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"Time Never Worked That Way:" Toni Morrison's Disruption of Historical Chronology in *Beloved*

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Abstract

This article reads Toni Morrison's Beloved *(1987) as a form, intervention and expansion of Black temporality. Rather than retelling history in linear time, Morrison uses a recursive, ghosted narrative that deconstructs the divide between past and present. Drawing on Tao Leigh Goffe's concept of "maroon time," the novel is here read as a refusal of Enlightenment chrononormativity as well as racial capitalism's demand for closure, progress, and resolution. With Morrison's free indirect discourse, fractured pace, and spectrality, Beloved inscribes time as trauma, survival, and resistance. The novel re-writes the Black womb as a site not of reproduction but of temporal disjunction, its form possessing a fugitive beat that shatters Western historiography. Morrison extends the grammar of Black narration by architecting a temporality which is incomplete, relational, and speculative, rendering the novel an ethical and political site of refusal.*

Keywords

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, time, linearity, closure, temporality

Introduction

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* does not simply shatter time; it reimagines what narrative time can do. Instead of a linear chronology, Morrison offers us one that curves, breaks, and loops. She disturbs not only what is reported of Black life after slavery, but how what is reported is reported; how it moves, how it haunts, how it resists closure. The novel breaks linearity, destabilizing narrative chronology and rendering memory indistinguishable from presence. Temporal fluidity in *Beloved* is not theoretical or decorative; it is political, somatic, and structural. Morrison establishes a literary form in which time is not only fractured but contested. She disorients the reader to make visible the violence of normative historical time. This research analyzes *Beloved* as a speculative refiguration of time in terms of Black experience, trauma, and resistance. Drawing on Tao Leigh Goffe's theory of Black temporality as "blackness working on the other side of time, as a cultivated resource stolen away across the Black diaspora,"[1] the novel is not interpreted here as a linear history of the post-slavery afterlife, but as a narrative experiment in Black temporality. Morrison constructs a grammar of time that disavows Enlightenment chronology, capitalist measurement, and liberal progress narratives. This syntax emerges formally in the recursive structure of the novel: its tense shifts unmarked, its use of free indirect discourse, and its avoidance of marking sharp distinctions between narration and memory. These techniques flatten the difference between past and present, speaker and witness, self and ghost.

1 Tao Leigh Goffe, "Stolen Life, Stolen Time: Black Temporality, Speculation, and Racial Capitalism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 121, no. 1 (2022): 112, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-9561573>.

Morrison establishes this rhythm from the start of the novel. "124 was spiteful,"[2] we read on page one, "Full of a baby's venom."[3] The reader is not led into exposition but dropped into a temporal stasis, one with no clear beginning and, as we discover later, no set resolution. The house at 124 Bluestone Road is a site of recurrence, not progression. Its haunting, the embodiment of *Beloved*, functions not as a ghost from the past, but as a current force de-railing the course of life and story. The characters cannot move on, as the house itself holds them within a kind of historical loop in which each day recapitulates what has happened and what cannot be changed. As Mark McGurl observes, *Beloved* "doubles back" on the idea of historical progress: "It is a story of the will to stasis."[4] Morrison complicates the expectation that education, freedom, or healing must unfold along a linear path, instead, she holds her characters and her readers suspended in a temporal paradox.

This form enacts Goffe's theory of maroon time, which is based on the histories of runaway slaves who fled the plantation and lived in a temporal relation structured around the demands of survival, secrecy, and non-productivity. Tao Leigh Goffe's maroon time describes a temporal condition guided by the existence of escape slave communities who detached themselves from plantations and survived outside the plantation cycles of colonial time. Rather than being oriented toward productivity or progress, maroon time is recursive and cyclical, founded upon survival and refusal. It resists the linearity of white modernity. In *Beloved*, Morrison not only performs but also complicates this time logic of pause and return by placing her characters in a shipwrecked temporality that refuses closure or resolution. Maroon time is not simply delay; it is resistance that refuses the scheduling of white modernity. Morrison constructs this argument most directly through her use of pause moments in the narrative when action slows or stops as tension accumulates. One such pause occurs when Sethe insists: "No moving. No leaving. It's all right the way it is."[5] This is not a defeatist statement. It is a refusal to re-engage the world on the terms which demanded her daughter's death. Sethe's suspension in time becomes political, a way of dwelling within the trauma rather than allowing history or narrative to write over it.

The pace of the novel is not subject to the logic of resolution, but to the cycles of return. The sequences do not push toward a climax, but repeat: the plantation Sweet Home, the schoolteacher, and the milk theft each time newly embodied, never fully assimilated. By examining closely those repetitions, it will become apparent that *Beloved* disrupts Western chrononormativity and racial capitalism's temporal violence. Particularly, Sethe's infanticide will be revealed as a refusal of time, that is, an action both of desperation and of unmaking a future disciplined by slavery. The Black womb, rather than a reproductive container, is a speculative door through which time, history, and identity are rewritten. Similarly, Denver's long wait and subsequent outward movement represent a maroon temporality, a mode not defined by stagnation, but fugitive time recuperated in terms of rest and attentiveness. In the end, I argue that *Beloved* is not merely a representation of Black temporality, but a speculative incursion within it. Through recursive structure, ghostly pacing, and

2 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987, New York: Vintage International, 2004), 3.

3 Morrison, *Beloved,* 3.

4 Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 359.

5 Morrison, *Beloved*, 15.

unresolved narrative, Morrison complicates dominant timelines and develops a narrative form drawn from trauma, refusal, and Black survival via nonlinear time.

Temporal Collapse and Recursive Form in *Beloved*

In *Beloved*, Morrison dismantles the linear oppositions of past and present by collapsing them into a single recursive and haunted temporality. The collapse of time is not a thematic undercurrent so much as a formal motor that drives the structure of the novel. The reader is not guided through the chronological narrative, but submerged in a rhythm of looped memory, fractured narration, and fragmented return. Morrison's recursive structure, reversing time as sequence, eschews temporal rationality regarding progress, cure, and forgetting. Instead, time in *Beloved* represents Christina Sharpe's "the wake,"[6] a frozen, living residue, as well as Tao Leigh Goffe's "stolen life, stolen time," in which violence from the past exists as present-tense disjuncture. Morrison's recursive narrative performs this condition on the page, shattering the divide between memory and present moment. For Sharpe, the wake is not only a trail left by a slave ship or a corpse tossed overboard, but also the time space in which Black people have to exist with an unfinished past that continues to shape the present. Morrison's refusal to stabilize time through fragmented memory, ghostly interruption, and narrative recursion enacts this wake.

Nowhere is such fragmentation more apparent than in the manner in which Sethe's memory is treated in the novel. From early on in the book, we are told that her past is not something she is able to keep at arm's length: "Her past had been like her present—intolerable—and since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness."[7] The use of the dash here is crucial, as it conveys the interruption of thought, the blurring of narrative voice and interior monologue, and the inability to distinguish between states of existence. Sethe does not remember the past as a sequence of events; she feels it through anachronistic perception. And as she is brought back to Sweet Home, she experiences it as an immediate visual and bodily presence: "Although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty."[8] The plantation is not somewhere behind her; it is immediately present, insisting itself into existence with no transition and no narrative signal.

Morrison's recursive narrative again and again positions this temporal intrusion. Trauma returns in image rather than in sequence. The trees of Sweet Home, sites of loveliness and violence, tower above her sight over the remembrance of her children: "Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that."[9] Memory here is neither voluntary nor retrospective. It is a deceiver, distorting priorities and revealing how far-reaching the past's influence is on the present. Morrison's characters do not merely recall trauma; they reside within the repetition of the events. As Koolish notes, *Beloved* departs from traditional slave narratives to reveal "the story not told […] that of psychosis, dissociation, of climbing

6 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.

7 Morrison, *Beloved*, 4.

8 Morrison, *Beloved*, 6.

9 Morrison, *Beloved*, 6.

out of one's body"[10] as a response to the crushing violence of slavery. Sethe's inability to distinguish past and present is not only literary; it is a condition of historical memory. Morrison's story denies the comforting distance of the past; instead, her text flashes in and out of Sethe's consciousness, as in the line, "Counting on the stillness of her own soul, she had forgotten the other one: the soul of her baby girl."[11] The use of "the other one" underscores that trauma continues in more than one body, proliferating across lives and remaining uncontainable temporally or narratively.

A good deal of this dissolution is made possible by Morrison's use of free indirect discourse, a narrative mode that allows her to intermix third-person narrative with the individualized interiority of her characters without clear boundaries. This maneuver forces the reader to experience memory as present-reality. Consider the passage: "That's all you let yourself remember," Sethe had told her, but she was down to one herself—one alive, that is…"[12] The phrases "one alive, that is…" occur in Sethe's internal thought, yet none of these lines is any hint that the tale has slipped past the border into interiority. Instead, Morrison dismantles this demarcation, revealing a mode of memory that refuses to remain inside the past and instead dwells inside the now of the everyday, explosively splintering its way into the present.

This recursive temporality finds its most violent expression in the fractured narrative of the infanticide. Morrison never presents the scene in full from Sethe's point of view in straightforward language. Rather, it is slowly revealed in pieces, incrementally, through partial sight and hallucinatory narration: "She just flew."[13] The narrative voice shifts between Sethe's justification and a larger, ghostly discourse "the veil," "every bit of life she had made" a voice not just of a mother but of a shared, historical consciousness resisting temporal confinement. Later, the action recurs again: "She could feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hand."[14] In this instance, Morrison is describing present experience, not memory. The trauma of infanticide is not a moment of past to be remembered, but an ongoing physical feeling relived in the body, defying narrative chronology. As Bonnie Roos explains, "Sethe is ashamed and cannot forgive herself for the murder of her own child. But if Sethe's 'head is a bit too high,' her 'back a bit too straight,' it is because Sethe cannot forgive the community for their spiteful failure to warn, that results in her daughter's death."[15] This critique implicates not just personal guilt but communal abandonment, adding another layer to Sethe's refusal: she refuses not only the future shaped by slavery, but the present community that failed to shield her from it.

Rooms in the novel also represent recursive spaces in which time stands still and loops. Sethe's rememory discourse articulates this collapse explicitly: "Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay… Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the

10 Lynda Koolish, "'To Be Loved and Cry Shame': A Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *MELUS* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 172, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3185546>.

11 Morrison, *Beloved*, 5.

12 Morrison, *Beloved*, 5

13 Morrison, *Beloved*, 163.

14 Morrison, *Beloved*, 251.

15 Bonnie Roos, "Teaching Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: From Genesis to the Reckoning," *South Central Review* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 127, <https://doi.org/10.1353/scr.2024.a926136>.

picture of it—stays… it will be there for you, waiting for you."[16] Memory here is not interior. It is a topological form, a space in and out of which one can infinitely enter. The spatialization of memory intensifies the collapse of past and present. The 124 ghost house becomes the recursive architecture of time, a space inhabited not merely with specters, but an entire grammar of Black temporality. Hock Soon Ng observes, "The house has become a spatial monument testifying to Sethe's trauma and stasis, for although she is alive, she has nevertheless ceased to exist."[17] The house is not simply a setting; it is the site of refusal, holding grief in its very structure, a non-progressive space where narrative time halts and haunts. In rejecting linear time, Morrison eschews the temporality of enclosure. Memory is not in the employment of narrative consummation or telos; memory disrupts sequence, undoes cause and effect, and stands in opposition to redemption. Recursive narration in *Beloved* becomes politicized and ethically inflected a mode of narration that urges us to be *in* the aftermath of trauma, not *after* it. Past and present are rendered as states rather than distinctions: incoherent, entangled, and repeating.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* renders history into a fractured state of being, breaking into the very forms and grammar of narration in which history is conventionally recounted. The novel's refusal to neatly demarcate changes in time, speaker, or consciousness represents more than a mere gesture of experimentation: it signifies a formal violation of Enlightenment-narrative conventions that underwrite white historical narration. Whereas traditional historiography prioritizes continuity, legibility, and order, Morrison constructs a narrative that is discontinuous, unstable, and often indecipherable by design. The indeterminate stylistic grammar of the text resists the authority of documentation and de-stabilizes the structures through which racial capitalism and liberal historiography have explained the Black past.

In traditional narrative forms described by white historiography, simplicity of chronology and a unified point of view perform ideological functions reifying tropes of progress, coherence, and closure. Morrison subverts these norms by repressing transitions, rejecting narrative markers, and disrupting grammatical expectations. Her strategy is to compose a novel that forces the reader to forgo assumptions of linear progress and instead to inhabit a fractured, relational, and recursive temporality; a time to be felt rather than traced.

One of Morrison's primary techniques in this disruption is free indirect discourse, whereby the narrative intrudes unnoticed into the interior voice of a character, then escapes out again without typographical or syntactical indication. This technique erases the line between narrator and character, private memory and public consciousness, fact and perception. For instance, Morrison writes, "She needed to get up from there, go downstairs and piece it all back together."[18] The sentence begins in third-person narration, then shifts into Sethe's interior voice "This house he told her to leave as though a house was a little thing"[19] without quotation marks or dialogue tags. The passage thereby undermines the grammatical distinction between external narration and internal thought, making it impossible to ascertain where objective narration ends and subjective consciousness

16 Morrison, *Beloved*, 36.

17 Andrew Hock Soon Ng, "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Space, Architecture, Trauma," *symplokē* 19, no. 1–2 (2011): 238, <https://doi.org/10.5250/symploke.19.1-2.0231>.

18 Morrison, *Beloved*, 22.

19 Morrison, *Beloved*, 22.

begins. This not a mere stylistic flourish; it is a subversion of the very foundations of objective historical discourse, which is typically based on a fixed authorial point of view. A second example of this formal rejection is the sentence, "That's all you let yourself remember, Sethe had told her, but she was down to one herself—one alive."[20] The sentence shifts midway between a reported quotation and Sethe's silent inner qualification, "one alive, that is…" The text violates grammatical conventions that would cue the reader to the change in speaker or tense. By conflating multiple voices within a single sentence framework, Morrison resists the notion that historical memory can be cleanly attributed, cataloged, or distanced from. The very instability is the point: *Beloved* renders visible the layered, fractured way Black history is recalled, not through official record but through embedded, partial voices that more often than not speak in dissonance.

This formal refusal also contests the authority of the historical document, a founding pillar of white historical narrative. In the novel, the schoolteacher embodies this documentary function. His role is not only that of an agent of physical violence but as a figure of Enlightenment reason and record-keeping. He classifies slaves in "human traits" and "animal traits," instructing his students to do the same: "He'd talk and [his students would] write. Or he would read and they would write down what he said."[21] Writing thereby represents a weapon by alchemizing violence into information and lived experience into abstraction. Morrison answers this archival violence with a narrative mode that cannot be transcribed or reduced to mere cause-and-effect. Her storytelling exceeds what can be written on the schoolteacher's paper.

Most importantly, Morrison does not refute the schoolteacher's logic by proposing a cohesive counter-history. Instead, she constructs a narrative grammar that is resistant to totality, linearity, and even access. The reader is often left confused as to the timeline in which events occur and who is speaking at a particular moment. This is true particularly toward the end of the novel, when the voices of Beloved, Sethe, and Denver merge together in pages that form a typographically cohesive, unpunctuated, disorienting refrain: "I am *Beloved* and she is mine" gives way to "I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop."[22] Repetition, lack of punctuation, and lack of narrative anchoring make these passages unreadable by the terms of conventional narrative. This is not confusion; it is form as refusal. It is Morrison's means of resisting the transparent, sequential, and individualist grammar of Enlightenment narrative time.

This negation of narrative also functions politically: if white historical narrative depends on the promise of linearity, rationality, and closure—through which everything can be traced back to its source and enumerated in that order—then *Beloved* prevents that very possibility. Sethe's recollections of infanticide, for instance, fail to give rise to revelations or solutions. Rather, they spin in circles: "She could feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hand."[23] This is not a flashback. It is a haunting reappearance. The past is enacted in a sensory here-and-now that will not be walled from the future. Morrison's sentence structure does not merely report on trauma, but on the refusal of trauma to remain in the past.

20 Morrison, *Beloved*, 5.

21 Morrison, *Beloved*, 193.

22 Morrison, *Beloved*, 210.

23 Morrison, *Beloved*, 251.

Briefly put, *Beloved* does not so much symbolize the dislocations of Black existence after slavery—as it builds them into its syntax. Through unmarked shifts in time, voice, and narratorial level, Morrison performs an intervention against the very forms wherein official history gets written and recalled. Her syntax of refusal puts into view the limits of white historiography, replacing this text with a polyphonic, disoriented, and embodied form of Black temporal narrative. This is not a lack of structure so much as the presence of a counter-structure—one that seeks to disturb, to deny, and to redefine the possibilities of historical voice.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* complicates the notion of the womb as a purely biological or reproductive space by redefining it as a space of historical disturbance, ethical tension, and temporal rearrangement. The Black maternal body in *Beloved* is not merely the site where life begins—it is the site of struggle over slavery, time, memory, and resistance. The womb is not the place of linear genealogies; it is a border space in which Morrison rethinks time itself, derailing the reproductive from the chronological and instead insisting on rupture, re-entry, and refusal. Sethe's body is not merely productive of life; it becomes the vehicle through which life itself is redefined, withheld, or strategically undone.

Sethe's recollection of the theft of her breast milk anchors this refiguring: "After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for."[24] This is not recounted as sexual violence but as a theft of care, nourishment, and futurity. The brutality is not against Sethe, but against her to continue Black life on her own terms. Milk, frequently emblematic of care and continuity, is ripped away by a white supremacist structure that desires to regulate not only the Black body, but its possibilities across generations. Here, Morrison theatricalizes the break in the reproductive cycle: the intimate association of mother and child is breached by slavery's invasion of the womb and the temporality associated with it. As Asma Hichri has noted, "Sethe's hunger and emaciation thus signal her symbolic re-appropriation of her milk and her ink, the tools by which her identity was re-sited within the bounds of subalternity and servitude."[25] Such a characterization stresses how Sethe's body, particularly her milk, becomes not only a material resource, but a discursive instrument; an insistence upon ownership against the white historical and reproductive economy that seeks to erase her.

Notably, Sethe's memory is built through narrative retardation and recursive return, again subverting the logic of reproductive time. She declares, "Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me."[26] This is an assertion not only of maternal possession, but of temporal sovereignty. Sethe positions herself not just as biological source of life, but as keeper of embodied time. The assertion "nobody had her milk but me" requires ownership of the past and even the future through a refusal to allow time to be stolen or diverted by forces outside of herself. The Black womb is therefore a counter-archive, a container not of an inherited role but of historical consciousness.

This reinterpretation becomes more extreme in Morrison's retelling of the infanticide. Sethe does not merely lose control over her function of reproduction; she uses it as a weapon. In a scene refracted through indirect and piecemeal narrative, Morrison simply presents the killing without

24 Morrison, *Beloved*, 16.

25 Asma Hichri, "Hunger 'Beyond Appetite': Nurture Dialectics in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 44, no. 2–3 (2013): 207, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ari.2013.0013>.

26 Morrison, *Beloved*, 16.

moral evaluation as an act of preservation, as a disruption of linear reproductive temporality. Sethe is not continuing a line of forebears; she is consciously ending one under specific circumstances: a refutation of a future based on slavery. In this rejection, the womb is rendered a site not of continuity but of rupture. It is a hypothetical entry—one that, in Goffe's reading, retrieves "stolen life" through time's unwinding rather than submitting to its forward march.

This denial is not presented as atonement. Morrison does not offer the womb as a site of empowerment in a simple way. Rather, she presents it as a site of pain, memory, and contradiction. Sethe's body is referred to in terms that suggest historical scar tissue: "And he would bear no peace until he had moistened every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years."[27] The body here is not necessary but painful, its sense impaired by historical trauma. The female body, rather than being merely productive, becomes an artifact of violence and location of historical inscription.

The womb is also a portal within the very structure of the narrative. Beloved's re-appearance is not a flashback or a metaphor, but a literal haunting, a re-entry through time. Beloved returns not as a child remembered, but as a presence relived. She is not reborn; she re-appears, thus the womb is a space not of birth but of recursive haunting in another disruption of reproductive temporality. Beloved is not evidence of Sethe's maternal success or failure; she is evidence that time is not progressive, that trauma is not past, and that the body can be the means through which history re-manifests.

Whereas Sethe's womb is the site of rupture, Denver's experience is the slow reclamation of a future free of reproductive destiny. Denver's waiting, stasis, and tentative step outward are actions not of narrative progress but of stranded temporality. She is not propagating a lineage, but is reasserting time in delay and relation: "She waited a year. And the Sweet Home men abused cows while they waited with her."[28] Waiting is figured here a temporal gesture, not of stasis but refusal. Denver's time is fugitive, marooned – it does not work for history, but survives it. Morrison reformulates the Black womb not as a site of fertility, but as an invested temporal portal. It contains history. It contains disruption. It contains refusal. Through Sethe and Denver, Morrison resists any reading of the maternal that presumes progression, resolution, or natural order. Instead, she shapes the womb as a haunted and haunting space through which the future is not born but withheld, resisted, and reimagined.

In *Beloved*, Morrison creates a fugitive temporal rhythm that resists normative narrative time, and inhabits what Tao Leigh Goffe describes as "maroon time," that is, a speculative temporality inflected by historical fugitivity that is disjointed, slow. Rather than adhering to the pacing schemas of the European realist novel, rising action, climax, resolution, Morrison organizes her narrative through recursive returns, haunted stasis, spectral intrusions, and practices of deliberate waiting. Trauma is not merely depicted, but performed as the conditions of marooned Black time: denied, destabilized, and unmoored by capitalist and colonialist logics of productivity, linear progression, and closure. As argued by Richard Perez, "Morrison's fiction reorients the subject of capital from a hollow transactional mode of relation to an intersubjective engagement with temporal and

27 Morrison, *Beloved*, 18.

28 Morrison, *Beloved*, 11.

spatial processes that provoke critical reflection."[29] Recursive form and ghostly structure defeat historiography and capitalism's grasp of time—creating a literary space where public memory defies narrative closure mandated by profit and progress.

The pacing of the novel often resists haste, with Denver lingering within this maroon temporality as well. The waiting of Sethe's youngest daughter is long, even agonizing, but it is active: "She waited a year. And the Sweet Home men abused cows while they waited with her."[30] Denver's waiting is not only terror, but also a slow self-preservation opposed to the swift violence of the past. Her departure from the house at the end of the novel is important not as a gesture of resolution, but because it is the result of a long refusal to be rushed.

A particularly arresting formal instance of marooned time is found in Sixo's distorted pacing: "Time never worked the way Sixo thought… walked for seventeen hours, sat down for one, turned around and walked seventeen more."[31] This story, offhandedly recounted, whimsically defies the logic of efficient travel or practical time-usage. Yet implicit in it is a critique of plantation time. Sixo does not work on clocks or within other white structures of timekeeping. His way is his own, his rhythm illegible to the institution that seeks to discipline him. Morrison uses Sixo to literalize the fugitive body out of time—not timeless, but rather misaligned with normative rhythms.

Morrison employs spectral presence also to unsettle temporal order. Beloved's return is not the return of the ghost in a narrative sense. She is not a metaphor. She is physical and affective disturbance. She speaks present tense. She upsets chronology: "I am Beloved and she is mine," she repeats in the novel's chorus of voices. Her presence presses the open-ended past in the midst of the story's present. The corporeality of Beloved is inseparable from the temporal structure of the novel. She narrates, derails narrative trajectories, and reiterates trauma. In doing so, she is not a recurring character; she is the return, a figure through whom Morrison fragments time into haunting presentness.

Even the story is maroonedly paced. Morrison refuses exposition, allowing scenes to appear in a disorienting sequence. Things recur not for mere effect, but in order to be genuinely experienced again. Sethe's infanticide is not presented once and forgotten. Instead, it is approached piecemeal, delayed, interrupted, and retold from different viewpoints: "She could feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hand."[32] This information is not confined to a single climactic point. It infuses the novel's fabric, appearing unannounced through many pages after the reader has already been informed what happened. The form in this case is not simply nonlinear; it is recursive. Time recurs in waves, not lines.

Maroon time in *Beloved* is also embedded in the process of storytelling itself. Morrison resists the rapid exposition of most novels. Characters do not announce their motivations or tell complete stories. The reader must wait, circle back, read again. The effect is narrative pacing based on withholding and return. This measured rhythm is not simply aesthetic; it is ideological. It breaks with the reader's expectations of forwardness, thus demands an ethics of attention. The novel

29 Richard Perez, "The Debt of Memory: Reparations, Imagination, and History in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1–2 (Spring/Summer 2014): 192, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2014.0027>.

30 Morrison, *Beloved*, 11.

31 Morrison, *Beloved*, 21.

32 Morrison, *Beloved*, 251.

simply refuses to conclude. And as Morrison writes in the final lines: "It was not a story to pass on."[33] Yet this very refusal creates its own paused temporal condition. The story lingers – unsolved, uncleanly inherited, endless. Therefore, Morrison's orchestration of pauses, returns, and haunting presence offers a fugitive rhythm, invulnerable to white time and claimed by perseverance, delay, and non-coherence. *Beloved* does not move forward; it loops, moves within wounds and memory. It is within the fugitive rhythm that Morrison performs the grammar of maroon time.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is not a novel about telling history; it is a novel which disavows the forms in which history has traditionally been told. Through its recursive organization, spectral voice, and stranded pacing, Morrison dismantles the linear logic of Western chronology and builds an escapist narrative that inhabits what Tao Leigh Goffe identifies as "stolen life, stolen time." The text does not produce trauma as an event that has happened and is forgotten, but as an occurrence that continues unfolding, unresolved and unsettled. *Beloved* not only represents Black temporality, but rewrites it structurally, vocally, rhythmically, and grammatically.

At the center of Morrison's intervention is a refusal to let narrative serve as recovery. The novel resists the reader's investment in coherence, linear movement, and affective release. Events occur out of order, memory erupts uncalled-for, syntax bends toward internal voice and communal echo. Yet, this rebellion is not a departure from literary convention for its own sake. Rather, it is a challenge to Enlightenment narrative, which prizes order, linearity, and causality – precisely the forms that have erased, misrepresented, or contained Black life in hegemonic histories. What Morrison provides in place of this story is a text that waits, repeats, speaks in ghosted fragments. Sethe's infanticide, Denver's paralysis, Beloved's embodiment are not mere points of plot, but temporal maneuvers. The womb here does not produce linear descendants, but births rupture itself. The pace does not culminate in resolution, but lingers in delay and haunting. Morrison creates a new temporal ethics—one of return, not closure; one of rememory, not truth.

In *Beloved*, time is not a setting but a war zone. Morrison brings the form of the novel to bear the same scars, interruptions, and denials as the characters it seeks to evoke. By doing so, she provides us not merely with a chronicle of Black life post-slavery, but a revolutionary theory of Black time as felt, fractured, biding its time, and enduring. The outcome is not historical fiction. It is escaped storytelling, haunted, incomplete, and unencumbered.

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33 Morrison, *Beloved*, 274.

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