

Degree Project

Level: Bachelor's

A Psychoanalytical Reading of Repression and the Process of Healing in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

Author: Noor Kamaluldeen
Supervisor: Billy Gray
Examiner: David Gray
Subject/main field of study: English (literature)
Course code: EN2028
Credits: 15 ECTS
Date of examination: 2018-01-08

At Dalarna University it is possible to publish the student thesis in full text in DiVA. The publishing is open access, which means the work will be freely accessible to read and download on the internet. This will significantly increase the dissemination and visibility of the student thesis.

Open access is becoming the standard route for spreading scientific and academic information on the internet. Dalarna University recommends that both researchers as well as students publish their work open access.

I give my/we give our consent for full text publishing (freely accessible on the internet, open access):

Yes

No

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Sethe's pursuit of freedom	7
The Tobacco Tin	14
Isolation and abandonment	17
Conclusion	23
Works Cited	25

Introduction

Let go the before, let go the after
Let go the middle, beyond the becoming.

With mind released in everyway
You'll come no more to birth, decay.

- Dhammapada: *Craving*, verse 348

"Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership to that freed self was another." (Morrison, 112), These are the words of Sethe, the protagonist in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). The novel is based on the real-life story of Margret Garner, a slave who killed her two year old daughter rather than be taken back into enslavement (Morrison, XI). The novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988 and a *New York Times* survey of writers and literary critics ranked it the best work of American fiction between the years 1981 to 2006.

The novel tells the story of Sethe, a former slave who escapes, along with her four children, from a plantation called Sweet Home in Kentucky, a slave state, to Cincinnati, Ohio (a free state across the river), in the 1850s. This achievement is a precious one to Sethe, as it involves claiming her freedom as well as her children's freedom and having them at her side is her goal. However, when facing the possibility of being taken back into slavery, when Schoolteacher, the man who oversees the Sweet Home plantation, finds her and wants to take her and her children back to the plantation, Sethe decides that this is not an option. Therefore, she tries to kill her children, although she only succeeds in killing her two year old daughter. Instead of being taken back to the plantation she goes to jail, taking Denver, her youngest daughter, with her.

After escaping to Cincinnati, Sethe stays with her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, in a house located in 124 Bluestone Road. Subsequently in the novel, the house is referred to as 124. Before Sethe kills her daughter, the house is described as a cheerful place, always crowded with people. Because of its location on the edge of Cincinnati, many people pass by the house on their way in or out of town and it serves as a “way station” where messages arrive and ex-slaves get news of their loved ones. A month after her arrival in Cincinnati, Schoolteacher finds her, and the act of infanticide takes place. After the murder of Sethe’s child, the aura of the house changes. It becomes haunted with the baby’s ghost which changes the house’s atmosphere from cheerful to spiteful. The appearance of the ghost changes the lives of Baby Suggs, Sethe and her children as much as it changes 124 itself. They become isolated from the community and the once crowded and joyful house becomes a quiet, gloomy and dreadful one. For years Sethe and her family live in the house and accept the presence of the baby ghost, until one day, when Paul D., another slave in the plantation and the last of Sweet Home men, exorcises the ghost, and it comes back in human form as a grown woman who calls herself Beloved.

The novel has been approached from a number of theoretical perspectives, including that of psychoanalysis, an approach that this thesis will also employ. Barbara Schapiro interprets the novel using a psychoanalytical approach, and explains that the characters need to feel loved and needed. They seek recognition because without it they would have no sense of self. Schapiro states that “if from the earliest years on, one’s fundamental need to be recognized and affirmed as a human subject is denied, that need can take on fantastic and destructive proportion in the inner world” (Schapiro, 209).

Iyunolu Osagie takes a different approach, and explains how Morrison uses psychoanalysis as a “literary device” (425) in writing *Beloved*, a strategy which allows the

reader to interpret the novel differently. She offers two readings of the novel; one is that Beloved is actually the ghost of Sethe's child who came back from the dead. The other reading is that Beloved is the ghost of a slave girl who was raped by white men.

Shelby Larrick focuses on the consequences of Sethe's actions on the people connected to her and how her choices affected them psychologically. Paul D. is one of the characters who is affected by Sethe's choice. He is forced to deal with Beloved, the reincarnation of Sethe's murdered baby. Denver also suffers from the consequences of Sethe's actions, since she is forced into isolation because no one speaks to the family, which in turn results in her developing a fear of leaving the house. Larrick claims that even Beloved suffers from her mother's actions, as she is not able to have the normal connection any mother and daughter have. For example, when Beloved comes back to the land of the living, she is a grown woman but with the emotions and mentality of a child not completely formed.

Lynda Koolish offers an interesting reading of *Beloved*, since she argues that Beloved is an alter ego in the novel: she is the part of their character which Sethe, Paul D. and Denver wish to deny and forget. All the characters who have seen Beloved either view her "as a fractured aspect of Sethe's psyche or as a kind of *doppelganger* for his or her own feeling of loss, grief, confusion, and rage" (Koolish, 170-71). Koolish supports her claim by pointing to the fact that Beloved disappears at the end of the novel when each character comes to term with his/her own past.

This thesis intends to offer an alternative psychoanalytical reading by focusing on defense mechanisms that Sethe, Paul D., and Denver subconsciously use to help them move on in life; the role of repression, identification with the aggressor, denial, projection in their behavior, and how they overcome the trauma of the past to reclaim their mental freedom. This thesis therefore, will focus on the Ego and its struggle against unbearable thoughts to

relieve the anxiety of the Id, and how the minds of the characters that are examined work so that they feel safe and secure. The unconscious mind uses psychological mechanisms to manipulate reality in order to relieve the sense of anxiety, fear, or any uncomfortable situation. These mechanisms are collectively referred to as defense mechanisms.

According to Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, the human psyche is divided into three parts: the “ego” corresponds to the conscious part of the mind, the “super-ego” corresponds to the conscience, and the “id” corresponds to the unconscious (Barry, 93). Anna Freud, an Austrian-British psychoanalyst and the daughter of Sigmund Freud, states in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* that there are ten defense mechanisms the ego uses in order for it to overcome anxiety and cope with “painful or unendurable ideas or affects” (42). The defenses identified originally by Sigmund Freud that are relevant to this thesis are repression, denial, projection, and identification with the aggressor. Psychoanalysis in general is a method by which the unconscious mind can be investigated. Through this method, the actions and behavior of the characters of *Beloved* can be explained. Ultimately in Freudian psychoanalysis the three parts of the human psyche mentioned here, construct the complex behavior of the human being.

Repression is, according to Bert Garssen in his article “Repression: Finding Our Way in the Maze of Concepts”, the “tendency to inhibit the experience and the expression of negative feelings or unpleasant cognitions in order to prevent one’s self-image from being threatened” (472). Michael Billing states in his book *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious*, that Freud argues that there are two kinds of unconscious thoughts and the first kind consists of ordinary thoughts, which can be easily become conscious: “These are thoughts which happen not to be occupying one’s attention at any given moment.” (15); but when attention turns to that specific thought, it becomes conscious. The second kind is

the hidden thoughts that we keep secret from ourselves. These hidden thoughts are repressed because “these thoughts are so shocking or painful that something stops them from making the journey [to become conscious].” (16). Billing mentions that according to a study by Freud and Breur, repression happens when “[a] painful event occurs, which the patient can’t deal with [...] However, other people can find the event so traumatic, and the memories of such events too painful to recall, that they cannot come to terms with the past. Then, the memories may disappear from conscious awareness.” (18).

Denial as a defense mechanism is used unconsciously by those who want to avoid dealing with painful situations or actions that they do not want to admit. Denial is explained in an article by Baumeister, Dale, and Sommer. It is stated that according to Janoff-Bulman (1992)

Denial may be especially adaptive following trauma because it allows the interpretation process to proceed piecemeal. After suffering a serious personal trauma such as an accident or victimization, there is often little that the person can do, and so denial does not prevent adaptive responses. Meanwhile, the task of coping with trauma involves restoring one’s positive conceptions of self and world. In Janoff-Bulman’s view, one starts by denying the trauma in general, and then the denial drops piece by piece allowing the person to begin the task of rebuilding those positive conceptions, as opposed to having to find some new interpretation all at once. (1110).

Another defense mechanism is that of projection, in which the individual sees the negative traits in others to avoid having to confront this trait in themselves. According to Baumeister et. al, “projection *can* be seen as defensive if perceiving the threatening trait in

others helps the individual in some way to avoid recognizing it in himself or herself.” (1090). Similarly in the article “Stereotypes Focus Defensive projection”, Govorun et al. note that projection occurs when a threat to the self instigates a motivation to avoid recognizing negative qualities in the self. It is stated in the article that psychologically speaking “seeing one’s unwanted traits in others will necessarily make a person feel better about the self.” (782).

Anna Freud explains that the defense mechanism, identification with the aggressor, is a combination of two mechanisms that are identification and projection, and it mainly implies that “[b]y impersonating the aggressor, assuming his attributes or imitating his aggressions, [the individual] transforms himself from being the person threatened into the person who makes the threat.” (113).

This thesis intends to analyze each of Sethe’s, Paul D.’s and Denver’s role in their own mental enslavement. It will, using psychoanalytic literary theory, argue that even though the characters of *Beloved* claimed their physical freedom, it is not until they overcome their mental and emotional enslavement that they are truly free. The thesis contains three main chapters that analyze three of the main characters in the novel: Chapter 1 will examine Sethe’s experiences before killing her daughter, and how the repression that she experienced in the plantation is partly responsible for her decision to kill her own daughter. It will explore how after this action she suffers from denial, which prevents her from experiencing true freedom, and makes her a slave to her mind and to her past. Chapter 2 will examine Paul D., the man who shares Sethe’s past. Because of the repression caused by his suffering during his enslavement, he also becomes enslaved by his own mind. He uses denial as well as projection as defense mechanisms to cope with the traumas that he suffered. The final section will examine Denver, Sethe’s youngest child. Even though Denver has not experienced slavery

physically, she is denied her freedom because of the isolation that she experiences as a consequence of her mother's actions. Experiencing traumas force these characters to cope with their situation in an unhealthy way, which consequently denies them the possibility of enjoying the real meaning of freedom.

Sethe's pursuit of freedom

Sethe's goal is to ensure the freedom for herself and her children from the brutality of slavery. The Macmillan Dictionary defines freedom as "the ability to move or go where you want because there is nothing physically stopping you." (Macmillan Dictionary). This definition does not touch upon the idea of mental freedom, which is arguably a central if not always acknowledged component of the concept. Sethe succeeds in achieving the physical goal of freedom, but what about freedom of mind? She is enslaved by her own mind, feelings, and the consequences of her actions. This chapter undertakes a psychoanalytical study of the defense mechanisms Sethe subconsciously employs in order to move forward in her life, overcome her mental enslavement and experience true freedom.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, Sethe suffers from repression as a result of her days as a slave in Sweet Home plantation, and because of the repression and the loss of the sense of self that Sethe suffers at the Sweet Home plantation, she chooses infanticide over slavery for her children. Sethe is brought there at the age of thirteen. She is also the only female slave among five other male slaves. The Garners, the owners of the plantation, are considered liberal slaveholders. They do not raise their voices to the slaves, beat them, or torture them. On the contrary, they work with them, teach them to count if they wish and ask them their

opinion on matters that are related to managing the plantation. This is how it appears when looking at life on the plantation, but, a deeper analysis shows that the black slaves are considered to be quite different from white people after all. Sethe is given permission to marry Halle, one of the slaves on the plantation. She thinks she is going to have a wedding ceremony, but when she asks Mrs. Garner “is there going to be a wedding?” (Morrison, 31) Mrs. Garner laughs and does not give her a straight answer: “Mrs. Garner put down her cooking spoon. Laughing a little, she touched Sethe on the head saying, “you are one sweet child.” And then no more.” (Morrison, 31). Mrs. Garner’s reaction and lack of explanation can be interpreted as an implication that slaves do not have the privilege to marry, nor do they require explanation on such matters; Mrs. Garner appears to share the commonly held belief in the south that slaves are not civilized enough to share the same custom of marriage with their superiors. This indicates the first action that leads to Sethe’s repression: “the starting point [of repression] is an internal conflict arising when (mostly unconscious) wishes or drives are in a strict opposition to internalized norms or standards” (Axmacher et al., Natural memory). The desire that Sethe has, to have a wedding, is in opposition with the standards of white supremacy and the idea that she does not have the same social status as a white woman. This realization causes her to repress her desire to be treated as a human being with the right to celebrate her marriage.

The concept of repression can be further applied to Sethe as a result of her encounters with Schoolteacher. The character Schoolteacher represents a typical brutal masculine colonizer, since he treats the slaves as sub-humans by trying to make them believe in their inferiority, and he has a central role in Sethe’s psychological repression. The Sweet Home plantation is considered a nice place for the slaves to live. However, after the death of Mr. Garner and the arrival of Schoolteacher, Mrs. Garner’s brother-in-law, Sweet Home becomes

a plantation where slaves are tortured, dehumanized, and treated like animals. This treatment has a negative effect on the mentality of the slaves. Unlike Mr. Garner, Schoolteacher is a cruel man who sees slaves as property, not as human beings. He studies the slaves, asks them questions, and writes down their responses. The following incident also indicates Sethe's psychological repression where she internalizes the feeling of inferiority that Schoolteacher tries to apply to her. Sethe overhears Schoolteacher asking his nephew: "which one are you doing?" (Morrison, 228) and when she hears her name she stops and listens while he tells his nephew "No, no. that's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up." (Morrison, 228). After this episode Sethe decides to escape, and so she sends her three children ahead to her mother-in-law's house in Ohio. But when she goes back to meet her husband, Schoolteacher's nephews hold her down, rape her and suck the milk off her breasts. What affected her most was not the rape but the violation of her humanity, and her role as a mother. Sethe uses repression so that she can cope with the anxiety of losing her sense of self. This event affects Sethe so much that she could not accept the same fate for her children, so she decides: "no notebook for my babies and no measuring string neither." (Morrison, 233). After the incident Paul D. remarks: "Then Schoolteacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke three more Sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe's eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight." (Morrison, 11). This description shows the true nature of Schoolteacher's treatment of the slaves, and as a result they lose their identities under his oppression. Sethe's eyes, in this description, are a symbol of her psychic death, and as Schapiro notes "the worst atrocity of slavery, the real horror the novel exposes, is not physical death but psychic death" (Schapiro, 195). According to Schapiro, the psychic death "involves the denial of one's being as a human subject" (Schapiro, 195). As a result of the

intensity of Sethe's dehumanization and her desire to keep her children from experiencing this, she attempts to kill her children. Sethe tries to justify her action by thinking: "I'll explain to her, even though I don't have to. Why I did it. How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her." (Morrison, 236).

The concept of Identification with the aggressor can thus to some extent be applied to Sethe as well. After escaping to Cincinnati, Schoolteacher assisted by his nephew, the sheriff, and a slave hunter, search for Sethe and find her. Facing the possibility of returning to slavery, Sethe takes her children to the woodshed and tries to kill them. Her reaction is drastic, and in psychology the term identification with the aggressor means "a focus on a negative or feared traits. i.e. if you are afraid of someone, you can practically conquer the fear by becoming more like them." (McLeod, Defense Mechanisms). When confronted with the oppressor, Sethe must act quickly, without thinking, and depend on her unconscious because she will not only lose the freedom she recently claimed, but she is faced with the possibility of losing her children as well. Because of Schoolteacher's inhumane treatment of his slaves, Sethe fears him and fears that her children will be treated in the same manner, so she reacts in a way that matches Schoolteacher's brutality. Schoolteacher believes that the slaves are wild and in need of their masters' guidance, that they prefer to live a "cannibal life" (Morrison, 177), rather than a civilized one, but the wildness that white people ascribe to black people is, in fact, the projection of the white people themselves: "It was the jungle white folks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it." (Morrison, 234). Sethe's reaction can be considered both vengeful and defensive. Since Schoolteacher believes that slaves are his property, killing her children would mean destroying Schoolteacher's property. Stamp Paid, the man who took Sethe across the river when she escaped, tells Paul D. that "[s]he was trying to out-hurt the hurter" (Morrison, 276).

She succeeds only in killing her two year old daughter by cutting her throat using a handsaw. Sethe succeeds in stopping Schoolteacher from taking them back to the plantation, “by the time she faced him, looked him dead in the eye, she had something in her arms that stopped him in his tracks. He took a backward step with each jump of the baby heart until finally there were none.” (Morrison, 193).

Consequently, the concept of denial can also be applied to Sethe. After killing her daughter, she begins by isolating herself and her daughter from the outside world so that she would not remember what she had done. 124 becomes haunted by the baby’s ghost, which sends her two sons away. Sethe lives in the present, not daring to think about the past or plan anything for the future. The future to Sethe is “a matter of keeping the past at bay.” (Morrison, 51), and this defense mechanism helps Sethe live her life without the burden of unbearable memories and the feeling of guilt for killing her own child. After the arrival of Paul D. to 124, he exorcises the baby ghost, only for it to return in human form as an adult. Beloved returns as a grown woman and starts living with Sethe and Denver in the house. Even though Denver realizes that Beloved is her sister, Sethe keeps resisting this idea, and as Koolish argues: “for most of the novel, Sethe is in denial about the meaning of Beloved’s identity. At one point, apparently denying any personal relationship to Beloved, she refers to her simply as “Denver’s friend”” (Koolish, 184). She thinks of her daughter as an ordinary girl who escaped from the captivity of men who sexually abused her, or as a “nice girl company for Denver.” (Morrison, 80). When Paul D. hears about the murder of Sethe’s child, he has a fight with Sethe and tells her: “you got two feet, Sethe, not four.” (Morrison, 194). This remark from Paul D., the one person who shares her past and knows the cruelty of Schoolteacher, creates a gap between them; she tried to explain to him her reasons for deciding to kill her child thinking that he would understand, but he just echoed what people, who knew nothing

of what she has been through, thought of her. After this fight, he leaves her without saying goodbye.

The process of Sethe's healing starts after Paul D.'s departure, when as she finally recognizes Beloved as the incarnation of her dead child. As Peter Barry states, in psychoanalysis the process of healing must start by recognizing the repressed emotions and events: "the classic method [of curing mental disorders] is to get the patient to talk freely, in such a way that the repressed fears and conflicts which are causing the problems are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than remaining 'buried' in the unconscious." (Barry, 92). Sethe thinks that it is because Paul D. distracted her that she did not realize earlier that Beloved is her daughter: "I would have recognized you right off, except for Paul D. Seems to me he wanted you out from the beginning, but I wouldn't let him." (Morrison, 293). The first time Sethe talks about the woodshed where she killed Beloved is when Paul D. confronts her with the subject, this is the first step to healing. According to Koolish, "Sethe is able finally to come to terms with [incidents of overwhelming pain], to experience them as having happened to her, and thus finally begin to be free of the hold they have on her while she remained in denial." (Koolish, 185). Although accepting what happened, Sethe finds a way out of guilt by thinking that since Beloved is alive again, she does not have to remember the past or feel guilty for it, that she can just move on and continue her life like nothing happened: "Sethe was excited to giddiness by the things she no longer had to remember. I don't have to remember nothing. I don't even have to explain. [Beloved] understands it all." (Morrison, 215-16). She is trying to free herself from the guilt of changing and destroying the lives of the people around her, including Baby Suggs', who after Sethe killed her daughter suffered from depression and stayed in bed until she died: "I can forget that what I did changed Baby Suggs' life." (Morrison, 217). She believes that the world outside does not concern her, and there is

no place for her in it, as long as she has her daughters with her that is all she needs, and she thinks: "Paul D. convinced me there was a world out there and that I could live in it[...] Whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs to be." (Morrison, 215). Because of this mindset, Sethe leaves her job and stays at home with her daughters, she experiences false freedom, "When Sethe locked the door, the women inside were free at last to be what they liked, see whatever they saw, and say whatever was on their minds." (Morrison, 235).

Sethe starts to confront the repressed feelings and the denial of her past and although Sethe is aware of her actions and her past, she is still enslaved by them because of her submission to Beloved. Beloved grows greedy and wants to avenge herself by hurting Sethe, accusing her of leaving her behind, and of not caring for her and in return Sethe tries to make amends by providing whatever Beloved wants. She accepts her guilt and asks Beloved for forgiveness, she wishes to explain her reasons for doing what she did, but to no effect: "Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it." (Morrison, 295). Beloved consumes Sethe's energy, and she grows bigger while Sethe becomes thinner and weaker. Part of Sethe does not want Beloved to forgive her, as she wants to be punished. Seeing that things are becoming destructive, Denver asks for help from the black women of her community, when the women find out what is happening to Sethe, they decide to offer her assistance. Sethe's breakthrough happens when Mr. Bodwin, an abolitionist who provides the former slaves with work, comes to Sethe's yard to take Denver to work. Because Sethe's mentality is not sound, she mistakes Mr. Bodwin for Schoolteacher and attacks him with an ice pick, but Denver and the black women stop her. Her action appears to show that in her mind she knows that she should have attacked Schoolteacher and not kill her daughter. The women chant and pray, they exorcise Beloved. Sethe suffers from depression after the

disappearance of Beloved, and tells Paul D. that Beloved left her and that “[Beloved] was [her] best thing.” (Morrison, 321). Sethe finally acknowledges her feelings: she was hurt because her mother abandoned her and tried to run away without taking her along; her boys left her, Halle abandoned her as well and now Beloved is gone. Ultimately, she cannot bear to lose more people. Paul D. assures her that he intends to stay, and he tells her, “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.” (Morrison, 322). It is only after accepting her guilt and expressing her feelings that Sethe can finally be healed and be truly free from all the restraints of her past, and can look forward to the future.

The Tobacco Tin

Paul D., the last of Sweet Home men, also suffers from repressed feelings of anger, pain and inferiority that make him question his identity and deprive him of experiencing a truly free life. Paul D. was brought into Mr. Garner’s plantation when he was young, along with his two half-brothers, Paul A, and Paul F. He grew up on the plantation being granted the freedom to provide his opinions on matters that are related to managing the plantation, and he is even allowed to use the shotgun. Mr. Garner refers to his slaves as men, something that is unacceptable in Kentucky. Mr. Garner’s reason for calling them men is to prove his masculinity. Paul D. recalls that sometimes Mr. Garner comes back home bruised from a fight, pleased with himself “having demonstrated one more time what a real Kentuckian was: one tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers men.” (Morrison, 13). Paul D. fell in love with Sethe when she was brought to the plantation replacing Halle’s mother, Baby Suggs, after Halle bought his mother’s freedom.

The concept of repression can be applied to Paul D. Paul D. and the other slaves feel the need to meet Mr. Garner's expectations, to earn the title of a man. He remembers that it was hard for them not to rape Sethe "because they were Sweet Home men—the ones Mr. Garner bragged about while other farmers shook their heads in warning at the phrase." (Morrison, 12). After Paul D. claims his physical freedom, he represses both the pain he suffered during his period of enslavement and the feeling of inferiority inside what he calls the "tobacco tin". After his escape, he represses his feelings of anger and inferiority so that he can live without the feeling of failure or to think of his questioned manhood: "when everything was packed tight in his chest, he had no sense of failure," (Morrison, 261). Paul D. wanders for years, not being able to stay in one place for a long period of time for fear of being enslaved again, but when he reaches 124 and sees Sethe, he decides this time to settle down and try to join her family and make it his own. He succeeds in living his life without thinking of his past until Beloved comes along and supernaturally forces him out of Sethe's house and moves him to the cold house, a room outside 124. She forces him to have an intimate relationship with her, for a reason he cannot understand, and he feels helpless and cannot resist her. This forced relationship makes him question his manhood once more, how could he admit that a little girl forced him to do something that he did not want; he cannot tell Sethe that he is not a man. Instead of admitting the flaw in his personality, Paul D. asks Sethe to have a child with him, that way he can prove to himself that he is in fact a man. He thinks this is the solution to all his problems; it can be viewed as "a way to hold on to her, document his manhood and break out of the girl's spell—all in one." (Morrison, 151).

The concept of projection can also be applied to Paul D., since he appears to project aspects of his own inferiority complex, loss of identity and lost manhood. The French psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon touches upon this concept. Even though Fanon's texts deal with

postcolonial criticism, it is the psychological focus of his postcolonial theories that are relevant in this section. Fanon sheds light on how the colonizers affect the way colonized people think of themselves, and he explores how (predominately white European) and colonizers encourage the idea that white is beautiful, good and civilized, in the minds of the colonized people and that all negative attributes belong to the indigenous people of the place they have colonized. He states that “because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: “In reality, who am I?”” (Fanon, 250). Paul D. considers this question later in the novel when he starts to deal with the repressed feelings of the past, and he wonders if Mr. Garner saw a man in him or tried to create something that was not there. Paul D. uses projection as a defense mechanism before and after claiming his physical freedom. When he is imprisoned for escaping, he compares his life to Mister’s, a rooster in the plantation, and he thinks that even a rooster is freer than him because nobody can change its identity. The rooster is allowed to be the way God created it, unlike Paul D. who is being classified as a man or as an animal depending on the mercy of his owners. He tells Sethe: “Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub.” (Morrison, 86). Paul D. denies his desire to act as a free person and he projects this desire onto the rooster. Considering the definition of projection, it means projecting one’s negative attributes onto someone else to avoid dealing with them. When Paul D. is free from physical enslavement, he projects his more negative attributes onto Sethe. When he has an argument with her after discovering what she has done in the past, he tells her that she has two feet, not four: “The imposed colonized image of an inferior kind of people was eventually internalized and accepted as true by the conquered people themselves.” (Muddler, 11). Paul D. projects his own feeling of

dehumanization and inferiority onto Sethe to empower himself and relieve himself from dealing with it. By his statement, he accuses Sethe of “failing to overcome the conditions to which slavery confined her.” (Anker, 35).

The process of healing for Paul D. starts when the “tobacco tin” opens up and all the repressed feelings and thoughts come back; this happens when he has sex with Beloved. She asks him to call her name and touch her “inside parts”, and he then finds himself screaming “red heart, red heart.” (Morrison, 138), which signals that the “tobacco tin” has opened and that he loses control over the flood of the repressed feelings that he has kept buried for a long time. After the fight with Sethe, Paul D. leaves the house and stays in the church; he contemplates the past and thinks of all that he has been through. He figures out that he cannot run this time, and he knows that “his coming is the reverse route of his going.” (Morrison, 310), by this he means that coming back to Sethe has the reverse effect of him leaving her; that his return will mark both his and Sethe’s recovery from their traumatic past. He is willing to build a future with her now that they are both free from the grip of their respective pasts, and he tells her: “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.” (Morrison, 322).

Isolation and abandonment

Denver is a disturbed young lady, who lives most of her life in isolation. At the beginning of her life, she was not isolated by choice, since people avoided her family because of her mother’s actions and the fact that their house was haunted: “Because their house is haunted by the spirit of Beloved, before she returns, no children have ever dared to seek closeness

with Denver. Such solitude can cause severe psychological damage” (Larrick, 3). When Denver is seven, she goes to Lady Jones’ house to learn to spell and count. It is such a precious and joyful time for Denver that she “didn’t even know she was being avoided by her classmates—that they made excuses and altered their space not to walk with her.” (Morrison, 120). After one of her classmates, Nelson Lord, asked her if it is true that her mother was sent to prison for murder, Denver’s relationship with the outside world ended and from that day on she became a prisoner of Sethe’s past. Deep in her heart, Denver knows that what people say about her mother is true. After gathering the courage to ask her mother about the murder, Denver, not wanting to hear the truth from her mother, becomes deaf and stays that way for two years, until one day, she hears the crawling of the baby ghost on the stairs (Morrison, 121). As she grows up, she becomes interested only in the present (Morrison, 141), since she feels alone and disconnected from the past and the outside world.

Denver lives in denial and feels anxious as the people around her abandon her because of her mother’s actions. Her two brothers leave the house to fight the war, either because of the presence of the baby ghost or the fact that they do not want to be around their murderous mother, Denver thinks: “I guess they rather be around killing men than killing women,” (Morrison, 242). Then her grandmother, Baby Suggs, the only person she feels safe around dies and leaves her all alone with Sethe and the baby ghost. So she convinces herself that the presence of the ghost is enough and that it is her companion that would never leave. Denver feels that her mother abandoned her as well when Paul D. arrives to the house as she feels left out. She notices the difference in her mother’s behavior, and she thinks that Sethe acts “like a girl instead of the quiet, queenly woman [she] had known all her life.” (Morrison, 14). When Denver listens to her mother and Paul D. talk about the past and her father, she feels like an outsider and that nothing in that past belongs to her: she thinks: “They were a

twosome, saying “Your daddy” and “Sweet Home” in a way that made it clear both belonged to them and not her. That her own father’s absence was not hers.” (Morrison, 15). She resents Paul D., as he took her mother and got rid of her only companion, the baby ghost (Morrison, 23). To relieve herself from the feeling of anxiety because of this abandonment by the people she loved and depended on, she forms an unhealthy attachment to the baby ghost, and later on, to Beloved. Since the ghost is not going to leave, as its presence is attached Sethe, Denver “kept watch for the baby and withdrew from everything else.” (Morrison, 123). When Beloved comes back in human form, Denver tries so hard to keep her interest. It seems that she is afraid of being abandoned once more, this time by Beloved. For example, one afternoon they go to the cold house where Paul D. sleeps and Denver loses sight of Beloved, and so she starts crying, as she believes that Beloved has left, when she finally finds her, she says: “I thought you left me, I thought you went back.” (Morrison, 145). Since Beloved is only interested in Sethe, Denver try to keep Beloved’s interest when her mother is at work. Denver’s plan is to entertain Beloved by telling her stories about the past that she has been told by Sethe, and consequently the more detail she puts into these stories the more interested Beloved becomes: “[Denver’s] mind races to something she might do or say to interest and entertain [Beloved]. Denver is a strategist now and has to keep Beloved by her side from the minute Sethe leaves for work until the hour of her return.” (Morrison, 142). Writing about isolation and belonging, Roy F. Baumeister et al., state that “the most adaptive response to rejection would be to become nice, friendly, agreeable, well behaved, and generally pro-social. After all, if one group has rejected you, then you need to make new friends in order to replace the lost connection.” (Baumeister et al., 509). This is exactly what Denver does in order to keep Beloved by her side and in fact she even lies for her. For example, when Paul D. tells Sethe

that he saw Beloved pick up the rocking chair with one hand, Denver denies the fact even though she was there and witnessed what happened.

Denver has a complicated relationship with her mother, and she does not feel the natural love that a normal child has for its mother, in fact, she loves her mother because she fears for her own life. Sethe did not want her children to live in slavery, but her actions to maintain that goal only succeeded in driving her children away. Denver explains how she feels about her mother: "I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and as tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it. She missed killing my brothers and they knew it." (Morrison, 242). Similarly, Paul D. observes on one occasion that "what [Sethe] wanted for her children was exactly what was missing in 124: safety." (Morrison, 193). Denver lives in fear that her mother might kill her as well: "I spent all of my outside self loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill me," (Morrison, 245). She dreams that her mother will come and cut her head off, and the only place she feels safe in is in her Grandmother's room. But when her grandmother dies, she loses that sense of security altogether, and she believes that it is up to her to prevent her mother from committing the same crime all over again. Denver thinks repeatedly about what it is that made her mother kill Beloved as a child, so that she can prevent it from happening again: "Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard [...] So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too." (Morrison, 242). Deep down, Denver longs to have a real sense of family, and she pictures herself living with her father and Beloved; the presence of her mother in that picture is of no importance to her, and she thinks: "We should all be together. Me, him and Beloved. Ma'am could stay or go off with Paul D. if she wanted to." (Morrison, 246). She pictures her father through the words of her grandmother, since Baby Suggs describes him with such positivity that Denver refers to him as "angel man". This

longing is arguably a result of the instability in her life, the troubled relationship with her mother and the lack of security that she feels around her mother. Denver believes that Beloved has come back to help her wait for her father so that she can escape the life she is forced into by her mother. The denial Denver suffers from helps her survive in the unhealthy environment, which her mother forced upon her. She believes she has no choice other than living a life controlled by Sethe's troubled mind.

The healing process from the denial Denver suffers starts after Sethe quits her job to stay home with Beloved. Denver is forced out of her role as a daughter and takes the responsibility of caring for her mother after seeing that Beloved is consuming all of her mother's energy: "the job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved." (Morrison, 286). Since they don't have any income other than her mother's job, Denver decides to go to Lady Jones and asks her for a job. Forced out of her comfort zone, Denver feels the pressure of going out after years of being afraid to leave the house and be around people: "[Denver] would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help." (Morrison, 286). Baumeister et al., state that "excluded people approach others with mixed feelings. They seem highly (and understandably) sensitive to the possibility of further rejection and wish to avoid it [...] However, they are interested in meeting others, especially if the others make the first move or seem welcoming." (511). Denver experiences this feeling of anxiety on her way to Lady Jones' house. As she walks, she hears male voices coming closer to her as she moves along, thoughts race through her mind on how to handle the situation, she thinks of crossing the road to stay clear of them, then she wonders if the woman she just passed by would rescue her if they harmed her. However, as soon as they pass by her, making the friendly gesture of touching "their caps and murmur[ing], "Morning. Morning."" (Morrison, 289), she

feels herself relax a little. Mrs. Jones welcomes Denver and after hearing Mrs. Jones' heartfelt words, little by little, Denver's self-esteem grows, and she starts feeling that she could reclaim her freedom: "[Denver] did not know it then, but it was the word "baby," said softly and with such kindness that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman." (Morrison, 292). Lady Jones did not have a job for Denver, but she spreads the word in town that Denver needs help. Since Sethe is not going to her work and Denver does not have a job, they have no money to buy food, so the town people try to help by regularly leaving food at the edge of the yard with a note containing the name of the sender. Denver expresses her gratitude by saying "thank you" when she returns the baskets, which helps her to meet new people and this gives her the chance to have new connections outside of her house.

Not wanting to be dependent on others is a sign that Denver is ready to heal, claim her freedom, rebuild her personality, and discover her womanhood: "Feeling accepted and included by anybody can help restore the normal inhibitions" of excluded people. (Baumeister et al., 510). Nelson Lord has a great influence on Denver's journey to healing: "the last time he spoke to her his words blocked her ears. Now they opened her mind." (Morrison, 297). Moreover, his simple gesture of saying "take care of yourself, Denver," (Morrison, 297) makes her aware of her existence as an individual that matters: "It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve" (Morrison, 297), Denver reflects. Denver starts working for the Bodwins and thinks of having a second job at the shirt factory; she also starts studying and plans to get into college. Another sign that she is becoming more confident and less isolated is when she meets Paul D. in the street, and she greets him in a friendly manner which warms Paul D.'s heart: "[Denver's] smile, no longer sneer, he remembered, had welcome in it and strong traces of Sethe's mouth." (Morrison, 313). She tells him that he does not have to stay away and that he is welcome in the house. There is also a hint that she finds her womanly

side by having feelings for a young man: “a young man was running toward her, saying, “Hey, Miss Denver. Wait up.”. She turned to him, her face looking like someone had turned up the gas jet.” (Morrison, 315). All these developments signal Denver’s growth in her attempt to gain her freedom, her ability to take responsibility for her life and her readiness to live in the present and plan for the future.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* explores the journey of healing from the psychological traumas of the characters’ (Sethe, Paul D. and Denver) past. They go beyond physical limits to claim their freedom from their oppressive masters only to be enslaved by their own minds and feelings. These characters use defense mechanisms in order to cope with traumas, unbearable memories and painful life events. The characters of *Beloved* use some of these defense mechanisms so that they can survive in a society that rarely treats them as human beings. Sethe suffers greatly both during her life in the Sweet Home plantation and after her escape to Cincinnati. She suffers from psychological repression, denial, and identification with the aggressor. At Sweet Home she was treated as an inferior human, violated, and tortured to the point of psychological collapse. As a result of this treatment, Sethe chooses infanticide over slavery, because she is so afraid that her children will suffer the same fate as her. The consequence of the horrible act Sethe is forced to commit, killing her own child, ironically brings her back to where she started, enslaved, but this time she is enslaved by her own mind and she cannot escape this kind of slavery without coming to terms with her past. The return

of *Beloved* ultimately forces the characters to face their past. Throughout the novel, Sethe is forced into recognizing her actions and taking responsibility for them, and so starts the process of healing with the help of Paul D.

Paul D. suffers from repression and exercises projection in order to feel better about himself. He represses all his pain and anger onto what he calls the “tobacco tin” which symbolically replaces his heart. Paul D. refuses to take root in any place for fear of being enslaved again, so he wanders for years until he reaches Sethe’s house. Because Paul D. was in love with Sethe when they were in the plantation, he decides to stay with her and make a family. However, it is not possible to move on until he comes to term with his own troubled past. Paul D. is also forced, by *Beloved*, into dealing with the contents of his “tobacco tin” so that he can heal properly and can build a future that is free from physical and mental restraints.

Denver, on the other hand, did not experience physical slavery, and yet she suffers from mental enslavement as a consequence of being trapped in an environment that is controlled by Sethe’s thoughts and feelings. She lives in denial (by embracing fantasy) so that she can survive in the environment she is forced into. She grows up not having any friends, people avoid her and her family, her brothers leave the house, and after the death of her grandmother she is left with only her mother and the company of the baby ghost. This isolation affects Denver’s psychological health and she forms an unhealthy attachment to the baby ghost and then to *Beloved* in order to overcome the feeling of being socially excluded. Denver, not knowing how to engage with the outside world, lives in the denial since she believes that having a relationship with the ghost and subsequently *Beloved* is enough to have a normal life, and that having connections outside these two is of little importance. However, after noticing the destructive *Beloved*- Sethe relationship, Denver decides to take matters

into her own hands. She reintegrates into society and rebuilds her sense of self. In a short period of time Denver's personality develops, she works and studies and for the first time in her life, she plans for the future. She also discovers her femininity and develops feelings for a young man, which indicates that she is beginning to mature. Finally, Denver becomes an independent woman who is able to experience the freedom that she was deprived of earlier in her life.

In conclusion, the characters of *Beloved* are deprived of their freedom once because of their physical slavery and later because of the aftermath of the traumas of that slavery. However, throughout the novel the characters are forced to confront and accept the past and make amends with it, so that finally they can enjoy the freedom they have dreamt of for so long.

Works Cited

- Anker, Elizabeth S. "The 'scent of Ink': Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Semiotics of Rights." *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2014, pp. 29-45. Web. 7 Jan 2018.
- Axmacher, Nikolai, et al. "Natural Memory Beyond the Storage Model: Repression, Trauma, and the Construction of a Personal Past." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol. 4, 2010, pp. 211. Web. 7 Jan 2018.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester University Press, 2009. Print.
- Baumeister, Roy F., et al. "Thwarting the Need to Belong: Understanding the Interpersonal and Inner Effects of Social Exclusion." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 506-520. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

Baumeister, Roy F., Karen Dale, and Kristin L. Sommer. "Freudian Defense Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Social Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projection, Displacement, Undoing, Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 66, no. 6, 1998, pp. 1081-1124. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

Billig, Michael. *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 1963.

"Freedom." Macmillan Dictionary.com.

Freud, Anna. *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. Karnac Books, London, 1992.

Garssen, Bert. "Repression: Finding our Way in the Maze of Concepts." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, vol. 30, no. 6, 2007, pp. 471-481. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

Govorun, Olesya, Kathleen Fuegen, and B. K. Payne. "Stereotypes Focus Defensive Projection." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 32, no. 6, 2006, pp. 781-793. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

Koolish, Lynda. "'to be Loved and Cry Shame': A Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Melus*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2001, pp. 169-195. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

Larrick, Shelby. "Psychological Criticism of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." 2007. *A Web Case Book on BELOVED by Toni Morrison*. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

McLeod, Saul. "Defense Mechanisms". *SimplyPsychology*. 2009. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/defense-mechanisms.html>. Accessed 7 Jan 2018.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage, 2005.

Muddler, Lianne. "Frantz Fanon, Internalized Oppression and the Decolonization of Education". *The University of St. Martin*. 9 March 2016. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

Osagie, Iyunolu. "Is Morrison also among the Prophets?: "Psychoanalytic" Strategies in "Beloved"." *African American Review*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1994, pp. 423. Web. 7 Jan 2018.

Schapiro, Barbara. "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1991, pp. 194. Web. 7 Jan 2018.