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# Flattening Morrison's *Beloved*: The Limits of Psychoanalysis in Literary Criticism, A Literature Review

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FLATTENING MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

The Limits of Psychoanalysis in Literary Criticism, A Literature Review

by

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## Abstract

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* was first published in 1987 and has amassed a wide range of scholarship throughout the years; with some literary scholars using psychoanalysis to suggest a reading of *Beloved*. Because of the volume of scholarship and *Beloved's* plot—dealing with a mother who represses the memory of killing her daughter, Beloved—I found it to be perfect for the scope of this project. This literature review focuses on the sometimes reductive qualities of psychoanalyzing *Beloved* (such as the Freudian universal psychoanalytic subject, and the ‘drawbacks’ of object relations theory), while also discussing some revelatory qualities via the same approach. This literature review is the first step in a larger project concerned with the pervasiveness of psychoanalysis in literary criticism and media studies; and the involvement of psychoanalytic theories in the formulation of (what is called) ‘Insta-poetry’ and in contemporary films, such as *Wolf* (Biancheri, 2021) and *Smile* (Finn, 2022).

## Introduction

I am concerned with the pervasiveness of psychoanalytic theory and what it means for both the artist and critic who take it in as an informing or guiding agent. Psychoanalysis seems to be everywhere, but how this came to be is out of scope for this first project—which is concerned with the *limits* of psychoanalysis as well as its revelatory qualities. I chose Toni Morrison's *Beloved* for two reasons: one, the rich volume of literary criticism surrounding it; and two for its plot being amenable to the psychoanalytic approach. *Beloved's* central plot focuses on a formerly enslaved family in the United States, and how each member engages with the fleshed ghost of Beloved (the daughter of Sethe whom she killed under the duress of being recaptured by slave catchers). Morrison's novel is read (by psychoanalytic readings) for its themes of repression—Sethe not wanting to remember her act of murder—and for the novel's various and nuanced relationships. This literature review focuses on highlighting how each piece of scholarship uses psychoanalytic theories

in their readings of *Beloved*; for example, how a scholar may use some model of object relations theory to write about (or complicate) Sethe's relationship to both Beloved and her past. The reductive qualities of psychoanalyzing *Beloved* were found in two ways: either the author mentioned why they chose a certain psychoanalytic framework, critiquing another psychoanalytic approach; or I found the reductive quality in the paper itself. What this literature review finds as reductive is the Freudian notion of a universal psychoanalytic subject (found in Pyon), the privileging of the nuclear family in object relations theory (found in FitzGerald), and the complete application of Jessica Benjamin's idea of 'intersubjectivity' (found in Schapiro), in addition to the underlying notion of human beings as innately social animals (also found in Schapiro). The revelatory qualities of psychoanalysis are exemplified best in readings that use psychoanalytic theories as general guides but grant *Beloved* the agency to transcend (or revise) said theories. For example, Henderson uses object relations theory, and Wyatt uses notions from Lacan to piece together (in Henderson) Sethe's relationship to history, and (in Wyatt) to identify Sethe as a mother coming to terms with motherhood.

I do not wish to throw away or completely abandon psychoanalysis. This paper does not advance a reading of *Beloved*, nor is this paper trying to advance an introduction to the psychoanalysis of *Beloved*; merely, the function of this paper is to provide a literature review with a synthesis that sustains a vibrant discussion around the reductive qualities, the revelatory qualities, the claims and the consequences of psychoanalysis on *Beloved*. What this paper finds as 'flattening' *Beloved* is primarily found in the discussion of Schapiro's paper which (I will argue in a future paper) misrepresents the novel, disregarding where the novel might contradict Benjamin's notion of intersubjectivity.

### **Synthesis Section**

Two highly referenced academic papers on *Beloved* identify how language must be modified in circumstances where subjects have been “excluded from language” (Wyatt, 474), or lacking “a discourse of [their] own” (Henderson, 84). The paper most referenced in the scholarship is Mae G. Henderson’s “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text” where Henderson uses (then) contemporary historical theories on discourse and narrativity to bridge a connection between historiography and psychoanalysis (84). Henderson locates Sethe as a historian, needing to (re)configure memory into a historical discourse; however, the problem of Nineteenth-Century American slavery is “the absence of written records,” or records that have grave silences within them (Henderson, 85). Sethe is burdened with a need to shape disparate memories into a historical discourse shaped by narrativity: but how must Sethe “learn to represent the unspeakable and unspoken... as narrative” (Henderson, 85)? Henderson argues that Morrison writes both about the interiority and the exteriority of memory, which is both “thought,” and “material inscription” (Henderson, 85). A prime example of the material inscription is *Beloved*’s own headstone—which serves as an image around which feelings and thoughts pool: “If the inscription of *Beloved* is the trace... that initiates the plot, it is also an image that haunts the text in the multiple guises of the character *Beloved*” (Henderson, 85). In this way, Henderson gives a nuanced reading of the character *Beloved*—not only is *Beloved* a ‘fleshed-ghost’ but is also the material manifestation of slavery’s material consequence. Going further, Henderson reads the scars on Sethe’s back as inscriptions of slavery’s (memory’s) materiality. “The scars function as signs of ownership inscribing her as property, while the mutilation signifies her diminishment to a less-than-human status” (Henderson, 86). This is not, however, a static circumstance; the material inscriptions of the past are to be read, and the people around Sethe provide her with alternative readings of the material past. Sethe, then, is tasked with being able “to read herself—that is, to configure the history of her body as text” (Henderson, 87). This is where psychoanalysis seems to provide a useful scaffolding for

understanding Sethe and her relationship to the past, to her memory, and the collective memory around slavery. Henderson finds that: “The sources of [Sethe’s] ‘complex’ or ‘dis-ease’ manifest themselves in her endless efforts to avoid the past and avert the future... Sethe must ‘conjure up’ her past—symbolized by *Beloved*—and confront it as an antagonist” (Henderson, 92). This moment is where Henderson turns to Freud, citing his “recommendations on the technique of psychoanalysis” which makes it necessary that Sethe must frame her past as an adversary worthy of being engaged with. This is why, Henderson writes, that the character of *Beloved* steps in representing and conjuring up Sethe’s past. *Beloved* is read as a worthwhile adversary to Sethe, requiring her to confront her past actions. And that the, “... psychoanalytic process becomes the means by which Sethe must free herself from the burden of her past and from the burden of *history*” (Henderson, 93; emphasis in original). From this perspective, the psychoanalytic is a means of engaging with internalized trauma—teasing it out to realize what an individual is responding to, or acting out of.

I want to highlight the utility of psychoanalysis in Henderson’s paper, emphasizing this identification of relationships; we must identify the relationship between mother and daughter, and how Sethe has a relationship to a collective relationship with the Past (not just *her* past). Sethe is more-so defined, Henderson finds, by her resistance to remembering the murder of her daughter and to the whole of her enslavement. Henderson identifies this repressive struggle across all of Sethe’s relationships, while also finding that the material past having a presence in the present spurs the psychoanalytic process, where Sethe, by history-making, confronts and makes coherent her past (confronting her instinct to not remember, but to repress). The solution: a development of a language, a syntax, and a historical discourse in the syntax of narrative which can render coherent the experience of slavery.

Jean Wyatt in “Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” makes a similar argument to that made by Henderson. According to Wyatt, what is needed

in the wake of tragedy, and in living under the perils of American slavery as a black person, is a need for coherence. Wyatt finds that the "... paralysis of Denver's development shows how urgent is the need for a story that will make sense of the baby's death, mark the baby's disappearance, and lay her and the past she represents to rest" (Wyatt, 482). It is this need for language in conditions that prohibit literacy which cause "a breakdown and restructuring of linguistic forms" (Wyatt, 474). Wyatt finds *Beloved* (in the beginning) to use "metaphors [that] abandon their symbolic dimension to adhere to a baseline of literal meaning" (Wyatt, 475). This world Morrison makes allows for the physical manifestation of *Beloved* to enter and make Sethe remember the past. Lacan's paradigm which identifies "a child's entry into language," as a shift from "maternal bodily connection to a register of abstract signifiers," is used by Wyatt to address how Morrison (in *Beloved*) creates (what Wyatt calls) a "maternal symbolic" (Wyatt, 475). The maternal symbolic is both the "maternal and material values" and a "system that... locates subjects in relation to other subjects" (Wyatt, 475). In short, the maternal symbolic for Sethe is a self-imposed definition of motherhood: that one must be there for their child ("... the desire to get one's milk to one's baby," [Wyatt, 475]). Sethe's self-imposed definition of motherhood is partly why Sethe kills *Beloved*—an attempt to prevent separation. Wyatt makes a case that Denver is able to find a "social order" outside of Sethe's maternal symbolic that "conflates oral and verbal pleasures, nurtures her with words, and teaches her that caring is 'what language was made for'" (Wyatt, 475). The hope of the novel, as Wyatt writes, "is that Sethe, having recognized herself as subject, will narrate the mother-daughter story and invent a language that can encompass the desperation of the slave mother who killed her daughter" (Wyatt, 484). Wyatt suggests that because of the "heterosexual resolution," and "the enclosure of the mother in the symbolic," the "preoedipal daughter" is locked out, where she is both a victim of slavery and a "preverbal infant who has not made her way into the symbolic order," remaining outside of language "therefore outside of narrative memory" (Wyatt, 484). In this reading of *Beloved*,

Beloved's story is both a tragedy and a contradiction, as her story, because of its unpalatability, remains a ghost unable to be passed on from teller to teller, and unable to die—to find some neat resolution. Psychoanalysis, again, is used in this paper to identify the relationships amongst the characters and the relationships Sethe and Denver have to the world outside of them and the past (their memories). But it also ends with a note on the relationship of *Beloved* as a narrative to the reader, and the possible meaning for stories which defy symbolic conventions; stories like *Beloved* are haunting because they will not go away, and because they defy neat interpretation they require, as Wyatt wrote in the beginning, new linguistic forms—a new language. In short: Wyatt's paper uses Lacan's paradigm and concept of the paternal symbolic to write how Sethe enclosed herself in a maternal symbolic; however, Wyatt's thoughts on the ending of *Beloved* do not directly draw on Lacan, but rather a conversation between Lacan and Morrison.

In "Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in *Beloved*" Jennifer FitzGerald notes the reluctance to psychoanalyze *Beloved* (by Black Studies and Feminist scholars) because of how it defines motherhood, where "a huge burden of responsibility," falls on the mother, as if the mother-child relationship "existed as a freestanding relation, independent of the economic, political or social conditions which affect the circumstances of parenting" (FitzGerald, 669). However, FitzGerald still relies on the object relations school of psychoanalysis in discussion of *Beloved* because of how object relations theory "proposes that the psyche is constructed within a wide system of relationships, offering a model of how social, cultural and political forces become internalized" (FitzGerald, 670). The drawback to object relations theory is its confinement to "the Western nuclear family" which signals out and privileges the mother-child relationship as if it has always been a free-standing relationship from cultural and economic factors (FitzGerald, 670). In this paper, FitzGerald takes the vocabulary and some key insights from object relations theory to discuss *Beloved's* five primary discourses within the novel, those being: The dominant discourse of slavery,



the discourse of the good mother, the discourse of masculinity, the discourse of black solidarity, and the pre-oedipal discourse of objects relations psychoanalysis. Baby Suggs is read by FitzGerald as “revis[ing] classical psychoanalytic discourse,” where the psychotherapist is not some objective, distanced listener, but a community of people who share in pain that is similar (FitzGerald, 681).

And it is Baby Suggs moments in the Clearing that,

“... opposes the Eurocentric privileging of separateness and autonomy supported by masculinity... and which Sethe has internalized in her good mother position. It is not her valuing of motherhood which draws the community against Sethe, but her arrogance and self-sufficiency [of trying to do it all alone that encourages community push-back]” (FitzGerald, 681).

The community finding Sethe’s ‘arrogance’ distasteful affirms FitzGerald’s argument that the Clearing served the psychic purpose to ‘clear-out’ both the shared and individually felt pain of slavery. In addition, this purpose of the Clearing makes FitzGerald’s reading highly compelling: that Baby Suggs, even if operating outside of psychoanalytic discourse, revises psychoanalytic discourse by turning to the importance of shared healing and connecting with community.

These three papers—Henderson, Wyatt, and FitzGerald—use psychoanalytic theories to piece together a reading of *Beloved* that focuses on relationships among the characters, and the relationships the characters have to broader institutions. Both the Henderson and FitzGerald papers, underscore is how these relationships to society and the outside world manifest in the novel as discourses. Henderson focuses on the problem Sethe has with constructing a historical discourse from memories, and the use of her relationships with Paul D., Denver, and others, to interpret the materiality of the past found in the present. FitzGerald highlights five dominant discourses within the novel, ending with a reading of Baby Suggs as revising approaches to psychoanalysis. Wyatt also touches on discourse, but much more obliquely; discussing how the character Beloved operates outside of and may resist narrative memory; and that Sethe’s maternal symbolic closes out Beloved.

Only until this maternal symbolic is revised can a language (a discourse) establish that can better fit *Beloved* (the past of American slavery).

In “The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” FitzGerald and Linda Krumholz discuss *Beloved* as a revisional project that reconfigures how (in FitzGerald) therapy does not need to function one-way, or (in Krumholz), how history-making can be healing, and the methodologies used in historiography can be less empirical and more individual and subjective (which is a similar argument made in Henderson). Like Wyatt, who locates *Beloved* outside of narrative memory, Krumholz finds *Beloved* to be a trickster figure who disallows complete resolution and reconciliation. Going further, Krumholz also finds that *Beloved* catalyzes the healing process for both the characters and the readers—who too must witness slavery’s horrors—but that by reading *Beloved*, the readers also take on *Beloved*’s haunt (Krumholz, 397).

In addition this idea of *Beloved*, the novel, acting as medium for a healing process for both characters and readers (and even the author, Krumholz writes on page 395) is a theme found in Sheldon George’s paper, “Approaching the *Thing* of Slavery: A Lacanian Analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.” In the context of *Beloved*, George writes about the negotiation between racial identity and trying to live one’s life unencumbered by a destructive past (specifically, American slavery). George focuses on the persistence of trauma(s) as a psychoanalytic trope, and suggests that Morrison’s *Beloved* “points to... [this] persistence of a traumatic past that haunts the present through a subjective, psychic experience of trauma that defies the limits of time and space” (George, 115). It is this persistence of a traumatic past which “functions as what Lacan calls the Real,” a Thing of which is both part of and outside the individual, it is both an estranged yet familiar thing that is impossible to forget (George, 115). Pointing to Sethe’s description of Sweet Home, George reads this as Sethe’s own attempt to “circumscribe,” Sweet Home “as a place from her past that is ‘still there,’ not just in her ‘rememory,’ but ‘out there outside [her] head’” (George, 115).

George's paper also points out that this psychoanalytic element in *Beloved* is an articulation "of a historical trauma that equally haunts the residents of 124 and contemporary African Americans" (George, 115), and that the ensemble of *Beloved* are not only haunted, but the African American experience—and perhaps, more broadly, the American experience—is haunted. George presupposes, or assumes, that there is a way to self-destructively attach to race as identity, and that *Beloved* is written, at least in part, to show that one can attach to race, or (re)claim racial identity constructively (115). George looks at an interview Morrison gave with Marsha J. Darling in March 1988, "In the Realm of Possibility" where Morrison emphasized the need to remember the horror of slavery in a constructive way—not in a way where one becomes paralyzed, where one refuses to see the past, not in a way where it becomes pathological, or neurotic (see George, 116).

"This book functions, in my view, for both Morrison herself and her reader, as a new *object cause of desire* that potentially unhinges our attachment both to race as a sublimated *Atè* and to the Real of slavery. *Beloved* adopts the role that Lacan ascribes to the analyst, through whom the subject reorients her/his desire and reaches that point at which s/he 'renounces [her/his] object'" (George, 116).

This reorientation is something that Henderson and Wyatt also, in their own way, get at with the concept of reconfiguring language to meet the reality of American Slavery. However, George looks towards Lacan to clarify the multiple relationships between not only character to character, but reader to novel, and novel to novelist. George continues writing that,

"... *Beloved* seeks to enable what Lacan calls a 'beneficial crossing of the limit'... Aimed most urgently at African Americans, *Beloved* facilitates for each reader a *tuché*, or an encounter with the Real. Taking us through a journey that reveals to us the deadly path toward this destructive Real that one travels in pursuit of race and the traumatic past, *Beloved* enables in readers the capacity for catharsis, or a 'purification of desire'... And what the reader's desire is potentially purified of is an attachment to the concept of race that so grounds this traumatic history in our American Symbolic" (George, 116).

In this capacity, *Beloved* takes on a psychic territory for the reader where the psychic traumas of a real material past can be worked through. Unlike Wyatt and Henderson, George and Krumholz include the reader in part of this process. Henderson and Wyatt—and virtually every psychoanalytic

interpretation of *Beloved*—include a section about *Beloved*'s ending—the story not to be passed on—and what this means for the reader; however, George's paper focuses on the function of the novel as a psychic space for the reader and author. In Krumholz's paper, the novel is not read as a psychic space to work through the traumas of racial identity. Rather, Krumholz writes that the history-making process (which *Beloved* furthers) can be a blueprint for both the reader and author to heal.

The theme of history in the discourse around Morrison's *Beloved* is the subject of Kevin Pyon's paper, "Between Psychoanalysis and History: The Cultural Legacy of Toni Morrison in Modern Black Horror". Pyon writes about Morrison's revision of Freudian ideas in her work *Playing in the Dark* and how this revision can inform a reading of *Beloved*. Pyon's paper is also revising some of the psychoanalysis of *Beloved* in scholarship. He writes that,

"In both celebratory and skeptical accounts of the novel, rememory is understood as not only a metaphor about the protagonist Sethe's ongoing confrontation with her enslaved past but Morrison's confrontation with the history of racial slavery as well... In short, Morrison is viewed as conflating the discourses of psychoanalysis and history: memory stands in for the past, and the authorial self stands in for the fictional character" (Pyon, 247).

From Pyon's own literature review, Sethe is read as the "authorial self," where Morrison is, in actuality, confronting the past of slavery. Pyon asserts that this psychoanalytic perspective overlooks "how Morrison unsettles, rather than conflates, the conventional boundaries between psychoanalysis and history" (247). Pyon uses Morrison's early criticism—namely, *Playing in the Dark*—to show how she used Freudian ideas of repression, dreams, and the unconscious "to rethink the history of racial slavery beyond the limits of history itself. Rather than subsume the history of racial slavery within the interiority of the psyche," Pyon argues that Morrison,

"... revises the universal psychoanalytic subject constituted by the timeless past of the unconscious into a transhistorical racialized subject constituted by the enslaved past of the American unconscious. Instead of melancholy or loss... Morrison's unsettling of the discourses of psychoanalysis and history is better understood as (a genre of) horror—namely, the horror of confronting the repressed memory of racial slavery" (Pyon, 248).

Pyon finds in *Playing in the Dark* Morrison's fundamental thoughts on "the construction of the American writerly self," which is haunted by "American Africanism" (Pyon, 250). To elaborate, Morrison finds that "the white unconscious is premised upon" positing itself as "unraced" and "the Black consciousness is premised upon the self-awareness" of representing race, or being raced, which Pyon suggests is Morrison's way of revising or challenging the Freudian conception of the 'universal psychoanalytic subject' (Pyon, 250). The horror, or the "ontological terror," of recognizing whiteness as ideology and/or racialization is the fact that one cannot be without the relational Other—that a white male cannot be a white male without the racialized Other (Pyon, 251). In Pyon's words: The horror Morrison illustrates is of the "... horror of racial slavery as a racial dialectic between a white repression of and Black confrontation with the (repressed) memory of racial slavery" (251).

Pyon's argument is highly compelling because of how it uses Morrison's thesis of *Playing in the Dark* to render a reading of *Beloved* that furthers the thesis of a racial dialectic that locates "the genesis of the urban underclass in white American society's inability or refusal to confront the repressed memory of racial slavery" (Pyon, 253). In Pyon's paper, the Freudian idea of a universal psychoanalytic subject is revised in Morrison's meditations on whiteness in the literary imagination. Pyon's reading of *Playing in the Dark* identifies how Morrison used Freudian ideas of repression, dreams, and the subconscious to locate the presence of "American Africanism" in, for example, Melville's *Moby Dick*—where the impression of Black American's existed in the mirroring of white male characters. The 'subject' of nineteenth-century American literature was the presence of Black Americans and the repressed history of racial slavery; this subject of 'presence and repression' was (and is) a powerful force in the construction of whiteness as ideology, and white racial identity. Pyon argues that this revision of Freud's universal psychoanalytic subject—now, the transhistorical

racialized subject—can be read in *Beloved* in the racial dialectic between white repression and Black confrontation with racial identity and the history of racial slavery.

The theme historiography is a crucial theme in the scholarship surrounding *Beloved*, and it is one that seems connected to the topic of psychoanalysis. There are some connections to make here between Pyon and Henderson. Henderson finds Sethe to be an historian without a discourse who is lacking in the conventional means of history-making. Sethe only has her scars, oral traditions, folktales, and other material presences of the past—but she is also operating in a world that wishes to repress the reality of slavery. Henderson finds *Beloved* to be concerned with the act of history-making (similar to the Krumholz paper) even when Sethe seems to want to repress her own history. Pyon is also concerned with the idea of repressing and confronting history, but not so much the act of history-making, but the larger idea of how repressing and confronting history can be tied with racialization (and the development of a transhistorical racialized subject).

Pyon's paper discusses the horror of having a relational identity: in this regard Pyon's claim is novel, writing about relationality as lethal, unlike other academic papers that write about the necessity of being able to relate (or identify) with an other. Barbara Schapiro in "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" writes about the circumstance of American slavery prohibiting this relationality. Using Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love* (which discusses the free self as a relational self in need of conferring recognition with an other), Schapiro reads the circumstance of slavery as disrupting and disallowing the child to recognize and be recognized by their mother, making Sethe unable to have a coherent and reliable self. Schapiro elaborates, writing:

"The mother, the child's first vital other, is made unreliable or unavailable by a slave system which either separates her from her child or so enervates and depletes her that she has no self with which to confer recognition. The consequences on the inner life of the child—the emotional hunger, the obsessive and terrifying narcissistic fantasies—constitute the underlying psychological drama of the novel" (Schapiro, 194).

The underlying thought of “the object relations school of psychoanalysis,” as Schapiro cites Benjamin, is that human beings are social beings who are “innately responsive and relational” (Schapiro, 195). Therefore, the structure of American Slavery which breaks down the security, reliability, and consistency of the family structure—the relationship between mother/parent and child—is seen as not only a tragedy of its own accord, but consequential to the development of a coherent and reliable self, i.e., a psychic death. This context is what Schapiro argues constitutes the driving force of the novel, and the primary reason for Sethe’s paternalistic act—killing Beloved. Schapiro does not just look at *Beloved* to affirm her argument, but, like other critical essays on *Beloved*, looks to Morrison’s other work. Discussing *Sula*, Schapiro writes how Sula’s involvement in the drowning of a child in the river is characterized by the condition of having no one else to rely upon—that Sula had no one to count on, not even her own self. To this Schapiro writes, “... the lack of an affirming, reliable other leads to an unconscious, murderous rage and the lack of a coherent, reliable self” (Schapiro, 196).

Recalling FitzGerald, who wrote about the reluctance to psychoanalyze *Beloved* using object relations theory (because of the stringent definitions of motherhood) (FitzGerald, 669), it is not hard to imagine that FitzGerald would have a difficult time accepting Schapiro’s essential argument: that Sethe acts with a narcissistic tendency to assert herself into Beloved’s life because Sethe was never recognized and never got to recognize her own mother. The pitfall of Schapiro’s paper, I argue, is the use of Benjamin’s theory as a direct overlay in reading *Beloved*. Wyatt, Henderson, George, FitzGerald and Pyon all use psychoanalytic theories to frame discourses in *Beloved*, granting the novel the ability to revise the psychoanalytic discourse. In short, they all work with *Beloved* on its terms, not the theory’s terms. Schapiro, however, only invites Benjamin into the conversation where the notion of intersubjectivity dominates the reading of *Beloved*, making Schapiro cherry-pick scenes

with ocular and oral imagery, or collapsing (or flattening) Paul D. into the ‘maternal role’. Essentially, Schapiro reads *Beloved* on Benjamin’s terms. By doing so, Schapiro loses out on a chance to develop the idea of intersubjectivity. Henderson, Wyatt, FitzGerald, George, and Pyon are papers that discuss how *Beloved* adds to, and/or alters the psychoanalytic framework within the context of the novel; Schapiro’s does not.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review has focused on psychoanalytic readings of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and has found that papers that use psychoanalytic theories as a discursive framework (such as Henderson, Wyatt, George, FitzGerald, and Pyon) offer readings which work with the revisional qualities of *Beloved*. To summarize, Henderson wrote about narrativity in historiography and *Beloved*’s addition to this ongoing historical discussion; Wyatt wrote about Sethe’s maternal symbolic, adding to Lacan’s conception of the paternal symbolic; George also wrote about Lacan and the novel as a psychic space for working through racial identity; FitzGerald found a new articulation of relational objects theory and writing against a model with a fixed definition of motherhood; and Pyon identified Morrison’s thoughts on repression and confrontation of American racial slavery in American literature, arguing for ‘the horror’ Morrison wrote in *Beloved* to redraw the lines between psychoanalysis and history. Schapiro’s paper was not as dynamic; rather it was a static analysis of *Beloved*, using Jessica Benjamin’s notion of intersubjectivity to render a reading of the novel which portrays Sethe’s act as a narcissistic assertion, bred out of an unmet need to be recognized by her mother, making her self unreliable and incoherent. As this is the first in a larger body of work, my next steps will be to develop a reading of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* which is in conversation with the psychoanalytic readings of Morrison’s novel, and to seek out other novels (perhaps even films) to provide more readings in discussion with psychoanalytic readings of literature.





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