"Reclaiming Space: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis of Nature and Memory in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*"

Abdelghani El Mitry

ABSTRACT

This article explores the multifaceted concept of space in Toni Morrison's Beloved through a postcolonial ecocritical lens, focusing on how natural and domestic spaces serve as sites of memory, trauma, and healing for African American characters in the aftermath of slavery. The study examines three key spaces—the Ohio River, Baby Suggs' Clearing, and the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road—as symbolic realms where the characters navigate their fractured identities and confront the lingering ghosts of their past. The Ohio River emerges as a liminal space of rebirth and emancipation, while the Clearing represents a communal sanctuary for spiritual and emotional healing. The haunted house, on the other hand, embodies the inescapable past, where the trauma of slavery continues to haunt the present. Through these spaces, Morrison not only critiques the environmental and psychological scars of colonialism but also highlights the resilience and agency of her characters as they seek to reclaim their histories and identities. This article argues that Morrison's portrayal of space in Beloved underscores the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds, offering a profound commentary on the enduring impact of slavery and the possibility of redemption through nature and community.

Keywords: toni morrison, beloved, postcolonial ecocriticism, space, memory, trauma, healing, ohio river, baby suggs' clearing, haunted house, african american literature, slavery, environmental agency.

Classification: LCC Code: PS3563.O8749

Language: English

Great Britain Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573366
Print ISSN: 2515-5784
Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities & Social Science

Volume 25 | Issue 7 | Compilation 1.0

"Reclaiming Space: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis of Nature and Memory in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*"

Abdelghani El Mitry

ABSTRACT

This article explores the multifaceted concept of space in Toni Morrison's Beloved through a postcolonial ecocritical lens, focusing on how natural and domestic spaces serve as sites of memory, trauma, and healing for African American characters in the aftermath of slavery. The study examines three key spaces—the Ohio River, Baby Suggs' Clearing, and the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road—as symbolic realms where the characters navigate their fractured identities and confront the lingering ghosts of their past. The Ohio River emerges as a liminal space of rebirth and emancipation, while the Clearing represents a communal sanctuary for spiritual and emotional healing. The haunted house, on the other hand, embodies the inescapable past, where the trauma of slavery continues to haunt the present. Through these spaces, Morrison not only critiques the environmental and psychological scars of colonialism but also highlights the resilience and agency of her characters as they seek to reclaim their histories and identities. This article argues that Morrison's portrayal of space in Beloved underscores the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds, offering a profound commentary on the enduring impact of slavery and the possibility of redemption through nature and community.

Keywords: toni morrison, beloved, postcolonial ecocriticism, space, memory, trauma, healing, ohio river, baby suggs' clearing, haunted house, african american literature, slavery, environmental agency.

I. INTRODUCTION: *BELOVED:* A SPACE WHERE THE VOICELESS FIND THEIR VOICE

Beloved, published in 1987, stands as one of Toni Morrison's most acclaimed works. Within a year of its release, the novel earned the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and secured its place as a finalist for the National Book Award in 1987. The New York Times conducted a survey among writers and literary critics, ranking *Beloved* as the finest piece of American fiction spanning the years 1981 to 2006. This powerful narrative, set in the aftermath of the American Civil War, talks about a troubled family of former slaves living in Cincinnati, haunted by a malevolent spirit, and it "revolves around the wish to forget and a necessity to remember" (NaomiMandel 585).

The protagonist, Sethe (Margaret Garner), was born into slavery and escaped from Kentucky to Ohio in 1856. Despite nearly two decades of freedom, she remains captive to haunting memories of Sweet Home, the once-beautiful yet horrific farm where she endured the atrocities of slavery. The ghost of Sethe's deceased, nameless baby, engraved with the single word Beloved on its tombstone, continues to torment her household. Although Sethe strives to suppress the past, its echoes persistently reverberate in her memories and affect those around her. The arrival of a mysterious teenage girl, identifying herself as Beloved, triggers the eruption of Sethe's agonizing secret into the present.

Toni Morrison weaves a narrative that blends the visionary elements of legend with the undeniable truths of history. *Beloved* stands as an enduring masterpiece in American literature, highlighting

Morrison's profound storytelling and capturing the profound impact of slavery's legacy on women and their families. Morrison confirms: "I write for black women. We are not addressing the men, as some white female writers do. We are notattacking each other, as both black and white men do. Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving/loving way. They are writing to repossess, re-name, re-own." (N. McKay). Yet, Morrison refuses to identify her works as feminist, and when asked why? She answered:

> In order to be as free as I possibly can, in my own imagination, I can't take positions that are closed. Everything I've ever done, in the writing world, has been to expand articulation, rather than to close it, to open doors, sometimes, not even closing the book – leaving the endings open for reinterpretation, revisitation, a little ambiguity. (Jaffrey Zia)

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* stands as a literary masterpiece that transcends the boundaries of time and narrative, delving into the profound complexities of human experience. Within the intricate tapestry of this work, Morrison crafts a powerful exploration of identity, trauma, and the enduring legacy of slavery, for Morrison: "Modern life begins with slavery" (P. Gilroy). One of the striking dimensions of *Beloved* is its role as a sacred space, a literary sanctuary where the marginalized and voiceless slaves find resonance and, more importantly, discover the agency to articulate their silenced histories. This evocative narrative becomes a poignant testament to the transformative power of storytelling, where the unheard voices emerge from the shadows and claim their rightful place in the discourse of shared humanity. In the heart of Morrison's creation, *Beloved* becomes a sanctuary, a realm where the voiceless not only find their voices but also contribute to a collective and resonant chorus that echoes across the corridors of literature and history.

In Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the Ohio River, the sacred clearing of Baby Suggs, and the hauntingly evocative 124 house emerge as profound spaces that transcend mere physical settings. These spaces serve as poignant vessels for the expression of silenced voices and the narration of the African American experience during the post-slavery era. The Ohio River, a symbolic boundary between slavery and freedom, becomes a liminal space where characters confront the traumas of their past and forge a path toward self-discovery. Baby Suggs' clearing, a sacred sanctuary within the natural landscape, serves as a communal space for healing and spiritual revival, allowing the voiceless to reclaim their agency and articulate their stories. The haunted 124 house, shrouded in the lingering specter of the past, becomes a compelling backdrop where the ghosts of slavery and the unresolved traumas of its survivors find expression. Within these carefully crafted spaces, Morrison magnificently provides a platform for the voiceless to speak, ensuring that the African American characters of *Beloved* are not only heard but also empowered to narrate their intricate and often silenced histories. So how does Morrison portray water as a space of rebirth and emancipation for Sethe and her family? How nature is depicted as a space for healing through Baby Suggs clearing? And how is the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road transformed into a space of inescapable past in Morrison's *Beloved* ?

II. WATER AS A SPACE OF REBIRTH AND EMANCIPATION: THE OHIO RIVER

Life has its origins in water, and rivers play a crucial role in nurturing both human existence and culture. Humans not only rely on rivers for sustenance but also derive strength from them. Across various ancient cultures, a recurring theme is the veneration of a "mother river." The deep connection between rivers and black communities can be traced back to historical rivers such as the Nile, and Congo, with a tradition of profound respect towards these water bodies. Rivers symbolize both tranquility and turbulence, mirroring the ebb and flow of historical events. In the case of African Americans in the 19th century, the Ohio River held immense significance, representing life and redemption in their narrative.

> The Ohio River has historically represented freedom…The northern part of the state had

> underground railway stations and a history of black people escaping into Canada, but the southern part of the state is as much Kentucky as there is,complete with cross burnings. Ohio is a curious juxtaposition of what was ideal in this country and what was base. (C. Tate 119)

Tate presents a nuanced view of Ohio's historical significance in the context of American slavery and the quest for freedom. Tate highlights the Ohio River as a symbol of freedom, marking a physical and symbolic boundary between the slave states of the South and the free states of the North. This river, therefore, represents a critical juncture in the journey of enslaved African Americans seeking freedom, particularly through the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses used to escape to free states and Canada.The quote contrasts the northern and southern parts of Ohio to underscore the state's complex identity. In the north, Ohio is depicted as a beacon of hope for black people fleeing slavery, with its underground railway stations and a history of aiding their escape into Canada. This part of Ohio embodies the ideals of liberty and justice that are foundational to the American ethos.

Conversely, the southern part of Ohio is described as being "as much Kentucky as there is," alluding to its cultural and ideological alignment with the slave-holding South, complete with manifestations of racial hatred such as cross burnings. This starkly contrasts with the image of Ohio as a land of freedom and highlights the persistence of deeply entrenched racism and division, even in states that were nominally free. Tate concludes by reflecting on Ohio as a "curious juxtaposition" of America's highest ideals and its most base realities. This juxtaposition serves as a microcosm of the broader American experience, where the lofty ideals of freedom, equality, and justice coexist with the harsh realities of racism, division, and oppression. Ohio, in this sense, encapsulates the ongoing struggle to reconcile these conflicting aspects of the American identity and the continuous effort to live up to the nation's founding principles.

In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a post- slavery America, weaving a complex narrative of haunting histories and unrelenting struggles for identity and freedom. Among the various motifs that Morrison masterfully employs, water, and particularly the Ohio River, emerges as a symbolic space of profound significance. Within this aquatic realm, Morrison deftly explores the transformative power of water as a metaphor for rebirth and emancipation. The Ohio River, coursing through the narrative, takes on a dual nature, serving not only as a geographical boundary but also as a symbolic threshold between the shackles of slavery and the promise of liberation. This exploration of water as a catalyst for change becomes a central theme, as the river becomes a conduit through which characters like Sethe and her family navigate the complexities of their pasts, finding solace and emancipation in the ebb and flow of its currents. In this analysis, we delve into the symbolic depths of water as a space of rebirth and emancipation in Morrison's *Beloved*, uncovering the layers of meaning woven into the novel's narrative.

The Ohio River represents a boundary between slavery and freedom, and crossing it is a transformative experience for Sethe. The river is where Sethe's baby is born, symbolizing a new beginning:

> On a riverbank in the cool of a summer evening two women struggled under a shower of silvery blue. They never expected to see each other again in this world and at the moment couldn't care less.But there on a summer night surrounded by bluefern they did something together appropriately and well. A pateroller passing wouldhave sniggered to see two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws—a slave and a barefoot white woman with unpinned hair—wrapping a ten-minute-old baby in the rags they wore. But no pateroller came and no preacher. The water sucked and swallowed itself beneath them. There was nothing to disturb them at their work. So they did it appropriately and well. (Morrison, *Beloved* 84- 85)

The act of crossing the water is a pivotal moment for Sethe, as it represents her transition from the bondage of slavery to the promise of freedom. The water here is not just a physical barrier but a symbolic one, marking the boundary between two worlds and two states of being.The phrase "sucked and swallowed itself" suggests a kind of self-contained cycle, reminiscent of the natural processes of renewal and rebirth. Water, in many traditions, is associated with cleansing and new beginnings, and here it seems to be renewing itself, just as Sethe is seeking to renew her own life. The water's self-consuming action could also be seen as a metaphor for the way Sethe must consume her own past, confront it, and emerge anew on the other side.

The fact that "there was nothing to disturb them at their work" indicates a moment of peace and focus, a rare respite from the chaos and danger that have characterized Sethe's life up to this point. This tranquility allows Sethe to perform the task at hand "appropriately and well," which in this context means giving birth to her child and thus literally bringing new life into the world at the very moment she is seeking to rebirth her own life in freedom. Therefore, the theme of water as a space of rebirth in *Beloved* is reinforced by showing how the Ohio River serves as a natural force that aids in the characters' transformation. It is a place where the old can be left behind and the new can be embraced, where the characters can perform the work of self-renewal without the interference of the oppressive structures from which they are fleeing.

The Ohio River is also a source of sustenance and life, providing Sethe with the water she desperately needs after her arduous journey to freedom:

> She begged him for water and he gave her some of the Ohio in a jar. Sethe drank it all and begged more. The clanging was back in her head but she refused to believe that she had come all that way, endured all she had, to die on the wrong side of the river. (90)

This passage can be considered a powerful intersection of environmental, historical, and cultural narratives.The act of begging for water and receiving it from the Ohio River encapsulates the life-giving and sustaining properties of natural resources, which are often central to ecocritical readings. Water, in this context, is not merely a physical necessity for survival but also a symbol of the natural world's role in human liberation and transformation. The Ohio River, in particular, is emblematic of the boundary between the ecological spaces of slavery and freedom. It is a natural feature that has been imbued with profound social and historical significance due to its geographical location as a divider between slave and free states.

Sethe's consumption of the river water in a jar signifies her taking in the essence of freedom, as the river itself represents a threshold she must cross to achieve emancipation. The water from the Ohio River is thus not just hydrating her body but also symbolically nourishing her spirit and will to live as a free person. This act of drinking is a form of communion with the landscape that has witnessed the trauma of slavery and now participates in the rebirth of those who cross it.The "clanging" in Sethe's head can be interpreted as the psychological remnants of her traumatic past, which continue to haunt her even as she seeks to move beyond them. The refusal to die on the wrong side of the river is a testament to her determination to redefine her identity in relation to the land. It is a rejection of the colonial imposition that has dictated her life up to this point and an assertion of her agency in choosing where her life will be lived and how her story will be told.

In this light, Morrison's work at hand reflects the complex interplay between the environment and the postcolonial experience. It underscores the role of the natural world in the historical experiences of colonized peoples, serving both as a witness to their suffering and as a participant in their quest for autonomy and self-definition. The ecocritical lens allows us to see how Morrison weaves environmental elements into her narrative to enrich the experience of her characters, and behind them the experience of African Americans who suffered the atrocities of slavery. Morrison emphasizes the interconnecte- dness of the

characters with their environment. The natural world is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the process of healing and rebirth, Morrison narrates: "Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (261). The wave of sound that is "wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees" illustrates the power of nature to affect change and to resonate with the characters' emotional states. This wave of sound that "broke over Sethe" and caused her to "tremble like the baptized in its wash" aligns with the ecocritical notion that human emotions and experiences are deeply entwined with the non-human world.The baptismal imagery further reinforces the theme of rebirth. Baptism is a ritual of purification and a symbolic act of being born anew, which in the novel is paralleled by the characters' desire to cleanse themselves of the traumas of slavery and to emerge with a renewed sense of self. The natural setting of the Clearing, combined with the spiritual connotations of water, creates a space where personal and collective histories can be confronted.

Another aspect of water as a space of resurrection and rebirth in *Beloved* is the renaissance of Beloved from water like a child born from a watery sac, Morrison writes:

> A fully dressed woman walked out of the water. She barely gained the dry bank of the stream before she sat down and leaned against a mulberry tree. All day and all night she sat there, her head resting on the trunk in a position abandoned enough to crack the brim in her straw hat. Everything hurt but her lungs most of all. Sopping wet and breathing shallow she spent those hours trying to negotiate the weight of her eyelids. The day breeze blew her dress dry; the night wind wrinkled it. Nobody saw her emerge or came accidentally by. If they had, chances are they would have hesitated before approaching her. Not Because she was wet, or dozing or had what sounded like asthma, but because amid all that she was smiling. (50)

This passage from chapter five in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* presents a vivid image of a woman emerging from water, a symbol that is rich in meaning. From a postcolonial perspective, water in *Beloved* can be seen as a metaphor for the Middle Passage, the transatlantic slave trade route that forcibly brought Africans to the Americas. The woman's emergence from the water can be interpreted as a symbolic rebirth, an act of emerging from a history of oppression and the trauma of slavery into a new existence. This act of rebirth is not without its difficulties, as indicated by the woman's pain and the effort she expends just to keep her eyes open. The struggle to emerge and the subsequent rebirth can be seen as a metaphor for the broader African American experience of striving for a new identity and place in a post-slavery, postcolonial world.

From a green cultural studies perspective, water is often associated with life, cleansing, and renewal. Beloved's sitting by the mulberry tree, a symbol of growth and nurturing, further emphasizes the theme of rebirth. The natural elements—water, the tree, the day breeze, and the night wind—interact with the woman, affecting her physical state and contributing to her transformation. The ecocritical reading highlights the interconnectedness of the human and non-human worlds and suggests that the environment itself participates in the Beloved's rebirth and healing process. Moreover, the fact that the woman is smiling amid her pain and struggle suggests a complex emotional state, one that acknowledges the hardship of her past while also embracing the potential for hope and renewal. This smile could be interpreted as an act of resistance against the dehumanizing experiences of her past, asserting her humanity and resilience in the face of suffering.

What is more, in an otherworldly portrayal of the fluid boundary between the earthly realm and the afterlife, Sethe and her daughter remain spiritually connected, with the departed spirit lingering "in the water under the bridge" (214). Interpreters discern in this chapter a scene evoking a collective unconscious, a hazy

recollection embedded in the black diaspora's shared memory—the dispersal of Africans via ships to slave ports in the New World. Despite Beloved's lack of direct knowledge about the harrowing journey, her unity with the deceased compels her to undergo the confined and oppressive conditions of black bodies in the hold of the slaves' ship.

The reference to the departed spirit "in the water under the bridge" suggests a connection between the character Beloved and the element of water as a site of memory and return. Water, in this context, is not just a physical space but also a metaphysical one where the spirits of those who have passed away linger, unable to fully detach from the world they have left behind. This lingering presence in the water signifies the unresolved traumas and the continuous impact of the past on the present. Additionally, the bridge becomes a liminal space where Beloved attempts to join Sethe in the water. This liminality reflects the boundary between life and death, the past and the present. The failure to connect underscores the challenges of reconciling with a traumatic history and the difficulty of finding closure.

Furthermore, the theme of water in *Beloved* can be considered as a symbol of sustenance and struggle. the theme of water underscores the characters' fraught relationship with the natural world, one that is deeply intertwined with the experience of enslavement and the colonial exploitation of both land and people:

> He, Sixo and both of the Pauls satunder Brother pouring water from a gourd over their heads, and through eyes streaming with well water, they watched the confusion of tassels in the field below. It had been hard, hard, hard sitting there erect as dogs, watching corn stalks dance at noon. The water running over their heads made it worse. (27)

The act of pouring water from a gourd over the heads of Sweet Home plantation's slaves while sitting under the tree named Brother suggests a connection to the natural world and a momentary respite from their laborious existence. The water, a source of life and renewal, contrasts with the oppressive heat of the day, symbolizing the harsh conditions under which the enslaved individuals are forced to work.

The water's flow over the slaves' heads, while potentially refreshing, is described as exacerbating the difficulty of their situation, indicating that even elements of nature that should provide relief are transformed into sources of discomfort by the conditions of their enslavement. This reflects the postcolonial ecocritical idea that the environment, while inherently neutral or even nurturing, can be experienced negatively by those who are oppressed or marginalized.Moreover, the characters' connection to the land and the natural elements like water and corn is complex. While they rely on the land for sustenance and have an intimate knowledge of it, their relationship is mediated by the violence and control of slavery. The corn stalks they watch, for instance, are part of the plantation economy that exploits both the land and the people. The water, in this case, becomes a reminder of their lack of autonomy, as even their interactions with the environment are dictated by the needs and desires of their oppressors.

Beloved is written in remembrance of the lives of sixty million Africans, including those lost during the Middle Passage, as well as others who survived only to endure the cruelties of slavery. Morrison gives voice to these silenced spirits to narrate their stories and resurrect them from historical amnesia. Water is a symbol of rebirth and also a synonym of the dehumanizing effects of slavery, the maternal bond, and the struggle for identity:

> She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island.The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names,she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around.Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe." (62)

Nan's words to Sethe convey the brutal reality that both Sethe's mother and Nan were subjected to repeated sexual assaults by the crew during the Middle Passage, the sea voyage that brought them from Africa to America as slaves. The phrase "together from the sea" suggests a shared origin and a bond formed through the collective trauma of the transatlantic slave trade.

The act of Sethe's mother "throwing away" the children born from these assaults signifies a form of resistance. By refusing to accept or name these children, she rejects the violation and the offspring that resulted from it, which she could not view as her own under such circumstances. This act of discarding is a tragic assertion of agency in a situation where enslaved women had very little control over their bodies and lives.In stark contrast, Sethe is the child her mother kept, the one she "gave the name of the black man" and embraced with love. This distinction highlights the importance of parentage, naming, and acceptance in the formation of identity. Sethe's mother's decision to name her after her father and to physically embrace her signifies an acknowledgment of Sethe as her legitimate child, one born out of a consensual relationship, presumably with a black man who was not part of the crew.

Nan's repetition of "Never. Never." emphasizes the finality and the depth of Sethe's mother's rejection of the other children. It also underscores the emotional weight of the decision to keep Sethe, which is further amplified by Nan's insistence, "Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe," as if to ensure that Sethe understands the significance of her own existence and the choices her mother made.This passage is a powerful example of Morrison's ability to convey the complexities of slavery's legacy, the nuances of motherhood under such oppressive conditions, and the enduring quest for personal identity amidst a history of violence and loss. The Middle Passage, water, and the sea are other witnesses on the history of the oppressed and their White oppressors.

In Morrison's *Beloved*, the river and the Sea Islands could have functioned as refuge for runaway slaves, offering a potentially safer and less detectable route to freedom, away from the dangers and obstacles that Paul D and other slaves encountered on their journey to freedom, "Ifthey had known about it, they would have avoided not only Alfred And the beautiful feldspar, but Savannah too and headed for the SeaIslands on the river that slid down from the Blue Ridge Mountains.But they didn't know" (111).

To conclude, In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, water serves as a powerful and multifaceted symbol, representing both life and death, freedom and confinement. While the novel primarily focuses on the experiences of African American slaves and the haunting legacy of slavery, the theme of water offers a lens through which to examine their relationship with the environment. African American slaves are depicted as environmentally attached through their connection to water sources. The characters in *Beloved* often find solace, healing, and a sense of community near bodies of water. For example, Sethe, the protagonist, escapes to the riverbank with her newborn daughter Denver, seeking refuge and a connection to the natural world. The river becomes a space of cleansing and rejuvenation, representing both the trauma of slavery and the possibility of spiritual renewal. The water here is a life-giving force, present at the moment of Denver's birth, and it is undisturbed by the societal structures that oppress Sethe. Additionally, water in the novel is associated with memories and ancestral ties. The character of Sethe is haunted by the memory of her traumatic escape across the Ohio River, where she attempts to find freedom for herself and her children. This traumatic water crossing becomes a central motif, and the river itself becomes a repository of collective memories for the community.

Furthermore, the character Beloved, who represents the spirit of Sethe's deceased daughter, is associated with water and often described as "watery." Beloved's presence blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead, symbolizing the enduring impact of slavery on both the individual and the community. She is seen engaging with the water in a creek, gazing at her reflection and

touching the water's surface, which ripples and folds, suggesting a sense of unity with the natural world.

III. NATURE AS A SPACE FOR HEALING: BABY SUGGS AND THE CLEARING

In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the complex interplay between nature and the characters' healing processes takes center stage, offering a profound exploration of the transformative power embedded within the natural world. This part of the study delves into the pivotal role of nature as a space for healing, focusing specifically on two emblematic elements: Baby Suggs and the Clearing. Through this element, Morrison weaves a narrative that transcends the real and delves into the idyllic imagined spaces, portraying nature as not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the characters' journey towards liberation and self-discovery. The exploration of this natural space unfolds a nuanced understanding of how the environment, in its various forms, becomes an essential element for healing and reclaiming agency, particularly for the enslaved individuals grappling with the haunting legacy of their past. So, how does Morrison depict natural spaces, such as the Clearing, as a place for healing the wounds inflicted by the traumatic experience of slavery on the characters in *Beloved*? Additionally, how does this space portray African Americans in the novel as environmentally connected individuals and green agents?

To start with, the Clearing is a secluded area in the forest where Baby Suggs, a spiritual leader and former slave, holds gatherings for the black community. It is a place of emotional and spiritual healing, where the characters can connect with nature and each other away from the oppressive structures of slavery and racism. The clearing is also a space which connects African slaves to their African roots and African heritage, as RachelElizabeth Harding confirms:

> [African] religions all reflect a powerful, shielding spirit whose roots and branches represent the links between the spiritual and material worlds, as well as the connections between living human beings and their ancestors. The Africans who came across the Atlantic as slaves carried with them this tradition of recognizing a sacred tree as the dwelling of a protective divinity and as a symbol of their own relationship to spirit and to lineage. (268)

Harding highlights the profound spiritual and cultural significance of trees within African religions, emphasizing their role as symbols of connectivity and protection. This symbolism is deeply rooted in the belief that trees serve as a bridge between the spiritual and material realms, as well as between the living and their ancestors. The sacred tree, in this context, is not merely a physical entity but a manifestation of a protective divinity that safeguards and guides the community. This belief system, carried by Africans across the Atlantic during the transatlantic slave trade, underscores the resilience of African spiritual traditions and their ability to provide solace and a sense of belonging in the face of the dehumanizing experience of slavery. The sacred tree thus becomes a potent symbol of the enslaved Africans' enduring connection to their spiritual heritage and lineage, offering a source of strength and identity amidst the brutal dislocations of the slave experience. Harding underscores the importance of understanding the spiritual and cultural practices of African peoples as dynamic and living traditions that have played a crucial role in shaping the identities and resilience of African diasporic communities.

From an ecocritical standpoint, the Clearing represents a space of environmental purity and sanctuary, contrasting with the human-dominated and often exploitative environments that the characters have endured. Also, the Clearing can be seen as a reclaimed space where the characters assert their autonomy and identity. It is a refuge from the dehumanizing experiences of slavery, where they can engage with the natural world on their own terms. This act of reclamation is a form of resistance against the colonial mindset that views land as a resource to be owned and controlled. In the Clearing, the characters find a sense of belonging and community that is not dictated by the colonial power structures.

The Clearing also symbolizes a return to a more harmonious relationship with the land, which is a key aspect of many indigenous and pre-colonial cultures disrupted by colonialism. Baby Suggs' role as a preacher in the Clearing underscores the importance of oral traditions and communal gatherings in fostering a collective identity that is deeply connected to the land.Furthermore, the Clearing can be interpreted as a space of ecological healing, where the natural world provides solace and restoration to those who have been psychologically and physically scarred by the brutality of slavery. The forest itself becomes a character, offering a sense of peace and continuity that contrasts with the characters' turbulent pasts.

For Sethe, the protagonist of the novel, the Clearing is a natural space where she can heal from the wounds of loss, she felt towards Baby Suggs. The Clearing is a powerful communal and natural space which provides solace and the possibility of recovery. Sethe's yearning for the Clearing and the memory of Baby Suggs' vibrant spirit illustrates the enduring impact of her legacy and the community's need for a space where they can come together to heal and honor their past:

> Nine years without the fingers or the voice of Baby Suggs was too much. And words whispered in the keeping room were too little. The butter- smeared face of a man God made none sweeter than demanded more: an arch built or a robe sewn. Some fixing ceremony. Sethe decided to go to the Clearing, back where Baby Suggs had danced in sunlight. (Morrison, *Beloved*86)

This quote encapsulates the profound sense of loss and the need for healing that permeates the novel. The absence of Baby Suggs, a matriarchal figure and spiritual healer, is deeply felt by Sethe, the protagonist. Baby Suggs' fingers and voice symbolize her nurturing touch and wisdom, which provided comfort and guidance to the community. The "nine years" without her presence underscores a prolonged period of grief and disconnection from the solace that Baby Suggs once offered.The "words whispered in the keeping room" suggest the inadequacy of quiet, private mourning and the need for a more significant, communal form of healing. The reference to the "butter-smeared face of a man" evokes the memory of a loved one, possibly a reference to Halle, Sethe's husband, who is remembered with fondness and whose absence also demands recognition and a form of closure.

Sethe's decision to return to the Clearing, where Baby Suggs once "danced in sunlight," indicates a desire to reconnect with the healing power of this natural space. The Clearing, as a place of communal gathering and spiritual release, represents a space where the community could openly express their emotions and find collective healing. The mention of "danced in sunlight" conveys a sense of freedom and joy that was once experienced there, contrasting with the darkness of their past traumas.The "fixing ceremony" Sethe seeks is a ritual of repair, a way to mend the emotional and spiritual wounds left by the absence of Baby Suggs and the horrors of slavery. This passage highlights the importance of ritual, community, and connection to nature in the process of healing. It also reflects the characters' ongoing struggle to reconcile their painful histories with their present lives and their search for a way to move forward.

Moreover, the Clearing is a sacred space of communal healing and emotional release for the formerly enslaved. Baby Suggs, the spiritual leader of the community, uses the Clearing to facilitate a ritual that allows each group within the community—children, men, and women—to express a range of emotions that were often suppressed under the dehumanizing conditions of slavery:

> When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing—a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land inland in the first place. In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees.

After situating herself on a huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggsbowed her head and prayed silently. The company watched her from the trees. They knew she was ready when she put her stick down.Then she shouted, "Let the children come!" and they ran from the trees toward her.

> "Let your mothers hear you laugh," she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling.
>
> Then "Let the grown men come," she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees.
>
> "Let your wives and your children see you dance," she told them,and groundlife shuddered under their feet.
>
> Finally she called the women to her. "Cry," she told them. "For The living and the dead. Just cry." And without covering their eyes the women let loose. (87-88)

The Clearing itself is described as a "wide-open place cut deep in the woods," suggesting a hidden sanctuary that is both part of the natural world and separate from the everyday spaces controlled by white society. The fact that it is known only to deer and the unnamed individuals who cleared it implies a connection to a time before the current community, perhaps even to a time before slavery, and to the natural world that exists beyond human affairs.Baby Suggs' role in this space is central. She is described as "holy," indicating her spiritual authority and the reverence the community holds for her. Her actions are deliberate and ritualistic, from the silent prayer to the placement of her stick, signaling her readiness to begin the ceremony.

The call-and-response structure of the ritual is significant. Baby Suggs summons each group to perform an act that affirms their humanity. She invites the children to laugh, as an expression of joy and innocence that slavery attempted to quash. The laughter of children symbolizes hope and the future.The men are called to dance, as an act of physical freedom and self-expression. Dancing allows them to reclaim their bodies, which were treated as property under slavery, and to demonstrate strength and resilience in front of their families. Finally, the women are told to cry for the living and the dead. This is a profound moment of collective mourning and catharsis, acknowledging the immense loss and suffering they have endured, as well as a space to grieve openly without fear of retribution or judgment. The Clearing, then, is a place where the community can perform these acts of emotional liberation, away from the white gaze. It is a space where they can be fully human, where they can express the full range of human emotions—joy, pride, sorrow—that were often denied to them. The passage also highlights the inter-connectedness of the community. The adults cannot help but smile at the children's laughter, and the ground itself "shuddered under their feet."

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved there* is a complex interplay of hope, disillusionment, and the search for solace in the aftermath of trauma. Baby Suggs, a source of strength for the formerly enslaved community, experiences a crisis of faith following the arrival of her daughter-in-law, Sethe. The "Clearing," which once represented a place of healing and spiritual rejuvenation, becomes a symbol of lost grace and the limits of faith in the face of overwhelming suffering:

> Baby Suggs, holy, believed she had lied.There was no grace—imaginary or real—and no sunlit dance in aClearing could change that. Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived. Yet it was to the Clearing that Sethe determined to go—to pay tribute to Halle. Before the light changed, while it was still the green blessed place she remembered: misty with plant steam and the decay of berries. (89)

The phrase "Baby Suggs, holy," underscores her revered status within the community, but the revelation that she "believed she had lied" suggests a profound sense of betrayal within herself. The lie pertains to the promise of grace, which she no longer believes exists. The Clearing, where she led her community in rituals of dance

and emotional release, was supposed to be a space where the scars of slavery could be momentarily forgotten and where grace could be found. However, the harsh realities that followed Sethe's arrival—most notably, the trauma of Sethe's past and the ghostly presence that haunts 124 Bluestone Road—shatter Baby Suggs' belief in the possibility of such grace.

The "sunlit dance in a Clearing" symbolizes the moments of joy and communal connection that Baby Suggs facilitated, but she now sees these efforts as futile in the face of the relentless pain that her community endures. The "collapse" of her faith, love, imagination, and heart speaks to the emotional and spiritual exhaustion that comes from bearing witness to so much suffering. Despite Baby Suggs' loss of faith, Sethe is drawn to the Clearing to pay tribute to her husband, Halle. The Clearing still holds significance for Sethe as a "green blessed place," a memory untainted by the traumas that have unfolded since. The "misty with plant steam and the decay of berries" evokes a sense of both life and decay, reflecting the natural cycle of growth and death, and perhaps metaphorically, the cycle of pain and healing.

Sethe's determination to visit the Clearing before the "light changed" indicates a desire to reconnect with a time of perceived purity and hope, to honor Halle, and perhaps to find a measure of the grace that Baby Suggs has declared nonexistent. This act of tribute is Sethe's way of seeking closure and attempting to reconcile the beauty of her memories of the Clearing with the harsh realities of her present struggles and the traumas of her past.

Furthermore, the novel at hand captures the essence of the Clearing as a space of communal catharsis and the pivotal role Baby Suggs played in facilitating this process.*Beloved* evokes the powerful sense of place and memory associated with the Clearing,it underscores the importance of having a safe space to express emotions freely and the need for a compassionate leader to help navigate the journey towards healing, because, "In the Clearing, Sethe found Baby's old preaching rock and remembered the smell of leaves simmering in the sun, thunderous feet and feet and the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs of the chestnuts. WithBaby Suggs' heart in charge, the people let go" (94). Sethe's recollection of "Baby's old preaching rock" serves as a tangible connection to Baby Suggs, who is a maternal figure and spiritual leader for the community. The rock symbolizes the foundation and strength of Baby Suggs' influence, as well as the stability she provided to those around her.

The sensory details of "the smell of leaves simmering in the sun" and "the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs of the chestnuts" create a vivid and immersive atmosphere. These elements highlight the Clearing as a place alive with energy and transformation, where the natural environment responds to the collective emotions of the people gathered there.The phrase "With Baby Suggs' heart in charge" personifies her heart as the driving force behind the community's ability to "let go." It suggests that Baby Suggs' compassion, wisdom, and spiritual leadership were instrumental in allowing the people to release their pent-up emotions, whether it be pain, sorrow, or joy. Her heart represents the emotional core of the community, guiding them through the process of healing and finding some semblance of peace.

In essence, Morrison speaks to the core struggle of the characters in *Beloved* to not only survive the horrors of slavery but to also find a way to live with the freedom they have fought so hard to achieve. She underscores the idea that true freedom encompasses both the physical and the psychological, and that the latter can be a more arduous and enduring battle. Sethe "Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing;claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (95). The distinction between physical liberation and psychological or emotional emancipation is another profound theme in *Beloved*. The process of "claiming oneself" is depicted as a gradual and multifaceted journey that goes beyond the mere act of escaping physical bondage.

The phrase "Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself"

suggests that the protagonist's self-possession is a collective experience as much as it is an individual one. The reference to "124" and "the Clearing" signifies the importance of place in this process. "124" is the address of Sethe's home, a space that has been both a sanctuary and a site of haunting, while "the Clearing" is a communal natural space where the characters gather for spiritual and emotional healing under the guidance of Baby Suggs. To Sethe, the Clearing is essential for her physical healing and psychological liberation.

The distinction between "freeing yourself" and "claiming ownership of that freed self" highlights the two stages of liberation. The first stage, "freeing yourself," refers to the physical escape from slavery, a tangible and immediate form of liberation. However, the second stage, "claiming ownership of that freed self," is more complex and involves an internal journey towards self-realization and autonomy. This internal emancipation requires one to confront and process the psychological scars of enslavement, to rebuild a sense of identity that is not defined by the trauma of the past, and to assert one's agency and worth in a world that has dehumanized and objectified them.

The Clearing represents a place that holds historical and emotional significance for the characters. It underscores the importance of community and the act of caring for one another as a means of healing from the wounds of the past, Morrison writes: "We must look a sight, she thought, and closed her eyes to see it:the three women in the middle of the Clearing, at the base of the rockwhere Baby Suggs, holy, had loved. One seated, yielding up her throat to the kind hands of one of the two kneeling before her" (97). This quote is rich with symbolism and speaks to the themes of healing, community, and the reclaiming of self that are central to the novel. The image of Sethe, Beloved, and Denver in the Clearing, a place of spiritual significance and communal gathering, is a powerful representation of the support and solidarity that the characters find in each other as they work through their traumatic pasts.

The Clearing is where Baby Suggs, the spiritual mother of the community, preached and where she encouraged the formerly enslaved to love themselves—a radical act after a life of being treated as property. The reference to Baby Suggs and the love she embodied sets a tone of reverence and continuity, suggesting that the healing practices she initiated in the Clearing continue to resonate with the characters.The woman seated and "yielding up her throat to the kind hands" symbolizes vulnerability and trust. The throat can be seen as a metaphor for voice and self-expression, and in yielding it up, the woman is allowing herself to be cared for and to potentially find her voice again after being silenced by the trauma of slavery. The "kind hands" represent the gentle and nurturing support of the community, which is essential for individual healing.Sethe's thought, "We must look a sight," indicates an awareness of how they might appear to an outsider, but her closing her eyes to "see it" suggests that the true significance of this moment is not in how it looks but in how it feels. It is an intimate and transformative experience that transcends the visual and is deeply felt within the community of women.

The Clearing and the natural world are spaces of healing for the living and spaces of honor for the dead. The Clearing is an important place for the Black community, but, also, a space of tension between African American cultural practices and the imposed rules of white society. Upon the death of Baby Suggs:

> Sethe had no instructions except "Take her to the Clearing," which he tried to do,but was prevented by some rule the whites had invented about where the dead should rest. Baby Suggs went down next to the baby with its throat cut—a neighborliness that Stamp wasn't sure had Baby Suggs Approval. (171)

The Clearing is a significant location within the novel even for the dead, a space where the community, particularly the formerly enslaved, could gather for spiritual and emotional healing led by Baby Suggs, who is a central figure of solace and guidance. Sethe's simple instruction to "Take her to the Clearing" upon Baby Suggs'

death signifies a desire to honor her in a place that held profound meaning for her and the community she nurtured. However, the imposition of "some rule the whites had invented about where the dead should rest" represents the ongoing control and interference of white society, even in death. This rule is an extension of the systemic oppression that the characters have faced throughout their lives, dictating their actions and undermining their autonomy even in their mourning and burial practices.

The juxtaposition of Baby Suggs' burial next to the baby with its throat cut is a stark reminder of the violence and trauma that the characters have endured. The "neighborliness" of their final resting places is questioned by Stamp Paid (the former slave who smuggled Sethe and her family across the Ohio River into Cincinnati), who doubts whether Baby Suggs would have approved of being buried next to the evidence of such a horrific act. This doubt reflects the complexity of emotions and relationships within the community, as well as the difficulty in finding peace and closure after a life marked by such brutality. This is another illustration of the struggle for self-determination and the right to honor one's dead in a way that is meaningful to the community, as opposed to conforming to the dictates of an oppressive society. It also underscores the deep scars left by slavery and the challenges of reconciling a painful past with the desire for a respectful and dignified remembrance of loved ones.

In summary, the Clearing in *Beloved* is a potent symbol of resistance, healing, and reconnection with the natural world. It stands as a testament to the resilience of the characters and their ability to carve out spaces of freedom and self-expression within a postcolonial landscape marked by trauma and displacement.Toni Morrison's characters in *Beloved* exhibit a profound environmental attachment, particularly in relation to the Clearing, which serves as a space of spiritual and emotional significance. The Clearing is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the lives of the characters, offering a place of solace and communal connection that is deeply intertwined with the natural world. The environmental attachment of Morrison's characters is evident in the way they interact with the Clearing. It is a place of sensory experiences, where the characters are attuned to the sounds, sights, and smells of nature. The Clearing is a living, breathing entity that responds to and reflects the characters' emotions and states of being, making it an essential element in their journey toward healing, growth, love, fulfillment, and reclaiming their lives. As Barbara Christian notes: "Morrison views humans as part nature and nature as part of human beings; consequently, each person has an inherent need for growth, love, and fulfillment" (qtd, in Wallace and Armbruster 217).

IV. BELOVED AS A SPACE OF AN INESCAPABLE PAST: THE GHOST AND THE HAUNTED 124 HOUSE

The haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road,in Toni Morrison's Beloved, serves as a symbol of the inescapable past, particularly the traumatic legacy of slavery. This space can be analyzed as both a physical and psychological environment that embodies the scars of colonial history and the ongoing struggle for identity and agency in the aftermath of slavery. So, Does Morrison succeed in portraying the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road as a space of an inescapable past? Additionally, how can the presence of the ghost in this space be considered a form of environmental agency?

The haunted house itself, as a physical structure, is a repository of memories and experiences. It is where Sethe and her family lived, where she made the harrowing decision to kill her own child to protect her from the horrors of slavery, and where the ghost of her deceased daughter, Beloved, manifests. The haunting of 124 is a constant reminder that the past is not dead; it is not even past, as William Faulkner famously wrote. The ghost represents the trauma that continues to pervade the lives of those who have suffered under the dehumanizing institution of slavery. The environment of 124 Bluestone Road is not just a backdrop but an active participant in the narrative. The house's response to the characters' emotions and the ghost's presence suggests a

form of environmental agency. The natural world in *Beloved* is not passive; it bears witness to the atrocities of slavery and carries the weight of history.

The house at 124 Bluestone Road is a space wherein power dynamics and the struggle to reclaim identity unfold in a world shaped by colonial forces.The characters in *Beloved* are not only haunted by personal memories but also by the collective history of their people. The haunted house at 124 becomes a microcosm of the larger world, where the characters must navigate the complexities of their past and seek a way to move forward:

> The article on "Haunting" in the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* says that tradition established two main factors in haunting: an old house or other locale and restlessness of a spirit. The first represents an unbroken link with the past, the second is believed to be caused by remorse over an evil life or by the shock of violent death. (qtd. in Carol E. Schmudde 409)

The concept of haunting is deeply rooted in tradition, which identifies two primary elements: an old house or locale and the restlessness of a spirit. The old house or locale serves as a tangible connection to the past, embodying history and memories that transcend generations. This physical manifestation of history provides a setting where past events continue to resonate in the present, creating a space where the past is not entirely past but lingers on, influencing current perceptions and experiences. The enduring nature of such structures allows them to become repositories of collective memory and personal histories, making them ideal settings for hauntings.The restlessness of a spirit, on the other hand, is often attributed to unresolved issues from the spirit's lifetime, such as remorse over misdeeds or the trauma of a violent death. This aspect of haunting emphasizes the emotional and psychological dimensions of unresolved past events. Spirits are depicted as unable to find peace due to their inability to reconcile with their actions or the circumstances of their demise. This restlessness is a manifestation of the unresolved, the unacknowledged, or the repressed, seeking acknowledgment or resolution. It suggests a need for closure, not only for the spirit but also for those who are haunted, as the presence of such spirits often forces confrontation with uncomfortable truths or forgotten histories.

Together, these elements create a narrative framework that explores themes of memory, guilt, and the impact of history on the present. Hauntings, in this traditional sense, become a metaphor for the ways in which the past continues to influence the present, often in ways that are unsettling or unresolved. They challenge the living to confront what has been left behind, suggesting that ignoring or forgetting the past does not free one from its influence. Instead, acknowledging and engaging with these lingering presences can lead to a deeper understanding of both personal and collective histories.

The haunted house also serves as a metaphor for the characters' psyches. The fragmented and disjointed nature of their thoughts and memories reflects the brokenness of their spirits and the difficulty of piecing together a coherent identity after the trauma of enslavement. The community's response to the house's haunting underscore the social dimension of the struggle, highlighting the need for collective healing and the importance of community support in overcoming the shadows of the past.

Morrison uses the natural landscape around 124 to create a space that is rich with symbolic meaning, reflecting the themes of memory, trauma, and the search for identity that run throughout the novel, as the characters grapple with the haunting legacy of slavery and its impact on their lives and relationships. Skillfully, Morrison prepares the surroundings of 124 to be overloaded with historical events, and symbolism:

> Back beyond 124 was a narrow field that stopped itself at a wood. On the yonder side of these woods, a stream. In these woods, between the field and the stream, hidden by post oaks, five boxwood bushes, planted in a ring, had started stretching towards each other four feet off the ground to form a round,

> empty room seven feet high, its walls fifty inches of murmuring leaves. (Morrison, *Beloved*28)

The space around 124 is rich with representations of the past, the natural world, and the concept of a liminal space.Firstly, the description of the landscape around 124 creates a sense of isolation and boundary. The "narrow field that stopped itself at a wood" suggests a transition from the domestic space of the house to the wildness of nature. This transition can be seen as a metaphor for the characters' journey from the horrors of their enslaved past to the possibility of freedom and the unknown future.The "yonder side of these woods" and the stream represent a further boundary, perhaps one between the world of the living and the world of the dead, or between the harsh reality of the characters' lives and a more peaceful, natural state. Water in literature often symbolizes cleansing and renewal, and the stream may represent the potential for the characters to wash away the traumas of their past.

Furthermore, the "five boxwood bushes, planted in a ring" are particularly evocative. The circle is a universal symbol of unity, wholeness, and infinity. In this context, the ring of bushes could represent the unbroken connection between the characters and their ancestors, as well as the cyclical nature of life and history. The bushes stretching toward each other to form an "empty room" suggest a space that is both protective and secretive—a place where one can be surrounded by the natural world and yet hidden from the outside. Also, the "round, empty room seven feet high, its walls fifty inches of murmuring leaves" is a space that is alive with memory and sound. The murmuring leaves could be interpreted as the whispered stories of the past, the voices of those who have gone before, and the collective memory of the community. This hidden room is a sanctuary, a place for reflection and perhaps for spiritual communion, where the characters can connect with their history and with each other on a deeper level.In the context of the novel, this space could also be seen as a representation of the characters' inner lives—their thoughts, fears, and desires that are hidden from the world. It is a space where they can confront their traumas and perhaps find some measure of peace or understanding.

In the novel at hand, Morrison takes her readers into a journey of memories and the past's intrusion into the present. The ghost represents the inescapable legacy of slavery and the personal traumas that the characters carry with them. It also touches on the idea of home and the ways in which the characters find comfort or discomfort in their surroundings. *Beloved* represents an exploration of how individuals and communities deal with the scars of their collective history:

> Whatever they were or might have been, Paul D messed them up for good. With a table and a loud male voice he had rid 124 of its claim to local fame. Denver had taught herself to take pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped on them; the assumption that the haunting was done by an evil thing looking for more. None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but knowing the things behind things. Her brothers had known, but it scared them; Grandma Baby knew, but it saddened her. None could appreciate the safety of ghost company. Even Sethe didn't love it. She just took it for granted—like a sudden change in the weather. (37)

This quote delves into the complex relationship Sethe and her family have with the supernatural presence in their home at 124 Bluestone Road. The passage reflects on the aftermath of Paul D's actions, which have disrupted the haunting that gave the house its "local fame." Paul D's use of "a table and a loud male voice" to expel the ghost represents a forceful, masculine intervention into a space that had been defined by a feminine spirit—the ghost of Sethe's deceased daughter. His actions are described as having "messed them up for good," suggesting a permanent alteration of the household's dynamics and the loss of something that had become an integral part of their lives.

Denver, Sethe's daughter, has a unique perspective on the haunting. She had come to take "pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped

on them," indicating that the community's fear and judgment had become a source of identity for her. The haunting set them apart, and Denver found value in that distinction. The "downright pleasure of enchantment" that Denver speaks of suggests an intimate connection with the supernatural, a deeper understanding of "the things behind things," which is the hidden reality beneath the surface of everyday life.

The reactions of other characters to the ghost are varied. Denver's brothers were afraid, while Baby Suggs, her grandmother, was saddened by the presence. These differing responses highlight the individual ways in which people cope with trauma and the supernatural. Denver's assertion that "None could appreciate the safety of ghost company" reveals her own comfort with the ghost, which she sees as protective rather than threatening.Sethe's relationship with the ghost is more ambivalent. She doesn't love the presence but has come to "take it for granted," suggesting a resignation to the haunting as an inescapable aspect of her reality, much like the trauma of her past. The comparison to "a sudden change in the weather" implies that the haunting is a natural, if unpredictable, part of her environment. The shadow of the past embodied by the presence of the ghost, and the multiple reactions of 124 residents towards it, represent the multiplicity of African American community's acceptance or rejection of their history and the tragedies which accompanied it.

Beloved explores the enduring impact of slavery on the individual and collective psyche of African Americans, the loss of community and connection, and the haunting presence of past traumas that continue to shape the present especially within the space of the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road:

> "Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed," she said,"and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks." 124 shut down and put up with the venom of its ghost. No more lamp all night long, or neighbors dropping by. No low conversations after supper. No watched barefoot children playing in the shoes of strangers. (89)

Sethe and the African American community felt a profound sense of loss and betrayal due to the systemic oppression and violence perpetrated by white people. The speaker's assertion that "Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed" conveys a deep sense of dispossession and the destruction of hope and aspirations. The phrase "broke my heartstrings too" is a powerful metaphor for the emotional devastation that goes beyond material losses, indicating a rupture in the very fabric of Sethe's being.The reference to "whitefolks" as the source of "no bad luck in the world" underscores the belief that the misfortunes experienced by the characters are not random or due to fate, but are the direct result of actions taken by white people. This statement reflects a worldview shaped by the historical trauma of slavery and its aftermath, where the systemic racism and violence inflicted by white society are seen as the root cause of suffering for black individuals.

The ghost has a multifaceted impact on 124, the house where the main characters reside. The haunting has led to the isolation of the household, as indicated by the absence of communal activities such as "lamp all night long, or neighbors dropping by" and "low conversations after supper". The image of "barefoot children playing in the shoes of strangers" evokes a sense of innocence lost and the intrusion of external forces into the lives of the most vulnerable. The ghost, a manifestation of the traumatic past, has created a barrier between the inhabitants of 124 and the outside community, further entrenching their alienation and grief.

Morrison connects her characters with the natural world surrounding them in *Beloved*. Nature is a reflection of the character's troubled psychology. The novelist uses the natural phenomenon of snow surrounding 124 to symbolize the pervasive and inescapable influence of the past on the present, the isolation of the characters, and the depth of their trauma, "The couple upstairs, united, didn't hear a sound, but below them,outside, all around 124 the snow went on and on and on. Piling itself,burying itself. Higher. Deeper" (134). The use of imagery of snow conveys a sense of isolation and the weight

of the past that envelops the characters and the space they inhabit. The "couple upstairs, united," refers to Sethe and Paul D, who, in their moment of unity, are oblivious to the world outside 124. Their connection contrasts with the external environment, where the snow continues to fall relentlessly around 124, the house that is central to the novel's narrative.

The snow "piling itself, burying itself" suggests a natural process of accumulation and concealment, which can be seen as a metaphor for the way traumatic memories and the history of slavery accumulate and are buried within the characters' psyches. The repetition of "on and on and on" emphasizes the unending nature of this process, as well as the persistent presence of the past that cannot be easily escaped or ignored.The snow's act of "burying itself" also implies a self-contained cycle, where the environment is both the subject and object of the action, much like the characters in the novel who are both shaped by and actively shaping their own narratives. The snow creates a barrier, a blanket of silence that isolates 124 from the outside world, mirroring the isolation of the characters who are haunted by their personal and collective histories. Furthermore, the snow's depth, described as "Higher. Deeper," can be interpreted as the depth of the emotional and psychological scars that the characters carry with them. It also reflects the profound impact of slavery and its aftermath on the African American community, suggesting that the legacy of such trauma is not easily removed and continues to affect subsequent generations.

124 is also a space of community, healing, resistance to otherness, and the struggle for identity and belonging in the aftermath of slavery. It also embodies the tensions that can arise within a community that is still grappling with the scars of its past and the challenges of building a future.

Morrison's portrayal of the characters in *Beloved* is a profound exploration of the enduring scars of slavery, as she delves into the psychological trauma and fragmented identities that result from such a dehumanizing experience. Her characters are not only survivors of their past but also bearers of their culture's collective memory, each embodying the struggle to reconcile a horrific history with the need to forge a sense of self and community in its aftermath. 124 is a space of rememory and community, but also a map for the future:

> Baby Suggs' three (maybe four) pies grew to ten (maybe twelve). Sethe's two hens became five turkeys. The one block of ice brought all the way from Cincinnati—over which they poured mashed watermelon mixed with sugar and mint to make a punch—became a wagonload of ice cakes for a washtub full of strawberry shrug. 124,rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs,holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? Giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone. (137)

Baby Suggs, is a central figure in the novel who serves as a spiritual leader and healer within the African American community. The description of the food—pies, turkeys, and the elaborate watermelon punch—symbolizes the generosity and nurturing nature of Baby Suggs, as well as the sense of community she fosters. 124 as a space haunted by past difficult memories can't prevent the Black community sharing this space from creating joy and generosity. The transformation of modest offerings into a feast "three maybe four pies grew to ten maybe twelve" can be interpreted as a metaphor for the resilience and resourcefulness of the formerly enslaved community. Despite the scarcity and hardship they have faced, they create a space of plenty and celebration. This act of communal sharing and celebration is a form of resistance against the dehumanization and deprivation experienced during slavery.

The "wagonload of ice cakes" and the "wash tub full of strawberry shrug" represent not just physical nourishment but also the emotional and spiritual sustenance that Baby Suggs provides.

The ice, brought from Cincinnati, signifies the lengths to which the community goes to care for one another, and the effort put into creating moments of joy and relief from their traumatic pasts.However, the passage also touches on the undercurrent of resentment and suspicion from others in the community "made them angry". The questions "Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy?" and "Why is she and hers always the center of things?" reflect a sense of unease or jealousy regarding Baby Suggs' role and the attention she receives. This tension highlights the complexities within the community, where support and solidarity can coexist with envy and mistrust, possibly stemming from the internalized trauma and competition for scarce resources that were part of the legacy of slavery.

Baby Suggs' multifaceted role—giving advice, healing the sick, hiding fugitives, and loving everyone—is indicative of the leadership roles that women often assumed in African American communities, particularly in the post-emancipation period. Her actions are described almost as a divine calling "her job and hers alone", suggesting that her work is both a personal mission and a communal necessity.

From another perspective, even if "None could appreciate the safety of ghost company" (37), the ghost at 124 Bluestone Road embodies environmental agency by actively engaging with and altering the physical and emotional landscape of the house, reflecting the way in which environments can bear the imprint of history and trauma and, in turn, exert influence on the lives of those within them. The ghost's actions—shaking objects, crying, and smashing things—demonstrate an ability to affect the physical world, suggesting that the environment of 124 is not passive but rather responsive and dynamic. This agency is further emphasized when Paul D arrives and disrupts the ghost's hold on the house, indicating that the environment of 124 is subject to change and can be reshaped by the characters' actions.Moreover, the ghost's influence extends beyond the walls of the house, affecting the community's perception of the space. The house is seen as "full of trouble" and "Anybody got the money don't want to live out there" (264) is characterized by the voices and the strong feelings it once contained, which have now fallen silent, indicating a shift in the house's environmental agency.

By the end of the novel, Morrison talks about the duality of 124 as both a physical space in need of repair and a repository of the characters' pasts. The house's quietness as described by Stamp Paid is a momentary condition that belies the deep and inescapable imprints of history that it holds within its walls, "Unloaded, 124 is just another weathered house needing repair. Quiet, just as Stamp Paid said" (264). The house at 124 Bluestone Road is a space where the past is both inescapably present and yet, at times, eerily absent. Throughout the novel, 124 is depicted as a place where the characters confront their traumatic histories, and the house itself almost becomes a character, imbued with the emotions and memories of those who live there.

The term "Unloaded" suggests that the house has been relieved of its emotional burden, at least temporarily. This could refer to a moment when the ghostly presence that has haunted the house is no longer active or when the characters' own psychological burdens have been lifted or set aside. The description of 124 as "just another weathered house needing repair" implies that, stripped of its haunting and the weight of the past, it is merely a physical structure that shows signs of neglect and decay, much like any other old house. However, the simplicity of this description belies the complex history of the house and the people associated with it. The quietness that Stamp Paid observes is not necessarily a sign of peace but could be indicative of a suppressed or temporarily dormant past. The house's silence can be seen as a deceptive calm, one that might precede or follow the tumultuous events and emotional outpourings that have characterized its existence.The house has been a vessel for the characters' grief, pain, and longing, and even in its quiet state, it cannot fully escape the history that has shaped it.

In conclusion, the space of 124 Bluestone Road in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* serves as a critical nexus where the personal and collective histories of the

characters intersect, embodying the inescapable past of slavery and its enduring traumas. Through the haunting of the house, Morrison creates a space where the characters must confront their memories and the ghosts of their former selves, offering a poignant exploration of the ways in which the past continues to shape and inform the present. Furthermore, this space becomes a character that illuminates how this environment itself bears witness to the histories of its inhabitants, participating in the narrative as a living testament to the characters' struggles for identity, agency, and healing in the face of a legacy of oppression.

WORKS CITED

1. Christian, Barbara. "The Race for Theory." *Cultural Critique*, no. 6, 1987, pp. 51–63.
2. Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, 1993.
3. Harding, Rachel Elizabeth. *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness*. Indiana University Press, 2000.
4. Jaffrey, Zia. "The Salon Interview: Toni Morrison." Salon, 1998, www.salon.com/1998/02/02/cov_si_02int/.
5. Mandel, Naomi. "Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Limits of the Imagination." Contemporary Literature, vol. 40, no. 4, 1999, pp. 585–606.
6. McKay, Nellie. "An Interview with Toni Morrison." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1983, pp. 413–429.
7. Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.
8. Schmudde, Carol E. "Haunting." *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, edited by J. Gordon Melton, 5th ed., Gale, 2001, pp. 409–410.
9. Tate, Claudia. *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
10. Wallace, Kathleen R., and Karla Armbruster. "Introduction: Why Go Beyond Nature Writing, and Where To?" *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism,* University of Virginia Press, 2001, pp. 1–25.