

Unit 4-Hybrid “Is.” Postmodern revisions of autobiography

1. Is the “124 house” an element of the Magical Realism? By Alba Alcalá Franco.

From my point of view, 124 Bluestone Road is an important element of Magical Realism in Toni Morrison’s “Beloved” because it is the place where both juxtaposed elements that are the real and the magical or life and death cohabit in a way that seems to be normal. As it was the most common thing in life. The house represents the closeness of the two worlds.

There we can find the real which is the narration of the everyday life of a black woman (Sethe) who tries to survive in a world dominated by whites and her daughter (Denver); we can also see the magical part and, perhaps, the bizarre naturalized part, in the case of Beloved, the daughter that comes back to life, who represents the moreness in the novel. This “moreness” can be seen in the following quote:

“They were both silent for a moment and then he said, “Uh, that girl. You know. Beloved?”

“Yes?”

“You think she sure ‘nough your sister?”

Denver looked at her shoes. “At times. At times I think she was-more”.

(314. Beloved)

At the beginning, the ghost of the baby who Sethe killed in a desperate outburst for saving her children lives in the house and this is also the place where Beloved, this baby who comes to life, lives.

So, in conclusion, 124 is an important element associated with Magic Realism in the novel because it is the place where all the important facts take place, both real and magic.

1. “The importance of place in Beloved” by Ángela Gestido Malvido

Place is a crucial point in the lives of the protagonists of *Beloved*: it is clear the difference between being in the slave state of Kentucky and being in the free state of Ohio; or being in the southern plantation of “Sweet Home” or living at 124. It is also obvious that there are not absolute good or bad places and that is because of the movable borders of time (the overlapping of past and present in the haunted house, and in the character’s minds) and place.

The characters that were slaves in “Sweet Home” were completely dehumanised and their identities were completely cancelled: they were deprived of their bodies, of their will, of their families, of their original culture and history, of their names and so on and so forth. In the

South they were not seen as individuals but as commodities and they had to bear “unspeakable atrocity and violence.”

In contrast, the North was seen as the place of freedom. Baby Suggs soon understands the importance of being free: while crossing the Ohio River she becomes aware that she has a beating heart and, from then on, she will preach for the importance of the body, and she will teach her community to appreciate themselves. From this viewpoint we see that liberation from slavery and from the south becomes the key to the development of the self.

However, while the North is originally seen as the place of utter goodness for the black community, the expectations of a safe living and a free existence are soon thwarted by the launching of the Fugitive Slave Law: Sethe, once she had escaped from “Sweet Home” and had arrived at “124”, suffered the implications of this law: as a consequence to it, the border that separated North and South, that is, the Ohio River, is no longer the mark of separation between a slave state and a free state: now blacks could not be free at either side. Deciding that her children would not lead a life of slavery, Sethe tried to kill them all before being caught. The outcome of this event referred to as “The Misery” consisted not only on the killing one of her daughters and the scaring off Schoolteacher and his nephews or having been arrested; from then on she would have to bear the trauma of this experience, which would be embodied in the house where she lives. 124 will become an enchanted house, in which the spirit of the killed baby would manifest itself. It could also be argued that the number of the house stands for Sethe’s children, and the missing number 3 represents the spirit of Beloved, which has become implicit in the presence of the house.

Again, psychological trauma will enslave Sethe, depriving her of her own identity: alienating her from her past, from her community, and from herself. Now, the house in which she and her family lived freely and happily is more similar to “Sweet Home”, and once more she would have to fight to escape from it. Now it wasn’t a physical escape; she had to prepare a mental escape.

We see the evolution of Sethe’s mental state and of the plot of the novel through the description of the house at the beginning of the three sections: “124 was spiteful”, “124 was loud”, “124 was quiet”; corresponding to the introduction, climax and denouement of the story. We can see that in this novel place is intrinsically linked with time and consequently to memories. It wasn’t until Sethe could face her past that 124 stopped being haunted by a spirit from the past.

All in all, the importance of place in *Beloved* lies in that it has the means to deprive the characters of their identities reducing them to mere commodities, but it also has the means to help you develop it, as when the characters live in the free state of Ohio. However, this novel teaches us that being free and developing a sense of self is not only granted by a geographical state but also by a state of mind. Also, this novel is a quest for “home” and it is not geography that provides that either, but the individual’s identity.

1. **“Beloved: the house and its moods” by Diego Canelada Sánchez**

Because of the spirit of the baby the house was cursed. That place was evil and dangerous, but Sethe didn't realize it. She thought it was only sadness, however Paul knew from the beginning that the presence of the spirit was an evil influence, as we see in page 10: *“He followed her through the door straight into a pool of red and undulating light that locked him where he stood. “you got company?” He whispered, frowning. “of and on” said Sethe. “Good God”. He backed out the door onto the porch. “what kind of evil you got in here?”. “it's not evil, just sad”*. The women saw the presence of the spirit as natural, and they tried to have a normal life as they could, but the ambient of sadness was very strong and they were always in bad mood. Anyway, with the presence of Paul the moods change a bit. The family is happier more and more but, although the ghost had behaved calmed a little time, it starts again with its bad moods and becomes evil again, destroying the happiness of the house and bringing illness to Sethe. So the people of the village have to help Denver to maintain her mother until the ghost goes away.

1. **“Is the house that calls for ghosts or are ghosts accidentally bounded to the house?” by Sofía Hernández Hernández.**

As far as the reading explains we see the house controlled and abused by a spoiled toddler killed by her mother. Later we find out that another girl died there in a violent way.

Beloved is not the first book, movie, essay, story... where the house has an important meaning or where the house turns out to be a character much more than a passive element of the story. Memories bound to the walls and turns the house into something alive, for the interest of any story the worse the memories are the stronger to remain.

Beloved is a toddler when Sethe kills her, it's really easy to understand her tantrums, to get to understand she may want to interfere on her older siblings lives, however is it possible that a

kid that stage turn into something so strong? Beloved controls the house, we can see her almost being the house itself, turns the house into some kind of lunatic playground and her family are her toys, but I still wonder if a young kid is strong enough to turn a house and its elements into her playground.

Then there's the other girl, "a girl locked up by a white man over by Deer Creek. Found him dead last summer and the girl gone. Maybe that's her", violent death and for sure violent life, she's a grown up not a baby like Beloved. Wouldn't make more sense that she was the ghost hunting the house?. Theoretically it would obviously, however wouldn't make much sense to the story because then we wouldn't be able to explain the link between the ghost and Sethe, but it could be.

Giving a second thought to the it we have a house that it's another character in the book, that means that as any other character the house will have its own personality and that took me to the thought of the house taking advantage of what happens inside. We cannot blame the house for Sethe killing Beloved or for the man kidnapping the girl, or could we?.

A risky reading would present a house with a devilish "soul" that feeds from what happens on its premises, controlling the inhabitants and feeding from them. The house simply would feed from their fears, from their lack of knowledge, from their pasts. If the house is the evil presence no one will blame the house on itself everyone will look for a reason to explain what happens. Houses build over blood and bones of slaves, a girl kidnapped and tortured, a baby killed by her mother... The house may know enough about the inhabitants to make them believe what they want to believe, like with the ear rings, the ghost must be Beloved because of the memory of the ear rings... is that right? Beloved too young when she died, would she remembered an ear ring? Probably as much as a house would.

Truth is that since we first open the book we are ready to believe its Beloved torturing her family because of the title, because of the story... but at the end on second thoughts we know that the best way to control slaves was through fear, often they were taught to be scared of what they knew and even more of what they couldn't explain. This fear is inside Sethe's body is the house hunted by the toddler or by the unfortunate lives of illiterate people that used to justify the unknown with ghosts stories?. Maybe the fact that she was simply torturing herself for killing her baby girl...

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1. **“The Significance Of The House In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: This novel uses the house as a separate character that interacts with its inhabitants and neighbors. How is this relationship built and developed through the story?” by Rosa Piñuel Vega.**

In 19th century American literature, the settings in works of fiction usually play a very worthy function in the plot development. Toni Morrison successfully achieved this in *Beloved* by integrating and personifying the house as a main character of the novel that has dramatic existence and impact on other characters. 124 Bluestone Road is of great significance in regards to the various themes of the story. It can be pointed that the house changes, as the story progresses, along with its inhabitants and its meaning keeps varying throughout the novel.

In the beginning, when Baby Suggs was still alive, the house of 124 Bluestone Road is seen with reverence, as Baby Suggs was a loved and respected preacher in the community. It is a common place where people come to eat and chat and find out information.

All these appreciativeness soon turned into jealousy and dislike. Starting with the pie party and following with the tragic murder incident. Feeling strongly envious towards the family, the community refused to warn and defend Sethe from the arrival of Schoolteacher, leading the fanatical but protective mother to commit an insupportable act. After observing Sethe's act, the community backed away and the relationship between them and the house was stopped, viewing it with strong dislike, and perhaps fear.

Towards the end, the women of the area headed towards the house with a desire to help and conceivably a new feeling of friendliness, under the leadership of Ella. After viewing Denver out of her house and crying for help with her diseased mother, much of the raging preconceptions about 124 Bluestone Road vanished. The community's desire of help is grown from from their guilt as well. All this reflects the impulse to create a new community and carry on Baby Suggs' wish: To rebuild society as strong as possible.

Friendliness

dislike and hate

Desire of assistance

Community's rejection