

Negotiating Identity: Trauma and Double Consciousness in *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, *Beloved*, and *The Color Purple*.

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Abstract

This paper scrutinizes the themes of justice, trauma, resistance, and redemption in four different African American novels: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). The study applies W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of "double consciousness" as the main model analyses the protagonist's emotional disintegration owing to systemic racism. This study analyses the various modes of resistance, from intense rebellion to the process of healing in a society. Although Du Bois's model is central, the examination is also informed by harmonizing ideas about the emotion of oppression, Black feminism, and the special loads faced by Black women. It implies that redemption in these works is actively constructed by struggle, resistance, and the recovery of identity and dignity rather of being passive or simple to attain. In general, the paper demonstrates how African American literature continues to provide insightful perspectives on trauma, survival, and healing while effectively addressing issues of racial injustice.

Keywords: *Trauma, Double consciousness, African American literature, Resistance*

Identity

I. Introduction

William L. Andrews defines African American literature as a "body of literature written by Americans of African descent." Although African American literature began to be written long before the American Civil War, it wasn't until the civil rights movements gained momentum in the 1960s that it began to gain recognition and space in educational institutions. During that time, civil rights campaigners and well-known African American leaders like Martin Luther King, Booker T. Washington, and Malcolm X raised their voices to demand racial equality from society. Black literature was given space in schools and by editors as a result, and there are today many well-known and renowned African American writers (Milat, 2024).

Themes like trauma, justice, resistance, and redemption are prevalent in this literary tradition because they capture the nuanced realities of Black people navigating a systemically oppressive society (Viscuso, 2024). The *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *Native Son* by Richard Wright, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker are the four significant books that are examined in this paper.

Intensifying the conceptual framework, double awareness not only defines internal separation but also enables a "second-sight" that provides prophetic assessment as Du Bois projected. This duality resounds with Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic (1993), observing African American individuality as transnational, molded by cultural and diaspora hybridity. In the novels, characters symbolize this via code-switching to navigate the white environment indicating practical plans such as those utilized during the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955- 1956). Reclamation, in this context, comprises regaining narrative control, similar to what Saidiya Hartman relations "critical fabulation" in *Lose Your Mother* (2007), where chasms in historical records are occupied ingeniously to honor the confined.

Scholars now have a better grasp of the nature of trauma, its delayed effects, and its narrative function because to Cathy Caruth's important contributions to trauma theory (Caruth, 2016). Her observations have been crucial in clarifying how trauma affects the human psyche, particularly in its narrative forms. According to Caruth, trauma is not immediately absorbed or understood but rather reappears in waves that have a lasting impact on a person's life and are often unpredictable.

According to trauma theory, which is based on Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), traumatic events resist being told in a chronological fashion and instead appear as hauntings and repeats, as Morrison's spectral appearances demonstrate. As demonstrated by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995), which echoes African American demands for reparations discussed since the 1865 "40 acres and a mule" promise, justice, on the other hand, goes beyond legal remedies and includes restorative activities like truth-telling. Confrontation might be volatile, as Bigger Thomas's violence in Wright's novel, or inactive, like Celie's letter-writing in Walker's, mirroring Frantz Fanon's sustenance for decolonial catharsis in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

The essence of trauma is a prevalent theme that essentially impact the lives of several characters which result in compromised bodily reliability a loss of agency and a denial of personal history. In Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), the authors analyze how different aspects of trauma may lead to distinctly various "identity trajectories." In **Native Son**, the protagonist's presence in **Invisible Man** begins with symbolic and epistolary trauma that destroys the inner self, which prompts a metonymic reconstruction of identity. **Beloved** enunciates a poignant experience that exceeds the personal sphere. In *The Color Purple*, the main narrative antennas are manifested by Violet, an agent that seem to witness trauma, whose main voice is intricately mixed with the trauma of narrations. Whereas each of the character's experiences will intensify, and hence the trajectories of fundamental intents (Rodriguez, 2018) (D Jr McDonnell, 2016)

II. Problem Statement

The legacy of universal racism in the U.S. deeply affects African American existence which include social injustice and psychological shock. The remarkable works of Ellison's **Invisible Man**, Richard Wright's **Native Son**, Toni Morrison's **Beloved**, and Alice Walker's **The Color Purple** offers a crucial perception of double awareness. This model shows the inner conflict of Black persons as they face societal ordeal. Whereas these authors seek to address the fear of segregation, slavery and gender oppression, in pursuit of redemption within the foreseeable narrations (Forster, 2007).

Applying W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double awareness, this study contents that African American novels which include *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, *Beloved*, and *The Color Purple* serve as an essential assessment of institutional racism. Franz Fanon's colonial emotion show how various characters pass through struggle and pain as a result of dual awareness. To attain this form of restorative justice against organized oppression, the book show a narration of revolt and the

repossession of social healing. Different from other studies, this research, shows a form of redemption as a progressive process through the integration of themes of resistance, trauma and justice throughout numerous texts.

III. Significance of the study

The research stresses that African American novels as important criticisms of American exceptionalism to highlight the differences between Black Americans' reality from the Jim Crow period to the post-Civil Rights period and democratic standards. It discovers characters to negotiate how to communicate the nuanced identities and provide empathy. The study presents historical portrayals and absence of cruelty and slavery and stresses that redemption is another form of socio-psychological procedure, to stress resistance as a way to reclaim one's dignity. From the Harlem Renaissance to womanist solidarity in the 1980s, the study follows resistance motifs and contest that these texts are important to understanding the contemporary debates on reparative justice.

IV. Research Questions

- How does W.E.B. Du Bois's construct of double awareness can shape the manifestation of ordeal and disjointed identity in *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, *Beloved*, and *The Color Purple*?
- In what ways do the chosen African American novels portray distinct forms of confrontation to systemic racism, and how do these forms underwrite to procedures of healing, justice, and redemption?

V. Literature Review

A- Trauma Theory

One of the most popular crucial approaches in humanities studies is the study of ordeal in literature. According to Balaev (2014), Nadal & Calvo (2018), and Ahmed & Babo (2019), trauma is not only a hurting psychological experience for individuals but also a historical and cultural portents that impacts how people feel, remember, and describe previous events. According to Cathy Caruth, a prominent person in the field of trauma studies, trauma frequently manifests as repetition, delayed comprehension, and silence in the narrative rather than as a whole story. These ideas provide fresh perspectives on how traumatic events are portrayed in contemporary literary works (Caruth & Bojarska, 2010; Cash, 2022).

Cathy Caruth, a pioneer in the field of trauma studies, develops her theory of trauma in literature in *Unclaimed Experience* by drawing on Freud's ideas that literary writings, like dreams, reveal the author's private unconscious desires and aspirations. Caruth describes trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 1996: 11).

According to Cathy Caruth's perspective, trauma is a psychological experience that is not completely integrated into awareness at the time of the incident and instead haunts the person later on in the form of narrative disruptions, flashbacks, or repeats (Pederson, 2014). Caruth highlights that trauma is a "experience that is not fully experienced," an experience that cannot be immediately absorbed by awareness and hence becomes "belated," meaning it is only comprehended later, rather than just a mental wound brought on by violence or pain. As a result, trauma frequently manifests as silence, emptiness, or disruptions in language and narrative rather than being fully or sequentially described.

This idea demonstrates how severe psychological traumas are retained in memory and influence people's speech and storytelling (Ideology, n.d.). Caruth's trauma approach in literary studies examines the thematic and structural ways in which literary texts depict traumatic events. This theory is used by literary academics to analyze works that show unique narrative patterns, characters' fragmented

identities, and traumatic recollections of the past. In literary works, trauma manifests itself not only in the story's substance but also in the text itself, such as through fragmented narratives, nonlinear storylines, or recurring incidents (Bast, 2011; Dewanti & Kurniawan, 2025; Mazumder, 2021; Nayel, 2024).

B- Double Consciousness

Du Bois's (1903) theory of subjectivity, or the culturally and historically contextual understandings of self and other, as well as the meanings that shape our environment, is based on double consciousness.

Although Du Bois first presented the idea in an article titled "Strivings of Negro People," which appeared in the *Atlantic* in 1897, the most well-known expression of double consciousness may be found in the first essay in *Souls*, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." "How does it feel to be a problem?" is the question that drives Du Bois' investigation of Black people's daily experiences in these pieces.

The sociological importance of the theory of double consciousness is barely acknowledged. Yet Charles Lemert, one of the few sociologists who recognizes its importance, asserts that Du Bois's concept of the double self deserves a prominent place in the lineage of self theorists from James and Baldwin through Cooley to Mead and symbolic interactionism (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015). However, the theory of double consciousness does not simply deserve a place in a lineage of early sociology of the self; it is central to the analysis of subjectivity under racialized modernity. The theory of double consciousness, first introduced by Du Bois (1903), addresses an important "ontological myopia" in classical theories of the self. It reveals what other theorists such as William James, Charles Horton Cooley, and George Herbert Mead did not fully account for: the role of the color line as a fundamental structure shaping lived experience, identity formation, and recognition under racialized modernity.

The subjectivity of racialized persons is described by double awareness. In one of his most well-known and frequently referenced quotes, Du Bois claims that Black Americans are; a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and endowed with second sight in this American world that only allows him to perceive himself via the revelation of the other world rather than giving him genuine self-consciousness.

This double-consciousness, this feeling of always viewing oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the yardstick of a world that observes with amused scorn and sympathy, is an odd emotion. One is always aware of his dual identity as an American and a Negro; two spirits, two ideas, two conflicting aspirations, and two opposing ideals in one dark body (Du Bois, 1903).

Du Bois presents the veil, twoness, and second sight—the three components of the idea of double consciousness—in this succinct but important line. The subjectivity of racialized modernity is structured by the veil, also known as the color line. On either side of the color line, the social environment is perceived and experienced differently. The veil functions as a one-way mirror. Black people are projected onto the veil by white people, who then see their reflections mirrored on it. The racialized subject is invisible to them since they have the ability to define both themselves and other people.

Du Bois's explanation of double consciousness is based on his personal experiences as well as his observations on African Americans' lives, especially in the South. His theories are based on autobiographical reflections. In *The Souls of Black Folk*'s opening essay, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," he describes a realization that he is unique. It is a scene from his childhood when, during a group game, a girl rejects his card. Although Du Bois does not revisit this specific instance in *Dusk of Dawn* or his posthumous autobiography, it is evident from those works that he recognized the significance of the color line while growing up in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, a mostly white neighborhood of middle-class and working-class families. Additionally, he claims in *Souls* that this distinction is based on "a thousand and one little actions." However, even though Du Bois discovers his uniqueness while growing up in

New England, he doesn't really understand the exclusionary nature of the color line until he moves south to attend Fisk.

C- Previous Studies

Earlier works have examined the relationship between trauma, identity, and double consciousness in African American literature. Abood, 2019, *Trauma and Identity in Alice Walker's The Color Purple and Toni Morrison's Sula*, deals with how traumatic experiences can affect the development of identity and how trauma can contribute to both the destruction and reconstruction of identity through resilience and adaptation. Similarly, Meng (2019) in *Celie's Identity Search in The Color Purple: The Uplift of an African American Woman Under Double Consciousness*, applies W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of double consciousness to analyze Celie's struggle for self-definition, demonstrating how racial and gender oppression result in identity fragmentation and eventual empowerment.

In addition, Silva's study *Memory, Trauma, and Identity in Beloved* discovers the long-term impact of slavery on individual and collective memory to emphasize the essence of traumatic experiences in the act of identity reconstruction and the struggle for freedom and independence among African Americans. Whereas these studies offer essential contributions to identity, trauma and double awareness. Therefore, it remains prerequisite to conduct a comparative form of study on these messages in the *Native Son*, *The Color Purple*, and *Invisible Man*, in order to comprehend how diverse African American writers portray the entangled processes of trauma, redemption, resistance, and justice.

VI. Methodology of the study

Invisible Man, *Native Son*, *Beloved*, and *The Color Purple* are three important African American novels that are the subject of this study's qualitative literary research technique. Through the prism of W.E.B. Du Bois's idea of double consciousness, which represents the psychological tension resulting from racial marginalization, it explores themes of pain, justice, resistance, and redemption. In order to examine the complex realities of Black women, the study draws on concepts from psychological oppression and Black feminist critique to emphasize how characters negotiate split identities and institutional racism. African American literature, according to the research, symbolizes redemption as a reclaiming of identity and agency against past oppression.

A large portion of black racial prejudice can be linked to the transition from oppression to oppressor-and-oppressed cohabitation, according to Du Bois, who thought that racial prejudice produced double consciousness. Other races with histories of oppression might be able to connect, but there isn't much evidence that white Americans have had a comparable experience. An identity group, X, must be oppressed and have an oppressor, Y, in order to claim double consciousness. X cannot claim double consciousness if Y has no economic, social, or political influence on X. This is because Y's bias and authority allow them to have real repercussions for X.

Therefore, even though there would be a definition of whiteness, whites (as Y) would not be entitled to double consciousness. However, if they meet the aforementioned criteria, oppressed communities in America (and presumably elsewhere) might assert a feeling of double consciousness.

VII. Discussion and Analysis

In addition to natural catastrophes, war, terrorism, rape, and prejudice are the main causes of the world's disastrous occurrences. Most of the time, survivors of these sad incidents may have psychological and emotional suffering in addition to physical injuries. In actuality, no one could truly comprehend, feel, or articulate the trauma experience as the traumatized individual could. In many cultures, it takes greater bravery to talk about a traumatic incident. It can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a raped woman or an abused kid to put what happened into words. In these situations, the traumatized individual will have psychological effects from the physical suffering.

A- *The Color Purple*

From the outset, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* offers a unique example of what trauma may do to a young African American adolescent. The narrator and protagonist of the book, Celie, uses letters to God—a highly unique kind of epistolary novel—to contribute to the story's development. The novel, which was first published in 1982, follows the tale of Celie, a fourteen-year-old black girl who is illiterate and lives in an African village in rural Georgia, most likely in the early 20th century. Celie starts writing letters to God after her father, Alphonso, repeatedly rapes and mistreats her, threatening to murder her mother if she told anybody. Her mother passes away from a severe illness shortly after. After that, Celie's father marries her to Mr. Albert, who likewise mistreats her. Celie's sister Nettie flees Alphonso and seeks safety in Celie's home. Nettie runs away for her protection when Mr. Albert advances her because he harbors secret feelings for her.

Since Celie describes the mistreatment and abuse she experiences at the hands of her father in her first letter to God, the opening chapters of *The Color Purple* seem to be about trauma. But a close examination of Celie's personality reveals the opposite. Recovering from trauma is the theme of the book. In her letters to God, Celie finds comfort and security. Celie's strong friendship with Shug provides further support for this type of safety and protection. Celie uses Shug as a shield and a way to let go of her repressed feelings. Celie discovers that her nasty husband, Mr. Albert, has been concealing Nettie's letters from her with Shug's help.

Celie's double consciousness is not, like Bigger's, explosive; not, like the *Invisible Man*'s, strategic; not, like Sethe's, haunted. It is silenced. Celie has internalized the voices that tell her she is ugly, worthless, fit only for service and for sex. She does not rebel against these voices because she does not have a language for rebellion. Her letters to God are the only space in which she can speak without fear of punishment. And even there, her speech is fragmented, flat, stripped of affect and without any traces of emotion. "He starts to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it" (Walker 8). The sentence is a report, not a cry. Celie has learned not to feel the pain because feeling would be unbearable.

After confronting her spouse for the first time, she makes the decision to start her road toward independence. Celie's new identity starts to take shape when she is freed from her ethnic and patriarchal community: "I am so happy, I got love, I got work, I got money, friends, and time" (222). Celie recovers from her ordeal more quickly thanks to their companionship. According to Herman, having supporting friends, family, or lovers will be extremely beneficial for those who have experienced trauma. Their preservation and care can have a powerful therapeutic effect. Once safety has been restored, "the survivor needs the help of others in rebuilding a positive view of the self."

By the end of the story, Celie succeeds in building her own community by gathering not only those people whom she loves but also the person who has been abusing her, Mr. Albert, her husband. Celie acquires her new identity through love, courage, and self-determination. Her identity is shaped by all her life suffering and life experiences. With the family reunion, she is very happy, more secure and more confident "But I don't think us feel old at all. And us so happy. Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt." (295). As demonstrated by Harris, toward the end of the novel, "Celie overcomes a multitude of oppressions constructed to destroy her soul and proves the power of the human spirit to rise above impossibilities and love herself regardless" (2010: 43)

Moreover, it is revealed in this study that some of the characters in *The Color Purple* are aware of the nonhuman world around them. Being completely isolated from the people around her, Celie develops a relationship with God in her letters. She can express her feelings and ideas freely, which in turn helps polishing her own identity. Therefore, from the standpoint of double consciousness, Celie in Walker's *The Color Purple* is fighting for her racial, sexual, and class identities in order to discover her full cultural

identity as an African American woman. African American women like Celie cannot be liberated and elevated unless they achieve an individual identity..

B- Invisible Man

A creative achievement that attests to the persistent existence of double consciousness in African-American tales is Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. However, Ellison's attempt to reinterpret the idea in order to accurately represent Du Bois' intended meaning gives double-consciousness a more complex dimension. Although Ellison's equivocal treatment of this idea is reminiscent of Du Bois' usage in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), his dramatization of the idea displays its intrinsic complexity in a way never seen before.

The bildungsroman *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison was released in 1952. It is the tale of an African American man who, in the 1950s, dealt with a number of societal problems that black Americans faced. Ellison became the first Black author to receive the US "National Book Award for Fiction" for the book. The book is commended for being a work of African American literature that addresses racism, identity, and societal concerns. Ellison explores existentialism and personal life via the complex relationships of race in post-war America.

The narrator states unequivocally from the beginning of the book—as early as the prologue—that he lives in a transitional, bordering neighborhood between Harlem and the city's white core, but he doesn't belong to either. As he notes in the first few pages of the book, "The joke, of course, is that I don't live in Harlem, but in a border area" (p. 9), he is in a strange place—a liminal border space. Given that he is positioned between two spheres yet exactly in neither, this circumstance illustrates his spatial in-betweenness. Because of this circumstance, he is able to be conditioned by the atmospheres of the two places, which causes him to perceive things twice and eventually develop double consciousness.

It's possible that the narrator's invisibility stems in part from his residence in this border region, which allows him to avoid detection and evade punishment. The significance of boundaries in African-American life is highlighted by the fact that the narrator's ultimate initiation is accomplished in the underground, the border area. Homi Bhabha (1994) appears to better highlight the critical significance of borders in Ellison's *Invisible Man* when he states, albeit examining borders in a different context connected to the colonial setting: These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

This is what occurs to the novel's narrator, who uses hibernation in the pit as a transitional area to get a fresh, clear understanding of his own life. The *Invisible Man* has been successful in defining—or rather, redefining—both his identity and his social standing in the pit.

The narrator's heading north increases his condition of double-consciousness, because he has remained in a state of liminality between the past and the present despite his departure from the South. His aspiration towards leadership forces him to attempt to forget his past during his search for new horizons; but this attempt is baffled by many reminders of his past, a past reminding him of the impossibility of shedding the past, being as it is, an important constituent of his identity. Throughout the whole novel, the *Invisible Man* is presented as torn between the past and the present in an overlapping manner, and "the novel constantly provides echoes of past eras within the narrative present."¹⁰ The narrator lives in the present with reminiscences from the past echoed by his grandfather's voice. Here, there is a temporal doubleness, a temporal liminality, which is a perennial characteristic accompanying the nameless protagonist, and contributing to the persistence of his double consciousness.

Along the way, the narrator comes across several reminders that keep him in continual contact with his history, in addition to the luggage and the recommendation letters that continue to link him to the college and place him between a past and a present. He encounters the veterinarian he met earlier in the Golden

Day while boarding the train headed north. The veterinarian's speech is just as unclear as the narrator's grandfather's.

C- Native Son

Double Consciousness in Richard Wright's Works—*Native Son Unveiled* expands on the notion that *Native Son* (1940)¹ is not merely a work of literature and art but, above all, a social and political portrayal of the racial conflicts of its age and the pressing need for action. His fear about Black² people's circumstances in America infuses the book and raises existential concerns about the perilous state of the globe. According to Wright, losing "the very feeling and conception of what is human" was the "great danger." His writings sparked vivid imaginations that transcended the "color line" and had the capacity to change a severely racist culture with mostly racial thinking into a "nation where terms white and black no longer dominate national discourses about race."

Wright exposes the existential discomfort of living under the "veil" of double consciousness, when one's identity is shattered by the degrading projections of white culture, through Bigger's sad journey. Bigger's voyage is a plunge into this racist dichotomy. He becomes invisible and a simple "problem" in the eyes of white America because he is trapped in the "No Man's Land" of double awareness. This curtain filters everything of his thoughts, actions, and aspirations, warping his self-perception and depriving him of the basic human dignity of self-actualization. Wright's dogged representation of the emotional toll of this external issues to makes it so perfect. Bigger's frantic move to claim his humanity within the society and attempt to feel the need to disappear.

His aspiration to proclaim his genuine self-clashes with the socialization process that can shape emotional development. The authority may be compelled to express some attitudes and behaviours in order to communicate these specific tenets indirectly. "A feeling of being commanded forever by others so much thinking and feeling for one's self is not possible" (Wright 307). A hegemonic society enforces implicit behaviours and tenets through indirect means rather than noticeable commands. French Marxist Althusser supports the function of dominant ideologies in this procedure: "The power of the state can be maintained more clearly, by seeming to obtain the internal consent of its citizen through norms and behaviours, Althusser calls conceptual structures or state philosophical apparatuses" (Berry 158). According to Althusser, "We misrecognize universe around us, like the infant that Lacan designates, which misrecognizes itself as similar to its mirror image. As such, we do not see genuine condition" (Parker 290).

It is clear in the *Native Son* that law enforcement usually ignored crimes to be perpetrated within the Black community, regularly against the other blacks' population. As observed in an early exchange between Bigger Jack, this difference shows the deeper division between the Black settlement and the white universe. Their dialogue shows how media depiction of the whites' people shape Black people's opinions of them, which results in dread, prejudice and hostility. Similarly, the wealthy white population are still indifferent of the Black psychological ordeal. The "reds" are also introduced in the book. They are portrayed as supporters of equality, but the media and social institutions steadfastly maintain the power structures that benefit the wealthy white class.

These hegemonic dynamics are the source of Bigger's anxieties, traumas, and uncertainties, which lead to his hate of both white people and people of his race. He didn't mean to hurt Mary; rather, he was irritated by Mary and Jan's generosity. He felt degraded and inferior as a result of their sympathetic views. He felt and thought that one day he would be able to openly declare that he had succeeded, and there was a sort of frightening pride in that. By accepting the crime, he seemed to be fulfilling a deep and secret debt to himself (Wright 101). As he considers the crime throughout the trial, Bigger has a brief sensation of equality and power despite not being a deliberate killer.

The novel famously ends with: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (451). It is often read as a gesture of universalism, amplitude and unity. The invisible man speaks for all

the people, communities and individuals who are unseen, all who are categorised and stereotyped, all who are denied the fullness of their humanity. The narrator does not claim to speak for the reader. He asks if he speaks for him instead. The open-endedness of the novel indicates the ambiguity of the identity of the unnamed narrator. Invisibility is not a condition that can be overcome once and for all. It is a structural position, a permanent possibility, a truth that must be rediscovered in each new encounter in the society

D- *Beloved*

The characters Sethe and Denver in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) endure pain as a result of slavery. In addition to causing painful experiences for the many individuals in Morrison's book, slavery has historically affected African Americans, and its effects are being felt today. This article will use the characters Sethe and her daughter Denver from Toni Morrison's magical-realistic novel *Beloved* to analyze the psychological effects of slavery, specifically from a psychoanalytic standpoint. Through their encounter with *Beloved*, a girl who one day appears in their front yard and subsequently turns out to be the spirit of Sethe's deceased daughter, both characters confront the suppressed pain within them.

Sethe's double consciousness is not, like Bigger's, related to some sort of urban entrapment, nor, like the Invisible Man's, is it a matter of strategic retreat in which the affected individual would wipe themselves out. It is like a wound in time. Sethe's famous explanation to Denver is: "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay" (Morrison 43-44). These words tangibly articulate a theory of traumatic experience that prefigures Cathy Caruth's work by nearly a decade, in which the latter combines and explains trauma with the passage of time and generations. The past does not recede nor is it ever forgotten. It accumulates. Sethe's memory of Sweet Home is not a recollection of events that are over and boxed in the past. It is a "rememory," a picture that "floats around out there outside my head" and that can be encountered by anyone who happens to be in the right place (44). This is not metaphor. In Morrison's novel, rememory is a fact of the fictional world that returns so real and so corporeal.

The novel's central act of violence, which is Sethe's murder of her infant daughter, is incomprehensible outside the logic of double consciousness. Sethe kills her child to save her from slavery. The problem is not a failure of reasoning on her side but is a tragically paradoxical situation which shapes the world so grotesquely that the mother cannot protect her child by any other means but by killing her. When schoolteacher and his nephews arrive to take Sethe and her children back to the farm, Sethe does not see them as men. She sees them as the "men without skin," the white gaze made flesh, the measuring string that reduces her to animal characteristics on the right side of the page (Morrison 193). Her response to the situation is not rational in a Western-oriented sense of the word; it is traumatic and the result of transgenerational oppression. She acts not as a calculating agent but as a body possessed by a force of revolt against one's own self that precedes and exceeds any kind of logical and rational consciousness.

The final pages of the novel are bereft of sentimentality about *Beloved's* departure. She is not forgiven. She is not understood. She is simply "disremembered and unaccounted for" (Morrison 274). The community chooses to forget her, to let the story not be passed on. But the novel itself has passed on the story to the readers of next generations. The act of reading *Beloved* is an act of remembering that the characters within the novel cannot permit themselves to do and remain silent on it. This paradox is a gift to the reader. We are asked to remember what they must forget though they may not forgive. And in that asymmetrical relationship between the reader, the characters, and the world, we are duly educated.

VIII. Conclusion

When we read these four novels in chronological order, we learn a lot about the evolution of both African American literary history and the literary portrayal of traumatic double consciousness.

Wright's *Native Son* (1940) is set in the pre-Civil Rights era, a time when the legal form of Jim Crow was still firmly in place and when the psychological devastation of segregation was only beginning to be theorised. Bigger Thomas of this novel is a product of this era: his consciousness is a pressure cooker, and his violence is the inevitable explosion of a repression that does not have any other space to release itself. The novel presents no hope for social transformation and only shows that more Biggers will be produced inevitably in American society unless the repressive system falls apart. Therefore, its pedagogy is based on shock and warning for the reader.

Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) belongs to the same period but provides various diagnosis. Where Wright asserts the explosion of subjugation, Ellison observes hibernation and the basic erasure of one's identity of the situation. The Invisible Man disappears from the world not because he became defeated but because he demands the see the existence of clearer light. The novel has optimistic running down to become a normal person, however, his condition is genuine.

Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is written during the post-Civil Rights period but it evoke the trauma of slavery itself. The work that Morrison is traced here is somehow genealogical. The novel questions the meaning of descendant of survivors of these horrifying time in history, to inherit a previous time that one did not notice and mold the present identity as Black Americans. *Beloved* is the literal term that signifies that inheritance. She is not a phantasmagoric memory but a presence, it is not just a story to be told but a body to be affected. Morrison imparts that the past cannot be left behind; it must be lamented but not forgotten, and bereavement is a shared practice.

Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) is the most confident of the four, but its hope is not unexperienced. Celie's deliverance is attained via decades of struggle, but it is incomplete. The dedicative reunion with Nettie is ecstatic, but it comes after years of division. Her business is effective, but it is reliant on the Shug's capital and connections. Her association with Albert becomes genuine friendly, but she never returns to him as a wife. The novel stresses that redemption can be achieved, but it is not the end.

Implications of the study

This study has numerous significant theoretic, literary and social repercussions. First, it seeks to contribute to African American literary scholarship to compare the *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, *Beloved*, and *The Color Purple* in terms of W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double realization. By reading these novels together rather than individually, the study offers a more detailed perception of how African American writers depict the emotional impacts of racial subjugation and identity disintegration. Du Bois's theory endures to be an influential tool to comprehend the experience of "twoness" and the search for self-definition in a society of racial dissimilarity.

Second, the study enlarges the present discourse on trauma in African American literature by indicating how trauma is intricately relative of identity formation, struggle and justice. The results assist

scholars to perceive the manifestation of the long-term psychological impacts of racism in literary narratives and the basic negotiation of weak identities by characters in oppressive social domains.

Third, the study underlines the ongoing essence of double-consciousness as an analytic tool to deal with questions of race, belonging and race. The study indicates that the construct is not just an emotional situation, but a lens via which to perceive wider social, political and cultural struggles in African American communities.

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