
- Durrant, Sam. *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*. New York: State University of New York, 2004.
- Everaert, Tinneke. *The Representation of Perpetrators in the Work of Martin Amis*. The University of Ghent, lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/002/162/621/RUG01-002162621_2014_0001_AC.pdf. Web. Last Accessed 21 Jun. 2019.
- Frazier, Kimberly, Cirecie West-Olatunji, Shirley St. Juste, and Rachael Goodman. "Transgenerational Trauma and Child Sexual Abuse: Reconceptualizing Cases Involving Young Survivors of CSA". *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*: January 2009, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 22-33. Web. Last accessed 16 Oct. 2018.
- Friedman, George. "The Nature of Nations." *Geopolitical Futures*, 18 Apr. 2019, geopoliticalfutures.com/the-nature-of-nations/. Web. Last accessed 21 Jun. 2019.
- Frost, Dan. "Chattel Slavery". In Rodriguez, Junius P. (ed.) *Slavery in the Modern World*. 1. p. 182. 2011.

- Fossion, Pierre, et al. "Family approach with grandchildren of Holocaust survivors". *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 57 (4), 519-527. 2003.
- Gavin, Adrienne E. "Spirits of the Age: Ghosts in the Victorian Novel." *Critical Mass: Papers from the English Graduate Colloquium 1996-97*. Canterbury: Christ Church College, Canterbury, Dept. of English, 1998. 19-28. Print.
- Glenn, Robert. Interview. *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*. US Library of Congress. Vol. XI pt. 1. Mar. 2001. 5 Sept. 2018.
- Grabenstein, Hannah. "Inside Mississippi's notorious Parchman prison." *PBS News Hour*. Jan. 29, 2018. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.
- Green, Adrienne. "Jesmyn Ward's Eerie, Powerful Unearthing of History." *The Atlantic*. Sept. 28, 2017. Web. Last accessed 16 Oct. 2018.
- Gyasi, Yaa. *Homecoming: A Novel*. Random House Large Print, 2016. Print.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*, no. 29, ser. 1, 2008, pp. 103-125. 1, DOI:10.1215/03335372-2007-019.
- Holland-Tol, Linda J., and Angela R. Mullis. "(En)lightening the Dark Vision: Redemption through Storytelling in Tony Morrison's *Beloved*", *Teaching African American Women's Writing*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Krumholz, Linda. "The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *African American Review*. Vol. 26, No. 3, Fiction Issue, pp. 395-408. Indiana State University, 1992. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.
- Labanyi, Jo. "Memory and Modernity in Democratic Spain: The Difficulty of Coming to Terms with the Spanish Civil War." *Poetics Today* 28:1, 2007: 89-116. Web. Last accessed 4 Sept. 2018.
- Laqueur, Thomas Walter. "Lynched for Drinking from a White Man's Well". *The Work of Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

- McNamee, Eoin. "Sing, Unburied, Sing by Jesmyn Ward review: Deep darkness in the Deep South." *The Irish Times*. Jan. 20, 2018. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.
- Michaels, Walter B. "'You Who Never Was There': Slavery and the New Historicism, Deconstruction and the Holocaust." *Narrative* 4.1, 1996: 1-16.
- Moglen, Helene. "Redeeming History: Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'." *Cultural Critique*. No. 24, pp. 17-40, 1993. University of Minnesota Press. Web. Last accessed 16 Oct. 2018.
- Montgomery Advertiser. "Our Shame: The Sins of Our Past Laid Bare for All to See." *The Montgomery Advertiser*, 11 Jan. 2019
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Vintage, 1987. Print.
- . "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature". Lecture at The University of Michigan, 1988.
- . *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Interview with Taylor-Guthrie, Danille. University Press of Mississippi, 1994: 248.
- Murphy, Laura. "The Curse of Constant Remembrance: The Belated Trauma of the Slave Trade in Ayi Kwei Armah's 'Fragments'." *Studies in the Novel*. Vol. 40, *Postcolonial Trauma Novels*, pp. 52-71. The John Hopkins University Press, 2008. Web. Last accessed 16 Oct. 2018.
- Quinn, Annalisa. "'Sing' Mourns The Dead, Both Buried and Unburied". *Book Reviews*, *NPR*. Sept. 6, 2017. Web. Last accessed 9 Sept. 2018.
- Reed, Adolph Jr. "Socializing Neo-Slavery. Review of 'Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice.'" *The Nation*. May 6, 1996. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.
- Sandhu, Sukhdev. "Sing, Unburied, Sing by Jesmyn Ward review – slow apocalypse of black America." *The Guardian*. Nov. 24, 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/nov/24/sing-unburied-sing-jesmyn-ward-review>. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. The Arden Edition. Edited by Harold Jenkins. London and New York, 1982.

Shakespeare, William, and Ric Davidson. *Macbeth*. Lion Island, 2003.

Schönfelder, Christa. "Theorizing Trauma Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds." *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction*. Transcript Verlag, 2013. Web. Last accessed 16 Oct. 2018.

Schudson, Michael. "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory." *Memory Distortion*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994: 346-364.

Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. New York: Columbia University Press: 2010. Print.

Seemann, Daphne. "Moving beyond Post-Traumatic Memory Narratives: Generation, Memory Identity in Doron Rabinovici, Robert Menassa and Eva Menasse." *Austrian Studies*. Vol. 19, The Austrian Noughties: Texts, Films, Debates, pp. 157-172. University College Dublin, 2011. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.

Sehgal, Parul. "The Ghost Story Persists in American Literature. Why?" *The New York Times*, 22 Oct. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/10/22/books/review/ghost-stories.html. Web. Last accessed 21 Jun. 2019.

Smajic, Srdjan. "The Trouble with Ghost-Seeing: Vision, Ideology, and Genre in the Victorian Ghost Story." *ELH*, vol. 70, no. 4, 2003, pp. 1107–1135. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30029915. Web. Last accessed 28 Sept. 2018.

Smith, Tracy K. "January's Book Club Pick: 'Sing, Unburied, Sing,' by Jesmyn Ward." *The New York Times*. Sept. 22, 2017. Web. Last accessed 28 Sept. 2018.

- . "In 'Sing, Unburied, Sing,' a Haunted Road Trip to Prison". *The New York Times*. Sept. 22, 2017. Web. Last accessed 9 Sept. 2018.
- Smith, Valerie. "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*," *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 342-55.
- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: My Father Bleeds History*. New York: Pantheon: 2006. Print.
- Staples, Brent. "A Fate Worse Than Slavery, Unearthed in Sugar Land". *The New York Times*. October 27, 2018. Web. Last accessed 7 Nov. 2018.
- . "So the South's White Terror Will Never Be Forgotten". *The New York Times*. April 25, 2018. Web. Last accessed 28 Oct. 2018.
- Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. Balzer & Bray/HarperTeen: 2017.
- Turner, Justin. "Film Review: Spike Lee (dir.), *BlacKkKlansman*." *The Guardian*. August 26, 2018. Web. Last accessed 18 May 2019.
- Uwezo ya Ukombozi, Amani Na, and Michael McMillan. "Reparation for the Descendants of Enslaved Africans: What's Psychology Got to Do with It?" *Race, Gender and Class*. Vol. 18, pp. 111–124, 2011. Web. Accessed 28 Oct. 2018.
- Vajdi, Asrin, and Abdol Husein Joodaki. "Beloved in Search of an Identity: A Reading of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, Based on Homi K. Bhabha's Theories". *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literature*. Vol. 6, No. 1, 2014: 77-92.
- Ward, Jesmyn. *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. New York: Scribner, 2017. Print.
- Weissberg, Liliane. "Gothic spaces: the political aesthetics of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*", *Modern Gothic: A Reader*. Sage, Victor, and Smith, Allan L., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996: 104-120.