



## A New Historicist Interpretation of *Beloved*

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Received 23 July 2020; accepted 17 August 2020

Published online 26 October 2020

### Abstract

According to New Historicism, there are plural histories instead of single History. For a long time, blacks' miserable history was marginalized. This paper thinks, Morrison, in *Beloved*, presented their histories in the form of eye-catching stories. Such juxtaposition of literature and history rightly accords with the idea of New Historicism that literature and history have no clear border line. Thus, under the guidance of New Historicism, this paper intends to explore the hidden African Americans' histories by analyzing *Beloved* so as to reconstruct the part of the blacks' history under slavery.

**Key words:** New historicism; History reconstruction; Text and history; Toni Morrison

Wang, B. Y., & Zhang, R. W. (2020). A New Historicist Interpretation of *Beloved*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 21(2), 84-90. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/11849> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11849>

### INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison (1931-2019) was the first female African American writer who was awarded the Nobel Laureate for Literature in 1993. "Her novels are characterized by visionary force and poetic import, giving life to an essential aspect of American reality." (Allen, 1997, p.42) Throughout her lifetime, Morrison completed eight novels totally, most of which focus on the African Americans'

tough survival conditions. Among them, her fifth novel *Beloved* can display Morrison's reflections on history most and also interrogate powerfully the authority and veracity of American official history. (Wang, 2007, p.141) Since its publication in 1987, *Beloved* is always a hit among public, with crowns as the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in Race Relations, the Melcher Book Award, the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and "the best work of American fiction from 1981 to 2006" by *The New York Times*.

During the years working at Ramdon House, Morrison was setting about editing *The Black Book* which was finished in 1974. Known as "the encyclopedia of African American history", *The Black Book* contains much ignored historical material of black people, involving the 300-year history of black Americans fighting for equality. (Huang, 2018, p.46) Inspired by one of the stories in it, Morrison took up her powerful weapon with the intention of reconstructing the unilateral History. Reconstruction does not mean to adapt history, but to narrate the historical events from different perspectives so as to supplement the History with the absent ones, making some unheard utterances heard. Morrison successfully shapes it to bridge the incomplete canon of American literature the very chapter of American history it had long lacked: the story of the African Americans who survived slavery. (Rody, 1995, p.93)

The term New Historicism was first coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 in an introduction to an issue of the journal *Genre* devoted to the Renaissance. Different from the New Criticism which regards a literary text as an organic form, New Historicism pays more attention to associating the literary text with its historical context. Diverting from the traditional Historicism which is monological and attempts to discover a unitary political vision, New Historicism deconstructs the single capitalized History into plural lowercase histories and also decomposes the non-narrative and non-representational

history into several narrative stories. In the new historicist eyes, history is always in the process of being rewritten. For them, the terms - the historicity of texts and the textuality of histories - receive the sparkle spotlight. The former indicates that all texts have their own given historical and social attributes, while the latter means that history is preserved with the help of texts which facilitate the later circulation and further interpretation. (Hu, 2009, p.91) Such interaction between text and history offers the opportunity to reconstruct the so-called History, leaving the critical reflection on the authoritative ideology. Thus, this paper, with New Historicism as its theoretical guide, intends to interpret Morrison's reconstruction of the African American history in *Beloved* which is neglected by American mainstream culture. Meanwhile, the reflections on the black community provoked by their ignored or absent history will be further displayed.

## 1. THE UNSPEAKABLE RECONSTRUCTED

"I thought it will be the most incomprehensible writing of all my works, because what this novel exposes is the history people are reluctant to touch, not only the black characters in the novel, but also I myself, altogether with all the whites and blacks. It is a national amnesia towards this period of history", as Toni Morrison interviewed. (Zou, 2011, p.43)

Early in the 1776, *The Declaration of Independence* makes it clear: we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. In such a country where speaks highly of independence, liberty and democracy, it seems preposterous that slavery was not abolished until 1863 and left an incurable scar on nation and its subjects. Black slaves endured much inhumane treatment so that their mouths would rather silence themselves than mention a bit of it. Such psychology rightly accords with the intention of the mainstream culture which attempts to marginalize that unspeakable history.

As is known to all, history is written by the winner. New historians believe that history is full of faults, which means that there is no single History, but diverse voices in history. Dating back to the year 1850 when slavery was still alive, the black slave Margaret Garner fled from Kentucky to Cincinnati, Ohio, with her four children to escape from the miserable slavish life. Unfortunately, they after all could not land on their feet for the slave owner soon came to their shelter. With the belief that "they (her children) can no longer live like that [miserable slavish life]...I am a human being and they are my children (Peach, 2000, p.57)", she, grabbing an axe at that second, was painfully obliged to end her children's lives. The infant baby became the sacrifice of the cruel slavery in the end.

On the court, Garner was accused of committing the larceny - stealing the property (herself and her children) from the slave owner. This adjudication explains a reality that the black people were not seen as an individual under slavery, but only an accessory property of the owner. They have no right to deal with their lives. Unspeakable as it is, it was gradually covered with the effort of official statement.

As New Historicists variously recognize the ability of literature to challenge the social and political power, Morrison inscribes histories in literary texts. In *Beloved*, Sethe was the mother with thick love who was shaped in terms of the prototype Garner. To protect her children from experiencing inhumane sufferings, she made every effort to send her children, who were considered the personal property of the slave owner away from the "hell". Arriving at Bluestone 124 in Cincinnati, Ohio, she poorly gained a short 28-day freedom. Upon the day schoolteacher (slave owner) chased there to reclaim his property, Sethe "flew [towards her children], snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing...collecting them every which way: one on her shoulder, one under her arm, one by the hand, the other shouted forward into the woodshed (Morrison, 2007, p.157)". The same as Garner, Sethe bitterly chose to end their lives in person, believing eternal slumber is the safest state for them. Her third daughter who could simply crawl was murdered by herself finally. When Sethe was put into jail, Morrison changes the crime larceny into the crime encroachment of property, which highlights the fact of black people's commodification under slavery. While narrating the appalling infanticide event, Morrison not only spreads out the scene from the sight of schoolteacher, a white man, but also grants the power of discourse to those ignored perspectives - Stamp Paid's and Sethe's (two blacks) - so as to reconstruct a rather complete history. Each of their narrative is presented as an independent chapter, supplement each other. In order to underline that infanticide was not rare under slavery, Morrison also shapes another character in the novel. Ella, being raped and tortured by a white father and son in turns, delivered a "hybrid". But it only lived five days for she would not nurse it. Try to ruminate on the question: in what kind of situation a mother will make the choice to kill her own sweetheart without a second thought? The answer is surely brutal to reply.

According to Eric Foner, since 1960s, the best work written by American historians has been about reevaluating the "fancy system" in the South. (Eric Foner, 1998, p.186) The fancy system refers to the slavery in the Southern Plantation. Back that time, manorial economy largely supported Southern economy. Usually, the planter bought a group of black slaves at a relatively low price and exploited their labor force to an extreme to make maximum profits. By the fragmentary rememory of characters, Morrison represents blacks' realistic plight

under the “fancy system”. When Sethe was still an infant, her mother had to drop her to another woman who took the charge of nursing a group of babies while she herself kept working on the field. So in Sethe’s memory, there was no maternal love at all.

I didn’t see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks - that’s the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was. (Morrison, p.60)

Even as a baby, the ethnic inferiority has been branded on her. When it comes to the basic substance, usually it is unequal to the whites and blacks, “the little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none (Morrison, p.200)”. In addition, the subtlest mother-daughter relationship was not kept natural, but was recognized based on a circle-cross symbol burnt on the body. After her mother was hanged, Sethe was also marked on her body, a mark claiming her affiliation. More unspeakably, it is agreed that the slave trade could be counted as the most horrifying evidence of blacks’ commodification.

The epigraph of the novel “sixty million and more” has its historical implication. Actually, it directly points to a piece of unspeakable history that the Africans and their descendants were dropped into water after death in the Middle Passage of the cross-Atlantic slave trade. Miserable as it is, both the whites and blacks refuse to remember it. Worse, it is hard to locate any traces in the recording of “official history”. Thus, Morrison endows Sethe’s dead daughter *Beloved* a special identity, transcending between the living and the dead, to uncover this permanently traumatic memory. Along with *Beloved*’s stream of consciousness, a realistic sight can be caught. “The little hill of dead people a hot thing the men without skin push them through with poles ... They are not crouching now we are they are floating on the water” (Morrison, pp.211-212) During the trade sailing course, the cargo ship was overcrowded with black slaves so that it was even difficult for them to catch a breath. Under the hostile environment that there was no food, no water, or even no urine to drink, sixty million blacks at least were dead. After death, there was no room to store their corpses. So the frigid sea became their grave. The female black slaves, according to *Beloved*’s personal experience, suffered worse,

I am always crouching the man on my face is dead his face is not mine his mouth smells sweet but his eyes are locked some who eat nasty themselves I do not eat the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink we have none. (Morrison, p.210)

Apparently, the bare description is the factual portraiture of black slaves’ inhumane living condition. *Beloved*’s narration not only disclosed her individual

wound, but also the blacks’ collective trauma carefully hid in their heart. Morrison by this way censures the slavery system and points straightly at the authenticity of history.

Literature and history both are narratives. They walk shoulder to shoulder, reconstructing a more convincing history from various perspectives. The cruel past leaves a deep cut on every American so that they lock it deeply. Morrison refreshes their memory and attempts to subvert the power of discourse which is primarily monopolized by whites in the history to reconstruct the history.

## 2. TRAUMATIC MEMORY RECALLED

As Ricoeur mentioned, “texts endow the narrator a pair of eyes ... not for further revenge, but for narration (Ricoeur, 1988, p.188-189)”. With historical consciousness, Morrison combines the texts and history, resurfacing the traumatic memory in the form of words in order to inform all of the neglected and unspeakable history of blacks. By the time when the slavery was universal in US, blacks were totally devoured by the notorious system. They perceived that everything in their life was dim. They had to survive between the narrowest cracks, hiding here and there, lowering their human natures to animals’, as recorded in the novel,

Negroes [were] so stunned, or hungry, or tired or bereft it was a wonder they recalled or said anything. [They] had hidden in caves and fought owls for food; ... stole from pigs; ... slept in trees in the day and walked by night; ... had buried themselves in slop and jumped in wells to avoid regulators, raiders, paterollers, veterans, hill men, posses and merrymakers.(Morrison, p.87)

What’s worse, trauma resulted from those painful sufferings harasses them with mental disorder. According to a black’s memory, “once, [he saw] a Negro about fourteen years old who lived by himself in the woods and said he couldn’t remember living anywhere else. [And] a witless coloredwoman jailed and hanged for stealing ducks she believed were her own babies (Morrison, p.87)”. They were driven into crazy by the slavery. At that time, it was not unusual that blacks were doomed to be “got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized (Morrison, p.23)”, which left a collective trauma on them. As “every mention of [that] past life hurt (Morrison, p.58)”, they had no choice but to cover it at the bottom of their memory. For blacks, recalling the past is nothing less than scattering salt over their uncured cuts. But Morrison, who believes that history plays a significant role in the forward road, resurrects the dead daughter *Beloved* as the “channel” to arouse the hidden history.

It is easily to locate that the main characters in *Beloved* sharing a collective traumatic memory when they were serving as slaves in Sweet Home - where “it wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home (Morrison, p.14)”. Sethe



described it as somewhere “never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was pretty place too (Morrison, p.6)”, because both physical and mental pains were regular visitors to her during her stay there. She was whipped and tortured by schoolteacher and his two nephews so cruelly and frequently that a form of “chokecherry” tree is shaped on her back.

It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk - it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. (Morrison, p.79)

Sethe, as the only black woman in Sweet Home, was often harassed by them who did not care whether she was pregnant or in suckling period at all. They took away her milk which was the only food nursing baby. In the eyes of the whites, the black slaves were not even seen as human. Their biological attribute was defined as half-man and half-animal. The schoolteacher demanded the two nephews to categorize Sethe's human and animal features, “to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up (Morrison, p.193)”. For the slave owners, the maximum value of female slaves is nothing but their fertility. They can “produce” more and more little slaves, who would be exploited to create the maximum profits for them. It could be concluded that nothing but these traumatic and unspeakable experiences drive Sethe as well as Garner to pick up the saw towards their own baby.

More shockingly, the schoolteacher even employed the way of taming animals to control slaves by enforcing them to wear a bit in their mouth which is a metal bar usually put in a horse's mouth so that the rider can rein it. Under slavery, the blacks were lowered to be subhuman and were disposed by their white owners willingly. The miserable slavish life made them even envy Mister's (a rooster) life. At least, “Mister, he looked so...free (Morrison, p.72)”. Similar to Sethe, none of the five black men in Sweet Home could free themselves from the miserable endings - one crazy, one missing, one burnt and two sold.

Paul D, one of the sold, was also determined to lock his memory box forever on his way toward Bluestone 124. He tended to lead a peaceful and new life with Sethe and Denver. Nevertheless, the memory box was still pried by Morrison. The arrival of *Beloved* not only awakens Sethe's memory, but also Paul D's. Reopening the box, it was playing the cinematic scenes full of traumatic color. It records that the schoolteacher sold him to Brandywine who later sold him to Alfred, Georgia, where stored his most unwillingly-mentioned sufferings. His memory tells that arriving Georgia, he was arranged to live in ditches five-foot depth, five-foot width, into which forty-six wooden box had been placed.

A door of bars that you could lift on hinges like a cage opened into three walls and a roof of scrap lumber and red dirt. Two feet of it over his head; three feet of open trench in front of him with anything that crawled or scurried welcome to share that grave calling itself quarters. (Morrison, p.106)

In the morning, all forty-six had to wake up at the same moment as soon as they heard the rifle shot. All doors unlocked, they could step out and lined up in the trench. Not until another rifle shot could they climb out and up the ground above. Then, all forty-six needed to wear the iron loop on their leg one by one so that they were chained together. Then, they knelt down and three guards in turns tortured them humiliatingly. During that period, all they could utter were only “Hi” and “Yes, Sir”, which indicate that they had to present their a-hundred percent humble obedience. If it was a rainy day, they were locked back in the boxes. They heard the water rise drop by drop. Meanwhile, they had to look out for cottonmouths.

...Something was running down his (Paul D) cheeks. He lifted his hands to wipe away the tears and saw dark brown slime...The water was above his ankles, flowing over the wooden plank he slept on. And then it wasn't water anymore. The ditch was caving in and mud oozed under and through the bars. (Morrison, p.110)

As it is narrated, the life in Georgia was excruciating enough so that, for them, to live is no better than to die. “They killed the flirt whom folks called Life for leading them on. Making them think the next sunrise would be worth it; that another stroke of time would do it at last. Only when she was dead would they be safe.” (Morrison, p.109) To survive, they had to strangle the slim hope for life in their deep soul. A whim of escapement would bring nothing but bloody disaster. Paul D tried five times to escape (from Sweet Home, from Brandywine, from Alfred, Georgia, from Wilmington, from Northpoint), but all failed and paid a heavy price for his attempts.

As in the novel, the slavery had imposed such an unforgettable traumatic memory on the younger black generation like Sethe and Paul D, not to mention the elder, like Baby Suggs whose most lifetime had been taken by slavery. Baby remembered that she herself gave birth to eight children but having six fathers. The children were not born to be their parents' pearl in the palm, but born as checkers to be manipulated at will. Two girls were sold before having their adult teeth; a boy was traded for lumber; others the similar fates. Baby herself was also sold from one hand to another under slavery. Bitterly, too long being a slave, she even had been accustomed to her role so that even upon the moment the freedom greets to her, she realized that “her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue [were all busted] (Morrison, p.87)”.

The trauma caused by slavery is immeasurable. Slavery executed a negative effects on blacks who gradually became “bloody, silly, worse than even they

wanted to be (Morrison, p.199)". The year 1863 has witnessed the moment that President Abraham Lincoln enacted the Emancipation Proclamation, abolishing the slavery legally. But slavery was so deep-rooted that tragedies of blacks still happened one after another.

Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. (Morrison, p.180)

Memory is time-bound. Gradually, it will silently fade away in the long river of history. Morrison perceives the urgency and necessity of catching the remaining memory. Thus, she, by the form of literature, records the traumatic memory so as to provide supplement in the undertaking of reconstructing history. History not only implies the past, but also predicts the future. Rememory of these traumatic experiences under slavery is the prerequisite of restoring social order, curing historical scar and awakening the collective amnesia.

### 3. STRUGGLING HISTORY RECONSTRUCTED

Where there is slavery, there is misery. However, as Morrison herself persisted, her works derive from the joy of hope instead of the grief of disappointment. In *Beloved*, she also shows great expectation for blacks' future. For one thing, Morrison utters the repressed voices of blacks. For another, she leaves hints here and there which form a picture of blacks' struggling history, when pieced together, quite encouraging.

The whites used to embrace the definition that blacks are an uncivilized community; they are under-educated, backward and ignorant. But from Morrison's *Beloved*, there is no lack of progressive representations in black history. Halle, though was born being a slave, could sensitively perceive that knowledge is power and knowledge can change one's fate. Therefore, unlike other slaves whose mind mostly dawned on feeding animals, using tools, planting crops, he also develops interest in alphabet. Among a group of black students, he is the only one who wants to learn accounting. He bears in mind that "if you can't count, they (whitefolks) can cheat you; if you can't read they can beat you (Morrison, p.208)". It was due to his cognitive ability that he freed his mother Baby Suggs from her sixty-odd-year slave life. Morrison clearly shows that only when one endeavors to equip himself with enough knowledge can one not be chained by others. Knowledge enables one to gain power of discourse and acknowledge his personal identity. One who is advanced in mind will strive not only for his own life but also for the fate of the whole race.

Halle's desire to advance rightly passed to his daughter Denver. Lady Jones (a teacher) has witnessed how Denver was thirsty in studying knowledge and heartily enjoying the learning time. Unfortunately, the remaining influence of infanticide deafened her so that she had to drop out of school. From then on, she led a rather isolated life, no friends, no contact with the outside world until the appearance of her beloved "sister". Though showing best love to her "sister", Denver could not bear its threaten to her closest mother. Instead of conniving her "sister", Denver bravely defends against it. She steps out of the isolated house to contact with and seek for help from the community. The community, though alienating 124 for 18 years because of Sethe's unforgivable crime - infanticide, will not fold their hands and see one die. Soon, a group of women gathered in front of 124. With their overwhelming morale, the "ghost" was expelled from 124 forever. The blacks' unity inspires Denver to embrace the outside world which gives her a sense of belonging and security in response. She tries her best to blend into the society, works two jobs at the same day and strives for a higher education. The future of Denver is, without question, expected and hopeful. Morrison takes Denver as an example to tell that the younger generation of blacks has been aware of and will fight for their independence and liberty as industriously as possible.

Moreover, after Baby Suggs gained freedom, she initially led her life with the support of her sophisticated skill in mending shoes, which even won the appreciation from whites. Besides, she preached on her own field - the Clearing.

Here, in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back...You got to love it, you! ...The dark, dark liver - love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too...love your heart. For this is the prize. (Morrison, pp.88-89)

Literally, Baby Suggs was delivering a new concept about flesh to blacks. History showed that they were born to be possessed by slave owners. They were inferior and had no right to deal with their own body. And there was no highly-sung independence, equality, freedom at all. What they could do was to bear every insult from the white and accept life passively. Baby, on behalf of Morrison, appeals to the black folks that they should learn to love and respect their body and discover the value of their life. They need to courageously discard the commercial price the slave owners tied on them. (Li & Zeng, 2016, p.26)

Realizing their own value, they embark on fighting for their power of discourse which was stripped by the whites in the past. There is a conversation between schoolteacher (a white) and Sixo (a black):

"You stole that shoat, didn't you?"  
"No, Sir," said Sixo.

...  
"Did you kill it?"  
"Yes, sir. I killed it."  
...  
"Well, then. Did you eat it?"  
"Yes, sir. I sure did."  
"And you telling me that's not stealing?"  
"No, sir. It ain't."  
"What is it then?"  
"Improving your property, sir."  
"What?"  
"Sixo plant rye to give the high price a better chance. Sixo take and feed the soil, give you more crop. Sixo take and feed Sixo give you more work." (Morrison, p.190)

Though under slavery, it is acknowledged that "definitions belonged to the definers (whites owner) - not the defined (black slaves) (Morrison, p.190)", it can still be peeped that Sixo was clever and brave enough and knew to make use of his mouth to strive for the power of discourse.

Not only with those inspiring thoughts and actions, Morrison also embeds original blacks' culture and arts into the story which powerfully declare that their history has its own roots and can be traced back to. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, jazz, from the center of New Orleans, disseminated extensively among common people. Dating to its roots, this special music style is exactly derived from Africa and plays a significant role in serving as a soul comfort for the marginalized blacks. (Mao & Huang, 2009, p.184)

As James Baldwin (1985) pointed out, only by music can blacks narrate their stories. Like jazz who bears such distinct features as improvisation and out of reason, Morrison tells the story in a fragmentary and disordered way. The three parts of the novel have no obvious links and transitions between them. Each chapter has no title, each open line without an indentation. Taking a panoramic view, the novel is presented harmoniously though in disorder, grandly though in fragments, just as the cadence of jazz. When Paul D, together with other forty-five men, was doing the slavery work, they act according to the rhythm of jazz.

With a sledge hammer in his hands and Hi Man's lead, the men got through. They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves or seen others tame. They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life. They sang lovingly of graveyards and sisters long gone. Of pork in the woods; meal in the pan; fish on the lien; cane, rain and rocking chairs. (Morrison, p.108)

The music intangibly transfers them unexhausted energy and power to face life in hardships so that the slaves sung out their inner resentment and also their hope. (Wang, 2002, p.123)

History is a bond connecting the past, present and future. Blacks are overshadowed by their heavy and

unspeakable history for a long time. Looking back, though treated inhumanely, they did not lose their progressive spirits. What Morrison recorded and narrated in the novel are rightly their courage and confidence. She tends to tell that blacks should never give up gaining freedom by every means. Though there is a history full of bitterness and miseries, more importantly, they also have a history of persistent struggling radiating hope to generations after generations.

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## CONCLUSION

In her masterpiece *Beloved*, Toni Morrison revivifies the African Americans extremely terrible even horrible life pictures. Under slavery, since the whites occupied the mainstream power of discourse, the voices of blacks were marginalized or ignored so that most of them led the inhumane life. However, the "official history" almost has no trace of that unspeakable history and the mainstream culture intends to ignore it. Morrison, with strong historical consciousness, gives the microphone to the blacks so as to rewrite the history.

Firstly, based on the prototypes under slavery in America, Morrison, in *Beloved*, subverts the mainstream power of discourse by paying attention to the absence of black utterances to reconstruct history. Secondly, Morrison dwells upon blacks' bitter sufferings in texts to draw a realistic painting of their living condition for one thing and to criticize the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery for another. Finally, she, between lines, endows the long-time marginalized blacks the awakening moment to reflect on the history so as to bear in mind that their own race has a history of struggling and is full of hope. For blacks, history provides them the tool to know the past and helps them to produce a sense of identity, form a community and promote their culture. (Wang & Gu, 2003, p.117) Morrison's *Beloved*, though narrating something in the past, calls for ethnic awareness and claims dignity for all African Americans.

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