Chapter One

Introduction

Beloved (1987) is Toni Morrison's fifth novel.   The novel was published in 1987 yet the origin of the novel goes back to 1974.   At that time, Morrison was a senior editor of Random House and she was editing a book called *The Black Book*, a collection of items in relation to the history of African Americans.   While Morrison was gathering material for that book, she found an article entitled "'A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child'" (Morrison, "Rediscovering" 16).   The article relates the story of Margaret Garner, a female slave who ran away with her children from the plantation in Kentucky and settled in Cincinnati.   When the officers and the slaveholders found them, Garner resisted by trying to kill her children.   "[S]he caught a shovel and struck two of her children on the head, and then took a knife and cut the throat of the third, and tried to kill the other" (Morrison, "Rediscovering" 16-17).   Garner was arrested on a charge of infanticide; she confessed that she committed the act because "she was unwilling to have her children suffer as she had done" (Morrison, "Rediscovering" 17).   After reading the article, Morrison was shocked by Garner's horrific action—killing her children in order to protect them from slavery.   She stated that the desperate slave's infanticide aroused her feeling of "despair quite new to me [Morrison] but so deep it had no passion at all and elicited no tears" ("Rediscovering" 16, explanation mine).   Garner's story deeply impressed Morrison, yet she did not write it down at once.   The story stayed in Morrison's mind and, after a decade, she began to write *Beloved* based on Garner's experiences.

Most of Morrison's works are related to the unacknowledged experiences of

African Americans.   However, before writing *Beloved*, Morrison hardly dealt with

the subject of slavery in her novels.   Morrison admits that writing the history of

slavery is "a heart-wrenching experience" (Carmean 81) which she tries to shun.   In

an interview with Bonnie Angelo, Morrison says, "I had this terrible reluctance about

dwelling on that era.   Then I realized I didn't know anything about it [slavery],

really" (48, explanation mine).   Being aware of her unfamiliarity with the history of

slavery, Morrison writes *Beloved* in order to grasp the details of slavery and to

reconnect herself with the black ancestors.   The other reason for Morrison to write a

novel of slavery is to supplement the traditional slave narratives.[1]   Although

Morrison considers the traditional slave narratives as her "own literary heritage"

("The Site" 103), she realizes that such narratives "always 'drew a veil' over the

shocking and painful incidents of their past, pleading that such things were too terrible

to relate" (Matus 104).   Morrison points out that the traditional slave narratives

"were silent about many things, and they 'forgot' many other things" ("The Site" 110).

To "rip that veil" ("The Site" 110) and to recover the silenced voices in the traditional

slave narratives, Morrison has to write a novel containing the unspoken stories and

representing the horrors of slavery.

　　　　Morrison also notices that the discourse of the contemporary black movement,

as the traditional slave narratives, does not pay attention to the details of slavery.

African Americans are eager to rid themselves of their identity as the victims or the

secondary American citizens.   They want to "create a new version of history"

(Mobley 190) and construct a new identity.   Morrison fears that, in order to create

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[1] According to Frances Foster, the traditional slave narrative is the personal account of "black slaves and ex-slaves of their experiences in slavery and of their efforts to obtain freedom" (3).   The traditional slave narratives are written or dictated by the slaves or ex-slaves as their autobiographies.

the "new," African Americans would abandon the "old," the history of slavery.

Morrison indicates that American people often choose to overlook the history of

slavery and this intentional neglect has turned into "national amnesia" (Angelo 48).[2]

By writing *Beloved*, Morrison stresses the significance of "the past and a lot of the

truth and sustenance that went with it" ("Rediscovering" 14).   She reminds her

people that the history of slavery is not their burden; it is the heritage which they

should not abandon.   For African Americans, reading *Beloved* is a process of

rediscovering the history they have neglected.   And what they learn is not only the

horrors of slavery but also the virtues—trust, love, temperance, and kindness—which

help their ancestors to endure slavery.   As Morrison suggests, rediscovering black

history is not a nostalgic action.   It is more like digging gold: to find something

valuable and to pass it to the next generation:

> The point is not to soak in some warm bath of nostalgia about the good
>
> old days—there were none!—but to recognize and rescue those qualities
>
> of resistance, excellence and integrity that were so much a part of our
>
> past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks now growing up.
>
> ("Rediscovering" 14)

I. Critical Reviews of *Beloved*

Beloved, as the best seller of Morrison's novels, intrigues both readers and

critics.   As a hyper-inclusive novel with intricate narratives, *Beloved* invites critics to

view it from different perspectives.   Since the subject of *Beloved* is the history of

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[2] When *Beloved* was published, Morrison thought that it would be "the least read" (Angelo 48) of all
novels she had written because its subject, the traumatic experiences in slavery, was "about something
that the characters don't want to remember, I don't want to remember, black people don't want to
remember, white people don't want to remember.   I mean, it's national amnesia" (Angelo 48).

slavery, many critics explore the novel from the historical perspective. Caroline Rody refers to *Beloved* as the "historical novel" because Morrison rewrites "the life of the historical figure Margaret Garner" (156). Rody also discusses how Morrison adopts the idea of "rememory" to represent the unspoken history. Some critics discuss the significance of the "ghost" in *Beloved*. David Lawrence compares the baby ghost in the novel with the characters' repressed memories, suggesting that the novel "brings into daylight the 'ghost' that are harbored by memory" (231). Naomi Rand discusses the meaning of the reappearance of the dead daughter, considering it as a threat to the characters (98). Susan Corey in her critical essay talks about "the grotesque in *Beloved*. She lists two opposing qualities of the grotesque, the "positive" grotesque with play and humor, and the "negative" grotesque with fear and terror. Corey demonstrates that in *Beloved* "Morrison establishes a dialectic between these two poles of the grotesque to maintain a tension between the interior and exterior experiences of slavery and between the historical past and the realm of the uncanny" (33). Considering the story of *Beloved* revolves around the relationship between Sethe and her two daughters, Denver and Beloved, many critics ponder on the mother-daughter relation in the novel. Jennifer FitzGerald adopts Melanie Klein's "[t]he pre-Oedipal discourse of object relations psychoanalysis" (672) to analyze the mother-daughter relation between Sethe and Beloved. Stephanie Demetrakopoulos examines motherhood in *Beloved*, arguing that "maternal bond can stunt or even obviate a woman's individuation or sense of self" (69).

Critics view *Beloved* from different perspectives, yet their discussions are often in relation to trauma, memory, and narrative. As Jill Matus points out, Morrison's novels are "powerfully engaged with questions of narrative, memory and trauma" (1).

Among the three topics, trauma is discussed most frequently. *Beloved* is a story of slavery and, according to Naomi Morgenstern, the story of slavery is "a story of captivity, torture, and sexual violence" (113). Before the main text of the novel, Morrison writes a sentence—"Sixty Million and more"—dedicated to the black people who died in the atrocities of slavery. In slavery, black people are traumatized by all kinds of atrocities. They are captured in Africa, shipped to America, broken up with their family, then sold, exchanged, raped, abused, and humiliated by the slaveholders. These traumatic experiences are represented in *Beloved*. The characters, Sethe and other blacks, are ex-slaves who have undergone the atrocities of slavery and the novel depicts their post-traumatic lives.

Trauma in *Beloved* has long been the focus of critical studies. R. Clifton Spargo compares the characters' trauma with the ghost in the novel, arguing that "the trauma functions rather as a ghost of rationality" because trauma "violently interrupts the present tense of consciousness, occurring for the first time only by being repeated" (114). Spargo points out that, for African Americans, the ghost haunting the occupants in 124 represents the unspoken and unresolved trauma of slavery. J. Brooks Bouson writes a book to discuss trauma in Morrison's novels. She interrelates trauma with the feeling of shame, indicating that Morrison repeatedly stages the scenes of "inter- and intraracial violence and shaming in her novels. She also uses her fiction to aestheticize [. . .] the racial shame and trauma she describes" (18).

Memory is another subject adopted by critics in their discussions of *Beloved*. Critics are interested in this subject because the novel is full of the characters' traumatic memory, which is repressed but repeatedly returns to disturb the characters'

lives.   Memory is a significant trope in Morrison's writings.   The creation of

Morrison's novels often begins with a person, a scene, or a taste living in Morrison's

memories.   For Morrison, writing novels is "the process by which the recollections

of these pieces coalesce into a part [. . .].   Memory, then, no matter how small the

piece remembered, demands my respect, my attention, and my trust" ("Memory"

386).

Morrison writes more than one article to discuss the relation between her

memories and writings.   In "Memory, Creation, and Writing," Morrison states that

she depends heavily on memory in her writings for two reasons: One, as mentioned

above, memory is the source of her imagination, and two, because she cannot trust

"the literature and the sociology of other people to help me [Morrison] know the truth

of my own cultural sources" (386).   Marilyn Mobley discerns Morrison's intention

of writing down the communal memories of the blacks to connect her people with

their culture and history.   Examining Morrison's use of memory in *Beloved*, she

argues that the author uses "the trope of memory" to "revise the genre of the slave

narrative and thereby to make the slave experience it inscribes more accessible to

contemporary readers.   In other words, she used memory as the metaphorical sign of

the interior life to explore and represent dimensions of slave life" (191).   Mobley

also praises Morrison for her success in dramatizing the complex relationship between

history and memory in *Beloved*.

The narrative of *Beloved* intrigues critics because of its intricacy.   Readers are

often bewildered by the shift of voices and tense in the novel.   Laurie Vickroy

explains that Morrison intentionally writes *Beloved* with such an intricate narrative.

What Morrison wants is not to confuse the reader or to show off her writing skills but

to represent the unspeakable trauma:

> The narrative in *Beloved* incorporates the gaps, uncertainties, dissociations, and affects that characterize traumatic experience in attempting to re-create the visceral details of living in extraordinary circumstances.   Conflicted, unconscious, and uncertain traumatic knowledge takes shape in the narrative through dialogism, fragmentation of memory, repetition, images, transference, dissociation, incongruities, and silence. (Vickroy 178-79)

Morgenstern explores the narrative of *Beloved*, suggesting that its intricacy is like the traumatized subject's "repletion compulsion."[3]   She also points out that the trauma narrative in *Beloved*, which guides the reader to re-experience the horrors of slavery, represents a new possibility for the neo-slave narrative (104-06).[4]   As discussed above, one reason for Morrison to write *Beloved* is her discontent with the traditional slave narrative which omits the black's traumatic experiences in slavery. Morgenstern considers that Morrison's dwelling on the horrors of slavery renders the narrative of *Beloved* different from other slave narratives.   Bernard Bell also refers to the narrative of *Beloved* as the neo-slave narrative.   He asserts that "[s]et in post-Civil-War Cincinnati, *Beloved* is a womanist neo-slave narrative of double consciousness, a postmodern romance that speaks in many compelling voices and on several time levels of the historical rape of black American women and of the resilient spirit of blacks in surviving as a people" (59-60).

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[3] The traumatized subject's repetition compulsion will be discussed in Chapter Four.
[4] The definition of the traditional slave narrative has been discussed in note 1.   The neo-slave narrative, according to Morgenstern, is "the twentieth-century novel about slavery" (101) which supplements the traditional slave narrative with the testimonies of the horrors of slavery.

II. Critical Approaches of the Thesis

In order to represent an unspeakable story of trauma, Morrison interrelates and interweaves trauma, memory, and narrative in *Beloved*. The plot of the novel is constructed from the characters' narration of memories. The trauma of slavery affects the formation and narration of the characters' memories. Moreover, the traumatized characters' refusals to narrate their traumatic experiences render traumatic memory indelible. Although the relation between trauma, memory, and narrative in the novel is inseparable, critics often discuss only one or two of them. There are also few studies which simply discuss trauma, memory, and narrative in *Beloved* without involving other topics such as history, race, or gender. Differing from those studies, the thesis analyzes the interrelation between trauma, memory, and narrative in *Beloved*. The thesis also lays emphasis on trauma narrative. Trauma narrative is the narrative of traumatic memory. It is constructed from the characteristics of trauma, memory, and narrative. Adopting trauma narrative as the theme of the thesis, the discussion of the thesis connects trauma with memory and narrative, analyzing how the traumatic events affect the traumatized subject's memories and her/his narration of memory. The thesis also reads the intricate narrative in *Beloved* in light of trauma narrative and further discusses the relation between trauma narrative and trauma healing.

The main body of the thesis is divided into three parts. Firstly, in Chapter Two, the discussion intends to clarify the relation between trauma, memory, and narrative and how the three interplay in *Beloved*. The chapter specifically defines memory and trauma, introducing the idea of "narrative memory" by which the subject builds her/his memory system. The chapter adopts the Freudian concept of "pleasure

principle" to explain the situation of being traumatized and how traumatic memory is formed.   Trauma not only affects the building of memory but also disrupts the narration of it.   On the one hand, the traumatized subject represses traumatic memory because she/he is unwilling to recollect their traumatic experiences.   On the other hand, the traumatized subject cannot clearly convey her/his feelings of being traumatized.   As a result, traumatic memory is an unspeakable story and trauma narrative is fragmented and often unintelligible.   The chapter tries to demonstrate that the narrative of *Beloved* is hard to follow and understand because it is constructed from the characters' trauma narrative.

The purpose of Chapter Three is to analyze how Morrison tells an unspeakable story in *Beloved*.   If the author narrates the characters' traumatic experiences in a linear, explicit way, readers may clearly realize what happens but they cannot appreciate the horrors of slavery and the characters' feelings of being traumatized. In order to represent the characters' unspeakable trauma, Morrison imitates the characteristics of traumatic memory and trauma narrative to create the narrative in *Beloved*.   The chapter explores the narrative and enumerates in detail Morrison's narrative strategies.   The first instance is the scene of the "involuntary memory" by which the author evokes the characters' repressed memories.   The chapter then compares Sethe's movement in the kitchen with her trauma narrative to explicate that trauma narrative is circular because the traumatized subject shows reluctance to dwell on the center of traumatic memory.   The chapter also examines the figuration in *Beloved*, analyzing how Morrison adopts the figuration to convey the characters' unspeakable trauma.

Chapter Four lays emphasis on trauma healing and tries to clarify the relation

between trauma narrative and trauma healing. The chapter firstly accentuates the significance of trauma healing by indicating the indelibility of traumatic memory and the characters' miserable lives resulting from the unhealed trauma. Secondly, the chapter examines the role of "the other" in trauma healing. For the traumatized characters, the participation of the other in trauma healing is impeded since the characters do not want to share their traumatic memory with other people. The characters adopt "repetition compulsion" and "acting out" as the ways of trauma healing. However, the characters' attempt to heal their trauma by the above two ways fails because, without the participation of the other, the negotiation between the characters and their trauma often reach an impasse. The chapter then explores the role the other acts in trauma narrative, which is a prerequisite for trauma healing. With the other's support in trauma narrative, the characters may recover from their trauma by transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory and assimilating it into their personal history.