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The Elements of Supernatural and Magic Realism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Abstract

The present research paper is a study of the elements of Magic Realism and the supernatural elements in the novel, *Beloved* by the Nobel laureate novelist Toni Morrison. The term Magic Realism was originally applied in the 1920s to the school of surrealist German painters and was later used to describe the process fiction of writers like George Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Salman Rushdie etc. These writers weave a sharply etched realism representing ordinary events and details together with fantastic and dream-like elements, as well as with material derived from myth and fairy tales. The German critic Franz Roz introduced the concept of Magic realism in 1920 and it was first used in paintings. The term was introduced in the book *Post-expressionism, Magic Realism: Problem of the Most Recent European Paintings in 1925*. The purpose here is to analyze the elements of magic realism in the novel, *Beloved*. We can see supernatural elements in Sethe's house that bring chaos by haunting everyone through its mysterious presence, and making Sethe's both the sons Howard and Buglar run away. It appears to be the ghost of a baby which was murdered by Sethe. The ghost causes the things in the house to break and shake mysteriously. In magic realism fiction the ghosts are the central characters generally. In the novel *Beloved* Morrison has portrayed the ghost as a living person. Thus, the dominance of a unique, mystical and gloomy atmosphere can be seen throughout the novel

Keywords- Ghost, Beloved, Marginalization, Reincarnation, Supernatural, Magic Realism

The term Magic Realism consists of two opposite meanings; "Realism" which describes real life events and "Magic" consists of mythical events and imagination. The concept of magic realism was introduced as an object of the research. Nowadays the term is in widespread use. Now even in cinema the term is being used in a broad spectrum. Taking the term into consideration the critic Soukhanov says that "it is believed that magic realist texts braids logically unexplainable mystic elements with

reality” (1992 45). The most important feature of magic realism is the use of myth, legend and folklore. The novelist has used the term magic realism to highlight the black folktales and their culture in a very beautiful and elite fashion in place of presenting the dominant ideas of western culture. We find that Morrison’s writings contain a number of magical and mysterious elements. Using the elements of fantasy, Morrison embellished her writing in a spectacular way.

Morrison in the novel, *Beloved* describes the life of a slave “Sethe” who gained freedom. Sethe cannot bear the fact that her baby girl also would bear the same trauma and pain of the horrible life which she endured; so she murdered her baby girl. Her grief is so strong that when a woman called Beloved comes to her doorstep who resembles the dead girl child of Sethe, she assumes that her dead daughter has reincarnated into a human being. The title of the house '124' signifies that the house is haunted. The house holds its own significance that we get to know by using the term magic realism. The house is depicted as a living being as if it feels and understands everything. The description of which can be seen here, “she smiled at him, and like a friend in need, the chimney coughed against the rush of cold shooting into it from the sky. Window sashes shuddered in a blast of winter air” (Morrison, 130). The novel tells us in the very beginning that house 124 is spiteful and carries baby venum. It is described that females and the children of the house were aware of it for many years. But the irony is that it is only seen by Sethe and her daughter Denver. The grandmother, baby Suggs, died in the beginning of the novel. At the age of thirteen both the sons of Sethe ran away from the house because both of them were very much scared of the mysterious tricks played by the ghost to make them leave the house for example when Buglar looks at the mirror the glass breaks in the same way Howard sees two small handprints on the top of the cake. Everything starts moving of its own in the house; it is clear that the ghost wants to teach Sethe a lesson. The ghost does not want anyone to forget it that is why the ghost comes back again and again as stated by Sethe recollecting her past that some things go away happily but something stays in your memories forever and not just the memories but also the things that you feel connected with. Citing an example she says that if your house in which you have spent many years burns down still you can never forget the memories, it will remain with you throughout the life.

In the novel the name of the home is sweet home but the circumstances are just opposite of it which shows a contradiction in itself. It creates confusion because in reality the place is haunted as it horrifies and scares the readers. Realism creates a twist, it breaks the stereotypes which makes our perspective broad. The walls of the house also felt her presence when beloved used to live there as a spirit. No drama has been depicted the way we see in the movies. Morrison has not portrayed the kind of ghost that unnecessarily intimidates people by scaring people with meaningless antics such as throwing the furniture by lifting it here and there etc. There is nothing here that shakes people's spirits. Here the purpose of the ghost was just to make people realise that they should not consider her as dead rather think that she is a living and is a part of the family. Even the walls of the house could see her soul and when she came a strange atmosphere was created. The house comes to life on her arrival. “White staircase climbed towards the blue-and-white wallpaper of the second floor” (11).

Magic realism gives a thirst in the convention of realism based on factual evidence, by including other kinds of perception. The narrative describes the ghosts having the ability to make the absent things present as a real human being When Paul D arrives at 124, Bluestone Road and exorcises the ghost the at that point even the inanimate things come to life. When the spirit enters the house all the windows and doors starts shaking and gets open and close of their own. With his loud voice and the loud rumble of furniture he drove away the ghost and dispersed all those illusions which had defamed the house as haunted in the locality. But within a few days the ghost comes back. In the form of Beloved the ghost descended from the water, wearing a black robe. When Denver tries to know something about her just to remove her suspicion, she is reluctant to answer most of the

questions. On being asked, where did you live before? She tells in a very scary way. It was very hot there. There was no place to breathe, not even to move, there were many people, some people were dead also. Taking it into consideration Louis Parkinson Zamora, expresses “they foreground magical realism's most basic concern the nature and limits of the knowable and they facilitate magical realism's critique of modernity” (Zamora, 498).

Morrison herself has said, “I am very happy to hear that my books haunt, that is what I work very hard for and for me, it is an achievement when they haunt readers” (qtd in Anderson, 47). Morrison uses ghost to make characters, realize and accept their past: According to Toni Morrison Encyclopedia: “there mythic elements root the novels in the African tradition and provides a spiritual and cultural bridge between the history of the characters ancestors and the lives of the characters at the time the novels and set in the United States” (79).

Morrison used the theme of reincarnation, which would be impossible in realist novels. In the same way, through the weapon of, magic realism technique, Morrison depicts the resentment and pain that is the horrific result of slavery and colonialism. Abdennebi: throws the light on it; “As Memory is but a moment of fear and trembling, a moment that shakes the body, and like an unexpected storm, shatters its wholeness, disturbs its restless quietness. It is at the difficult moment of training oneself to throw the past behind, that once awakened, hurled back to the past through the ever-persistent pain” (2010, 91). The novelist has presented the description of the beloved's body as a tempting and Alluring Young woman. She describes her seductive and sensual curves in an amazing way. Her limbs and her nature were exactly like that of a newborn baby. She looks so weak that she could not even lift her own weight. Beloved is portrayed as a newborn baby devoid of adulteration, absolutely innocent, soft and gentle. Her skin was not like the skin of ordinary women. She looked exactly like an angel from heaven. Instead Beloved had spotless new skin, her hands and feet were softer than rose petals. She was very charming.

The supernatural appears in a number of forms in the novel but all of them have an irrevocable effect on the character, through ghost and magic, the characters are forced to face a past that has been forgotten. The novelist has used the Mulberry tree as an indicator of the beginning of new life. Sethe compared her past to a chokecherry tree which has a symbolic meaning. Through the tree the novelist seeks to describe the wound inflicted on her back when she was chained to slavery. A scene is shown here in which Sethe's School teacher once opened her back and when he closed it, a tree grew there. As her memory grows, so does the tree, she gets lost in the memories by putting herself in place of the tree. Sethe describes it as “a chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know” (145). She gets lost in the horrifying past. She goes back eighteen years and recalls her very painful past. The readers can sketch the picture inside the mind only from the detailed picture of the tree. Although it brings very conflicting inner experiences and bitter memories nonetheless the tree brings some positive vibes and some happy moments also, and tries to find a ray of hope even in the face of despair. It is deeply connected to her unforgettable, irrevocable past which is deeply embedded in her memories. If a person truly wants to overcome the bad experience of the past; the person has to reconstruct the bad memories by rebuilding the past in a positive manner. At this juncture the comment of Sigmund Freud's is appropriate. He believes that “Sethe must ‘conjure up’ her past-symbolized by Beloved and confront it as an antagonist. Sethe must learn to regard her problematic past an ‘enemy worthy of [her] mettle, a piece of [her] personality, which was a solid ground for its existence and out of which things of value for [her] future life have to be derived” (90).

In a dialogue the voice of Sethe and Beloved becomes one: She inquired of many things to Beloved and asked her to tell the truth. Such as have you come from the other end? If you have come from the other end have you really come for me? Do you recognise me? And says your face is exactly

like my face. She asks further, can you forgive me? Sethe told her that she is absolutely safe there and requested beloved to stay in her house with her. The way the relationship between the mother and daughter shown here is absolutely injurious to the mental and physical health of Sethe. She fed beloved so much that not even a single grain remains in the home for them to eat. She got stuck in the way that she made herself isolated from society. Demetrakopoulos defines the relationship as “psychic incest” (36). He argues further that “this connection between the mother and daughter is injurious for the mother’s possibilities to go into the community, which is definitely accurate in the case of Sethe, who at this juncture is wholly separated from the community” (176).

The use of music enhances the charm of the novel, and makes the description even more alive and fantastic. In the process of exorcism 124 becomes alive and a very frightening and scary sound starts coming from the house, the sounds of animals makes the mystery deeper. In her works we get to know that she has woven the texture of her composition in a musical and rhythmic manner. Through her brilliance she increases the elegance of the exoticism ritual. This type of environment awakens the inner consciousness of the reader and boosts up their spirit. The mystery piques the curiosity of the reader to know what turn the story will take next. Ahead beyond this point an attempt has been made to give the research a meaningful look by using description of pictorial method and adequate testing has been to enhance its quality.

Thus, the research shows that magic realism is not used only as an experience but rather it occupies a special place in her literary creation. Whatever physical and mental torture the black has faced in history, they have been shown very realistically through magic realism. The use of the elements of magic realism made a special contribution by giving a desirable feel to the novel. It leaves a very deep and indelible impression in the mind of the reader. The novelist wants to convey the message that if a person wants to overcome his/her past s/he has to give up all the bitter experiences of the past and leave one's consciousness free. To heal the deadly wounds one has to settle with the present positively by discarding the negative thoughts and be happy internally.

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