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Steps Toward Healing from the Possessive Other: The Vital Role of Fantastical Literature in

Trauma Theory

A Thesis by

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Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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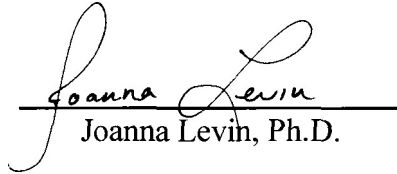
Joanna Levin

The thesis of Bekah D. Izard is approved.



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April 2023

Steps Toward Healing from the Possessive Other: The Vital Role of  
Fantastical Literature in Trauma Theory

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## **ABSTRACT**

Steps Toward Healing from the Possessive Other: The Vital Role of Fantastical Literature in

Trauma Theory

by Bekah D. Izard

Fantastical narratives such as fairy tales and magical realist literature utilizes fantastic and intangible spaces to unpack that which is often beyond the limitations imposed on our understanding by reality: the stunting experience of individual and generational traumas. This study aims to contribute to the current literary discourse's understandings of fantastic literature and its subgenres as a tool for healing from trauma through the application of ontological notions of Selfhood and Otherness supplied by 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, and the notion of Orientalism by postcolonial scholar, Edward Said. The dialogue generated by these schools of thought provide a space in which I unpack the narrative structures unique to fantastical genres through psychoanalytic, feminist, and postcolonial literary theories.

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## **1 Introduction: The Crossroads of the Fantastic and Reality**

In popular media, fantasy texts are often seen as an enjoyable, brisk escape from the problems of reality. While it could be argued that fiction of all genres offers readers some degree of diversion from the real, many fictional genres still reflect a familiar world that abides by familiar laws. Fantastical genres, on the other hand, are not bound to any physical law; in a fantastical narrative, damsels can fall into comas after pricking their fingers on a spindle, tigers can walk and wear fine suits like men, and dead infants can return from the grave as angry spirits and drain the life force from their living mothers. Based on fantastical works' innate extraordinariness, it is understandable for many to assume that a genre which constructs its own reality is, by its own nature, opposite of what we know as real.

Yet, literary discourse within the last half century—namely feminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic theory—has increasingly alluded to fantastical works' imperative role in understanding intricate social issues embedded within reality. With the knowledge that narratives are “shaped by the dominant ideologies of the societies they present,” literary critics have become increasingly aware of fantasy's role beyond entertainment—flourishing discourse around fantastical elements' function as narrative representations of societal ideologies (Tyagi 20). We find one such scholar in Wendy B. Farris and her analysis of the fantastic narrative technique, magical realism, as she describes its connection to cultural identity through the literary canon of postcolonial societies:

Very briefly defined, magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between

them. Furthermore, that combination of realistic and fantastical narrative, together with the inclusion of different cultural traditions, means that magical realism reflects, in both its narrative mode and its cultural environment, the hybrid nature of much postcolonial society (1).

In this sense, magical realism demonstrates that the fantastic and the real are not inherently antonymous; rather, the unique hybridity engrained into magical realism's narrative halves (the fantastic and the real) mirrors the ideological hybridity of societies coping with the interpellation inflicted on their cultures by colonialism. On this note, I would like to clarify this study's definition of fantastical works is not strictly limited to texts that would be considered traditional fantasy. Rather, this study concerns works of fiction that utilize magical narrative elements and techniques to convey societal issues present in our reality—thus, the works discussed in this study may not necessarily be fantasy but most definitely operate within the fantastic.

Likewise, the fantastic narrative anatomy of fairy tales and their modern retellings convey societal issues specific to genders under the traditional western binary of masculinity and femininity. Though I wish to pay proper acknowledgement to the multiplicity of the gender spectrum, for this study's purposes, our discussion takes place within the gender binary of traditional feminine and masculine roles ascribed to an individual by society based on the presence or absence of specific physical attributes. My reasoning for this lies with western fairy tales' gendered origins. In her anthology, *The Classic Fairytale*, Maria Tatar expands on western audiences' tendency to associate fairy tales with traditional feminine values: "Although virtually all of the national collections of fairy tales compiled in the nineteenth century were the work of



men, the tales themselves were ascribed to women narrators” (x). Because most western fairy tales are authored by men who wrote within patriarchal societies that favored binary views on gender, it would be incorrect to assert that these texts are representative of the authentic experiences and thoughts of the women often silenced in patriarchal societies. Yet, feminist literary critics of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries prove these masculine-authored fairy tales’ modern relevancy in feminist discourse as these texts display the expectations and consequential discrimination of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century western Europe. Moreover, Tatar emphasizes the polyvocality bred into the subgenre’s narrative fabric; because fairy tales “circulate in multiple versions, reconfigured by each telling to form kaleidoscopic variations with distinctly different effects,” societal issues unique to women can be compared and contrasted across multiple societies through multiple tales (ix). In other words, despite the cultural and structural varieties that occur, fairy tales around the globe and across time are in constant conversation with each other—inferring the subgenre’s influential “staying power” as a portrayer of western cultural truths regarding violence against women in earlier centuries (Tatar xi). Fairy tales’ “staying power” is so strong in western culture that it has since bred new generations of modern fairy tale revisions and reinterpretations that utilize the fantastic elements of fairy tales to demonstrate the traumatic effects of western societies’ recurring discrimination against women.

Based upon these notions of fantastical narratives providing a unique literary space for feminist and postcolonial discourse on the gendered and racial violence inflicted in western society, this study makes the assertion that fantastical texts are an integral narrative space for recognizing and conveying the traumatic effects of violence on women and people of color. Due

to the obstacles posed by trauma's difficult pathology, the trauma of marginalized voices often goes unheard in the western literary canon. This phenomenon of inaccessibility thus generates a symptomatic disconnect that exists "not only in regard to those who listen to the traumatized" but also "within the very knowledge and experience of the traumatized themselves" (5).

Consequently, the traumatic impact on marginalized voices by violence inflicted on the basis of gender and race struggle to be heard within patriarchal and postcolonial societies. I posit the unique relationship with reality engrained into fantasy's narrative core provides a vital means through which these marginalized voices may access the inaccessible symptoms of their traumas and, in return, begin a path to healing through the "listening of another" (Caruth 11).

Informed by a psychoanalytic and ontological understanding of trauma, I will examine two representatives of fantastic genres: the subgenre of modern fairy tale retellings and the unique narrative technique of magical realism in modern novels. Through feminist and postcolonial readings, I will unpack depictions of trauma in fantastic works that results from oppressive relationships between identities. Our first example is the immediate trauma experienced by the feminine Self in conflict with the masculine Other in Angela Carter's 20<sup>th</sup>-century fairy tale retelling, "The Tiger's Bride;" our second is found in the generational trauma experienced by the black Self in conflict with the possessing, colonial Other in Toni Morrison's magical realist neoslave novel, *Beloved*. By engaging these texts, this study aims to contribute to the vastly emerging scholarly discourse that seeks to solidify fantastical genres' vital literary role in healing from individual and cultural trauma.

## 1.1 Trauma: A Paradoxical Pathology and Representation

Within the last century, western academia has experienced an increase in interdisciplinary efforts to dissect trauma's paradoxical anatomy; yet, trends in western academia and cultures significantly impedes humanity's collective struggle with trauma's pathology. Sigmund Freud's work, though debunked and highly dismissed by a majority of modern critics, remains among the most referential bodies of psychoanalytic work to date. Though Freud may have refined western notions of the unconscious, modern scholars have criticized his work for "subjugat[ing] the disruptive unconscious...to the hegemonic order of the patriarchal family, the rule of law, and the capitalist economy" (Leitch et. al. 17). That is, Freudian psychoanalysis standardized psychological experiences of straight, white men as the official point for comparison when treating various mental health disorders in the human psyche. As a result, demographics with entirely different experiences, such as women and people of color, are largely overlooked in psychoanalytic discourse unless they are being measured against ideologies informed by patriarchy and white oppression.

Emerging from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American public and academia continue this damaging trend. Although general recognition of certain mental health crises, like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), has increased in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, public misconceptions about trauma's impact have persisted. Decades after Freud's *dream work*, the term "PTSD" may be more widely known, but it is likely to first conjure images reminiscent of Freud's roots in western ideologies that socially value the experiences of white men over the experiences of women and people of color. Yet, traumatic responses like PTSD are not exclusive to any single demographic—nor is

trauma necessarily exclusive to events more easily recognizable as traumatizing (such as wars and natural catastrophes). Since 1980, for instance, the American Psychiatric Association, publisher of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), has broadened the academic discourse of trauma from “responses not only to combat and to natural catastrophes but also to rape, child abuse, and a number of other violent occurrences” as common, valid sites of trauma (Caruth 3). Yet, those marginalized voices who are statistically more likely to experience these violent occurrences and survive with the resulting trauma still face daily skepticism and discrimination by western society for the traumas they’ve had to bear for generations—hence this study’s interest in traumatic representations within fantastical narratives by women authors and authors of color.

Before delving further into its presence in fantastical narratives, however, we must first establish this study’s foundational understanding of trauma. While many fields have supplied their own definitions, a general understanding involves:

[A] response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event[s], along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event (Caruth 4).

From this assessment, we may gather some core factors of trauma: the occurrence of one or more overwhelming event(s), a distortion to one’s recollection of said event(s), and an infliction of strong emotional responses to stimuli reminiscent of the event(s). While there is truth to these

definitions, they are strikingly vague and misleading; those living with trauma who have experienced the distressing paradox of being physically present in one mundane moment while simultaneously living in an internalized state of crisis may not consider the term ‘overwhelming’ to be a satisfactory encapsulation of living with trauma. The challenge of understanding trauma’s complexity “arises not only in regard to those who listen to the traumatized, not knowing how to establish the reality of their hallucinations and dreams [but also] occurs rather and most disturbingly often within the very knowledge and experience of the traumatized themselves” (Caruth 5). Consequently, the traumatized are also plagued with this block of inaccessibility in their attempts to understand their symptoms and may lack the proper means to convey and address them.

Lacking the proper means to convey one’s trauma to both oneself and others threatens to intensify an already reality-shattering experience with the harmful effects of isolation. On an individual scale, this isolation can deepen one’s sense of being removed from the actual surrounding reality and contribute to the development of other mental health issues. Culturally, the threat and repercussions of isolation are even greater; for instance, the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have seen an inflection of neoslave narratives by authors of color aimed at not only representing the historical past of the American slavery system but also steered towards providing a “powerful identification—not connection, but identification—of the present-day African American subject with a slave” (Dubey 786). In the article this quote originates from, scholar Madhu Dubey exemplifies the need for speculative fiction—another fantastical subgenre—in the American literary cannon of neoslave narratives to fully encapsulate the cultural trauma of the American

slavery system and combat America's self-inflicted cultural amnesia of its violence against African Americans in the past and present. That is, the traumas of slavery systemically transcend time on the backs of generations of black Americans. For this reason, a more intrusive and direct confrontation of this trauma is imperative in the American literary canon. Dubey exemplifies this relationship between trauma and literature through the evolution of the neoslave narrative by authors of color in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—specifically focusing on realist slave narratives in the 1960's and their rise “in response to widespread amnesia about the history of slavery” (781). Essentially, in the midst of the Civil Rights movement of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, authors of color writing about slavery utilized realist genres and literary devices to convey the traumas of slavery being brushed under the nation's rug by the dominant white society. While Dubey credits these texts' role in rewriting historical accounts of slavery to shift from a white perspective to a black perspective, she also points out the limitations of realistic historical accounts in properly conveying the trauma of slavery which she claims “transgress[es] realist conventions” (782). Thus, Dubey identifies an unfulfilled space within the American literary canon of neoslave narratives that cannot be filled by the limitations of reality: the generational trauma of slavery amongst black Americans. As such, the importance of expanding public conceptions of trauma through the literary canon cannot be overexaggerated as cultural biases threaten to misrepresent diagnostic criteria and isolate both the individually and culturally traumatized.

In addition to the countless repercussions suffered by women and people of color, the gender and racial biases in societal understandings of trauma also hinder the literary pursuit of trauma's pathology. Put simply, when discourse is constrained to a single demographic's

experience of the topic—such as the standardization of white men as subjects in Freudian psychoanalysis—it is incomplete. It is vital, therefore, for cultural and scholarly critics to recognize the highly personalized complexity of trauma’s birthplace. It is in this complex nature, however, that psychoanalyst, Cathy Caruth, identifies “the greatest challenge to psychoanalysis” (6). For instance, trauma is generally understood to result from occurrences of physical violence, yet traumatic symptoms may also manifest from emotionally violent circumstances (i.e. the emotional abuse or neglect, often of children, but also of adults). The criteria for identifying trauma, contrary to popular beliefs, is not conditional to the nature of the initial traumatizing event(s). Ergo, the nature of trauma refuses attempts at simple, clear-cut identification and categorization.

Caruth expresses similar concern about the incompleteness of general definitions of trauma in her work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. She criticizes generalizations of trauma as they fail to recognize how,

the pathology [of trauma] cannot be defined either by the event itself—which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally—nor can it be defined in terms of a *distortion* of the event...The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it (Caruth 4).

In this passage, Caruth addresses two key misconceptions relevant to this study: the impeding belief that only certain kinds of events are traumatizing and the inaccurate understanding of trauma’s effects on memory. While trauma certainly injects gaps into one’s knowledge after the

initial trauma, Caruth clarifies these gaps do not necessarily refer to one's lack of knowledge about the traumatizing experience. Rather, it is not "having too little or indirect access to an experience that places its truth in question...but paradoxically enough, its very overwhelming immediacy, that produces its belated uncertainty (6). That is, the immediate impact of overwhelming sensations—such as fear, pain, and panic—are so intense at the initial site of trauma that they stain and subtlety—or not so subtly—linger in one's mind and body even well after great expanses of time have passed and, in its immediacy, paradoxically creates its own belatedness (6). The innate intensity of trauma, then, distorts one's temporal location rather than their actual memory of the experience(s)—thus "preserv[ing] the event in its literality" (Caruth 8). As such, Caruth asserts that it is "not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself," that merits trauma's inaccessibility (8).

Caruth's identification of this "crisis of truth" in trauma's pathology underlies the connecting characteristic this study aims to highlight between fantastical narratives and trauma: their enigmatic refusal to be identified within a singular space (6). If trauma is "outside the boundaries of any single place or time," fantastical works' unique nonlocation outside of reality is perhaps the greatest narrative site for the traumatized to locate, process, and heal their trauma. Therefore, the narrative structures afforded by fantasy engages trauma's enigmatic core to aid marginalized authors and characters in accessing the inaccessibility of trauma.



## 1.2 The Trauma of Possession

Having established its paradoxical pathology, I make the argument for an umbrella term covering the different literary experiences of traumas that will later be discussed in this study: the *trauma of possession*. Throughout the narratives we will address, one might notice a similar undertone to the various traumas related on page. Before elaborating on this, however, I wish to acknowledge the intersectionality and differentiating circumstances of the feminine and black experiences. That is, a white woman may suffer similar discrimination as a black woman on the basis of her gender, but a white woman's societal experience will never include the added weight of racial discrimination systematically weaved into a black woman's societal experience. While both demographics are prone to oppression by the patriarchy, American black feminine identities are faced with the extra traumatic weight of colonialism that white American women are simply not. That said, as this study discusses generational trauma specific to black women descending from enslaved populations in fantastical narratives, I recognize the gaps in my own experience as a white woman and hope to supplement those gaps with works by women of color authors and critics on the traumas living within this demographic.

Building from this space of understanding that traumas between oppressed demographics are non-ubiquitous, we may examine their ontological commonalities to gain a greater understanding of the trauma inflicted by possession of the Self by the Other.

We start at the intersection of feminist and postcolonial criticism where we encounter fantastic narratives of trauma experienced by generations of an oppressed Self by a societally dominant Other. In her anthology, *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar identifies as much

between the feminine Self and masculine Other in fairy tales' depictions of "patriarchal norms, the subordination of female desire to male desire, and a glorification of filial duty and self-sacrifice" (27). Likewise, in her introduction to *Ordinary Enchantments*, Wendy B. Farris observes that "because magical realism is frequently a cultural hybrid [of the colonized and colonizers], it exemplifies many of the problematic relations that exist between selves and others in postcolonial literature" (4). Subsequently, we can surmise the core conflict in many fantastic narratives is the imbalanced relationship between the two opposing identities henceforth referred to as the Self and the Other.

This study's definition of Self and Other in fantastical narratives is rooted in the anthology, *Oneself as Another*, by 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, through his analysis on these agents' abstract relationship to one another. More specifically, Ricoeur offers two methods of describing the Self's identity by means of its relation to the Other: *idem*, or sameness, and *ipse*, or self-hood.

We start with the first of Ricoeur's descriptions, *idem*. Ricoeur establishes that this measurement of relation is defined in binary terms with "'other' appear[ing] in the list of antonyms of 'same'" (3). As such, an *idem*-based perception of the Other is dependent on what qualifies it as *not* the Self—hence, the relationship between Self and Other is defined in terms of sameness. To provide an example in the most literal terms, another individual is physically Other to my Self because they are physically *not* me; though that individual is their own Self, I may only perceive them as Other than me. Simultaneously, however, this measurement of sameness also restricts my perception of my Self to my *not* being the Other. In application to literary

criticism, the masculine Self's (i.e. male authors and audiences) understanding not only of the feminine Other but also of its own identity is contingent on how it perceives femininity to be opposite of masculinity; or, likewise, the colonial Self's (i.e. western authors and audiences) understanding of its own identity is limited to how it is opposite to its perception of non-western cultures.

Edward Said's foundational postcolonial work, *Orientalism*, provides this study an in-depth example of this measurement of sameness as a destructive characteristic in the possessive relationship between the Self and Other in terms of western academia and eastern cultures. While our later discussion on postcolonial trauma will center around black women characters in the immediate years after the abolishment of the American slavery system, Said's notions about the possessive relationship between the western Other and the eastern Self broadly reflects similar conflicts that arise for non-white identities being perceived by the colonial Other in literature. Said's criticism of western academia, and by extension the western Self, lies in the literary and ideological misrepresentation of the eastern Other as the "Orient" through the lens of the western Self. In response to the 20<sup>th</sup> century trend of western scholars traveling to the east and writing about its exoticism, Said emphasizes the Occident's portrayal of the Orient is not based in any true identity of the east. Rather, Orientalism is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (Said 68). When placed in Ricoeurian terms, we may interpret this as the eastern Self's identity being constricted to how it is *not* the western Other. Thus, literary representation of eastern cultures by western authors is based on the west's perception of the east and how those cultures measure against western cultures.

In application to cultural literary canons, Said identifies the disastrous ramifications of this projection of sameness on the eastern Self through which the Occident Other deepens its control:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (69).

Within this quote, Said refers specifically to the Occident Other's trend of reserving study exclusively for colonized populations through a western lens of sameness. In other words, when critics from western backgrounds write about that which they perceive as the Orient and treat it as the subject of their studies, the actual eastern Self is Othered as a specimen to be judged through a western perception of sameness rather than understood as an active agent with its own history, diversity, and identity. Therefore, Orientalism refers to the "regular constellation of ideas as the preeminent thing about the Orient, and not to its mere being" (Said 71). From Said's analysis, we may garner that literature can be a tool of cultural colonization as the western Self possesses and reshapes the identity of the non-western Other in its literary representation. Therefore, while western scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries may not approach postcolonial studies with the active goal to impose our own culture onto the postcolonized as our predecessors have, we are still subject to internalized biases grounded in a culture of colonization.

Additionally, Said identifies how an *idem*-based approach also limits the western Self's own identity. Most notably, "as much as the West [is] itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence

in and for the West. [Consequently,] the two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other” (71). In other words, because the Occident’s identity is constructed on the foundation of its relation to its perception of the east as Orient, the western Self denies its own ontological recognition beyond how it is not the same as its perception of the non-western Other. As such, the western Self constructs a strange interdependency on the Orient to define itself while simultaneously possessing the non-western Other through Orientalist literature—thus making it an ontological necessity for the western Self to sustain societal and cultural systems aimed at possessing and controlling the non-western Other.

With the conflicts of sameness established, it is natural to question if the relationship between one Self and an Other can exist beyond the power imbalances we observe in patriarchal and postcolonial relationships. Said provides a somewhat optimistic scope through which we might find such a relationship:

My principal methodological devices for studying authority here are what can be called *strategic location*, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about, and *strategic formation*, which is a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large (86).

Said’s concentration on strategic location—which calls for reflection on the author’s relationship to the material they write about—and strategic formation—which similarly calls for reflection on literary works and their impact on cultures—aligns with Ricoeur’s ontological definition of *ipse*

(self-hood). Unlike *idem* which is based in perceptions of sameness, *ipse* concentrates on the Self's ability to reflect on itself as both an object of Otherness and as an acting agent. *Iipse* therefore recognizes "[a] kind of otherness that is not (or not merely) the result of comparison [but is an] otherness of a kind that can be constitutive of self-hood... [and is therefore] not only of comparison (oneself similar to another) but indeed that of an implication (oneself inasmuch as being other)" (Ricoeur 3). Essentially, the practice of self-reflection allows for one Self to recognize its own inherent Otherness. Through this recognition, the Other is de-Orientalized as the Self reflects on how it is also an Other to that which it perceives as Other; thus, both are Self and Other. Ricoeur reflects this notion in the title of his work, *Oneself as Another*, as he claims it "suggests from the outset that the Selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other" (3). Ricoeur argues that the Self implies an innate otherness—meaning that any Self is also, in many ways, an Other. With this established, Said's examination of the Occident Self demands the Occident's reflection on its own innate Otherness (i.e. what parts of western identity is Other than the eastern Self rather than what parts of eastern cultures are other than the western Self).

This line of reflective thinking thus prompts our discussion toward how the relationship between the possessed Self and possessive Other relates to our understanding of trauma theory in fantastical narratives. Referring back to Cathy Caruth's assertion that the traumatizing "scene or thought is not a possessed knowledge, but itself possesses, at will, the one it inhabits, [and] often produces a deep uncertainty as to its very truth," we are inclined to consider trauma and its symptoms as an Other entity that is separate *than* and possessive *of* the traumatized Self (6).

Rather than existing only within the internal psyche, as has been theorized before, trauma is paradoxically both an external and internal Other that mentally and physically possesses one's Self through symptomatic temporal distortion (Caruth 6). That is to say, when traumatic experiences attach to the span of time in which the initial trauma took place and traps an individual within that same temporal mindset, we may consider trauma as a temporally possessive agent. Caruth's word choice, "possesses," particularly infers the agency of one's trauma as though it were a separate being that is beyond one's whole Self yet possesses one wholly.

We find some optimism for those possessed by their trauma in Said and Ricoeur's philosophies of self-hood. The trauma that possesses an individual, in all of its impossibilities, still belongs to the Self as an internalized sense of Otherness. That is, through the recognition and confrontation of the otherness that is one's trauma, the Self may recognize trauma as an "otherness of a kind that can be constitutive of self-hood" (Ricoeur 3). In application to the traumas of possession by the patriarchal and colonial Other, women and people of color internalize the possessing Other's perception of Otherness in their own identities to such a degree that recognizing and conveying said trauma may be impossible due to the disassociation experienced when one is Othered through objectification. Without a proper means to process trauma, one is sentenced to a constant state of temporal possession which hinders any healing that may be done through the simple act of talking through that trauma. Therefore, the need arises for literary methods by which the feminine and black Selves may confront their *idem*-based relations with the patriarchal and colonial Others while simultaneously processing through the trauma of those relations via an *ipse*-based relationship—a need which fantastical narratives dutifully fulfill.

### 1.3 Translating the Traumas of Womanhood: Patriarchal Possession in “The Tiger’s Bride”

The first of our two narratives in which we will examine depictions of the confrontation and processing of possessive trauma is Angela Carter’s fairy tale retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, “The Tiger’s Bride.” To examine the traumas engrained into Carter’s fantastical narrative, however, we must establish the literary background and modern relevancy of fairy tales. Due to centuries’ worth of sanitization and peoples’ association of fairy tales and domesticity, many scholars may assume these tales do not merit serious academic study in the modern age. However, Maria Tatar argues “the staying power of these stories, their widespread and enduring popularity, suggests that they must be addressing issues that have a significant social function—whether critical, conservative, compensatory, or therapeutic” (xi). As such, fairy tales present a scope through which traumas unique to the feminine experience may be communicated and retroactively processed for women audiences and authors. Yet, as previously established in this study’s introduction, most fairy tales were transcribed by men writing within patriarchal societies. Between Charles Perrault’s *Mother Goose* and the various older female figures whom the Grimm Brothers credit for influencing their anthologies, most western fairy tales convey projections of the feminine Self by the patriarchal Other rather than conveying the true experiences of the feminine Self (Tatar x). The general structure of *Beauty and the Beast* fairy tales, for instance, include the following conflicts:

- I. The monster as husband
- II. Disenchantment of the monster



III. Loss of the husband

IV. Search for the husband

V. Recovery of the husband (Tatar x)

Because most well-known fairy tales in the western literary canon originate from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, it is unsurprising this list centralizes the domestic concerns of marriage. Yet, keeping in mind what we've outlined through Orientalism, we should approach the assumption that this list and others like it accurately represent women's concerns and values with a grain of salt. Though these masculine authors speak through feminine narrators and may be informed by domestic struggles within the feminine experience as spectators, they first and foremost write from the internalized biases afforded by their position as men in patriarchal societies. This is evidenced in the typical structure of *Beauty and the Beast* as the primary focus of the heroine's story in this tale type is not herself but her husband: if he is a monster, if he is lost, and if he is recovered. Thus, this tale type defines feminine characters through their relationship to their masculine counterparts. Consequently, the feminine Self is not ontologically recognized as its own identity but rather through its relation to the patriarchal Other.

On this note, it is vital to clarify this study's distinction between the masculine Other and the patriarchal Other: while the patriarchy is a political movement that enforces patriarchal power, masculinity refers to the gendered role imposed on an individual for the presence or absence of physical characteristics by society. As such, masculinity does not necessarily entail patriarchy. Rather, the patriarchal Other denotes an assertion of control over the feminine Self while masculinity is the means through which the patriarchal Other defines the feminine Self. As

such, fairy tales existed as instrumental teaching modules for patriarchal values in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Even fairy tales written by feminine authors within patriarchal societies may uphold and enforce these values; *Beauty and the Beast*, for instance, specifically demonstrates fairy tales as “powerful instruments of constructive socialization” for young Anglo-Saxon women in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as one of the most well-known versions of this tale was written by the female author, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (Tatar xi). Regarding this version of *Beauty and the Beast*, Tatar indicates how de Beaumont’s version exemplifies fairy tales as, [V]ehicles for indoctrinating and enlightening children about the virtues of good manners, good breeding, and good behavior. But the lessons and moral imperatives inscribed in Beaumont's ‘Beauty and the Beast’ pertain almost unilaterally to the tale's young women, who, in a coda, are showered with either praise or blame (26).

Similar to Said’s notion of Orientalism, the literary representation of women by patriarchal authors is not a true representation of the feminine Self; yet these patriarchal misrepresentations of “good” and “bad” femininity are preserved and handed down between generations through fairy tales. The literary possession of the feminine Self is traumatizing as traditional, societal expectations of women in these tales are rooted in the patriarchal Other’s desire for control and authority over the feminine Self. Thus, even with a feminine association, traditional fairy tales “endorse in one cultural inflection after another...a reinscription of patriarchal norms, the subordination of female desire to male desire, and a glorification of filial duty and self-sacrifice” (27). In this sense, we can deduce fairy tales have, historically, served as possessive tools by which the patriarchal Other continues “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over” the

feminine Self (Said 69). In return, the trauma of possession for the feminine Self defies temporal location as it spreads through centuries of patriarchal fairy tales.

Yet, paradoxically, fairy tales are also utilized to break free from this generational curse of subordination to the patriarchy through modern, feminist retellings. Tatar, for instance, describes retellings of old tales as:

[C]ritique[s] of current relations between the sexes...seeking to ‘penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture [and] above all to demystify these sacred cultural texts, to show that we can break their magical spells and that social change is possible once we become aware of the stories that have guided our social, moral, and personal development” (xvi-xvii).

One such retelling is found in Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” which reinvents Beaumont’s *Beauty and the Beast* as a modernized, feminist narrative. When approaching this patriarchal tale from a feminist lens, Carter comments, “I wanted to demonstrate the extraordinary richness and diversity of responses to the same common predicament—being alive—and the richness and diversity with which femininity, in practice, is represented in 'unofficial' culture: its strategies, its plots, its hard work” (Tatar xv). In this commentary, Carter reflects the cultural literary effort to heal from the simple trauma of existing as a woman within a patriarchal society by reclaiming the multiplicity ingrained into the feminine Self that has, for centuries, been limited by its singular comparison to the masculine Other. Though Carter breaks from classic fairy tales’ characteristic patriarchal ideology, this is not to say that she shies away from the subgenres’ inherent magic in

favor of portraying a realist depiction of the feminine Self. Rather, she utilizes that magic to emphasize the extraordinariness of the feminine Self in its multiplicity.

Interestingly, yet perhaps not surprisingly, fairy tale retellings mirror the anatomy of magical realism in the same sense that “the magic in these texts refuses to be entirely assimilated into their realism...[as] magical images or events, glowing alluring from within the realistic matrix, often highlight central issues in a text” (Farris 8). For instance, the image of mirrors is no stranger in the classic *Beauty and the Beast* fairy tale, but it is in Carter’s modern retelling that we garner the central issue of traumatic possession by the patriarchal Other inside the mundane imagery of a mirror—more specifically, the possessive phenomenon of the male gaze.

The male gaze, though truly all-encompassing in Carter’s retelling, is focalized in two masculine characters: the narrator’s father and the Beast. Immediately, Carter dispels Beaumont’s idealization of feminine self-sacrifice as her retelling’s version of Beauty—though she is a remarkably unnamed narrator—is not given the choice to sacrifice herself to the Beast in her father’s place. Instead, the tale begins with a card game between the narrator’s father and the mysterious “*grand seigneur*” of the foreign, southern lands they have traveled to—effectively emphasizing the miniscule agency this female narrator has as she is gambled away by her own father while she merely “watched with the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly” (Carter 33). The narrator—as a dependent daughter—does not have the power to save even herself from her father’s decisions as she cannot defy his desires—even when those desires directly endanger her. While this sort of characteristic is valued in Beaumont’s version, Carter’s retelling effectively communicates the real danger this

enforced muteness poses to women as their fates are recklessly decided by an indifferent patriarchal Other who is in a possessive position to objectify and dehumanize them.

The severity of this mundane game of cards is further emphasized when the narrator reveals that the “*grand seigneur*” her father is gambling her to is literally a Beast:

The hour was late. The chill damp of this place creeps into the stones, into your bones, into the spongy pith of the lungs; it insinuated itself with a shiver into our parlour, where Milord came to play in the privacy essential to him. Who could refuse the invitation his valet brought to our lodging? Not my profligate father, certainly; the mirror above the table gave me back his frenzy, my impassivity, the withering candles, the emptying bottles, the coloured tide of the cards as they rose and fell, the still mask that concealed all the features of The Beast but for the yellow eyes that strayed, now and then, from his unfurled hand towards myself (33).

From the damp stones to the images reflected in the hanging mirror, Carter packs this scene with such intricate details that a reader might forget this is a fairy tale; yet it is this “accumulation of realistic details...[that] describes [the] impossible event” of being gawked at by a Tiger-Man with yellow eyes (Farris 90). In effect, these elements of realism highlight the magical characteristics of the scenario to focalize the narrator’s truly powerless position at the hands of the literal Beast and the figurative beast that is her father. Moreover, the narrator’s reliance on the mirror in this scene acts as a portal through which she asserts the only form of agency afforded to her: her ability to observe and judge her role within the patriarchal Other’s story. As her father plays the Beast, for example, the narrator comments:

Gambling is a sickness. My father said he loved me yet he staked his daughter on a hand of cards. He fanned them out; in the mirror, I saw wild hope light up his eyes. His collar was unfastened, his rumbled hair stood up on end, he had the anguish of a man in the last stages of debauchery...[a] queen, a king, an ace. I saw them in the mirror. Oh, I know he thought he could not lose me; besides, back with me would come all he had lost, the unraveled fortunes of our family at one blow restored... You must think my father valued me at less than a king's ransom; but, at *no more* than a king's ransom (35).

By watching her father through the mirror, the narrator practices the only form of agency she has in her particular situation: the ability to gaze. Yet, she does not use this ability to objectify her father as an unloving and cruel figure; instead, she essentially recognizes her father's humanity by considering the motivations behind his actions while still recognizing his objectification of her as a means for monetary gain. Yet, her statement that "gambling is a sickness" infers her desire to excuse her father's negligence as a symptom of an ailment he suffers from rather than a choice he is actively making. The narrator's perception of her father in the beginning of this tale, therefore, exemplifies her paradoxical desire to relate to and connect with the patriarchal Other while it gambles away her life.

Carter further illustrates the narrator's father's possessive power over his daughter through the imagery of an automaton maid. After she is gambled away to the Beast, the narrator is shown to her room by the Beast's valet who summons her:

This clockwork twin of mine halted before me, her bowels churning out a settecento minuet, and offered me the bold carnation of her smile. Click, click—she rises her arm

and busily dusts my cheeks with pink, powdered chalk that makes me cough; then thrusts towards me her little mirror (Carter 39).

The maid's presence serves as a fantastical representation of the traditional, objectifying role expected of the feminine narrator in several ways. Firstly, Carter's description of the automaton maid mechanicalizes characteristics traditionally valued as feminine such as likening her insides to sweet musical sounds and her robotic smile to a flower. This combination of machine and maid emphasizes the lack of agency afforded to the feminine Self under subservience to the patriarchal Other. Moreover, the maid's magic mirror represents the possessive force of the narrator's father's gaze as the narrator reports:

I saw within it not my own face but that of my father, as if I had put on his face when I arrived at The Beast's palace as the discharge of his debt. What, you self-deluding fool, are you crying still? And drunk, too. He tossed back his grappa and hurled the tumbler away. Seeing my astonished fright, the valet took the mirror away from me, breathed on it, polished it with the ham of his gloved fist, handed it back to me. Now all I saw was myself, haggard from a sleepless night, pale enough to need my maid's supply of rouge (Carter 39).

Rather than showing her own reflection, the mirror shows father's image in the aftermath of losing his daughter. Though it is not specified if her fear at this sight is a result of the mirror's magic, based on Carter's literary usage of mirrors in the previous scene, we may surmise her fear is a result of seeing her image erased by her father's—emphasizing the narrator's simultaneous fear of and anger toward being possessed by the patriarchal Other.

Yet, the feminine narrator in “The Tiger’s Bride” is not the only Self under threat of possession as she, from her position as a white Russian, exoticizes the vaguely foreign land of the South and her new Tiger groom. Through the narrative affordances of fairy tale, Carter raises the tale’s central issue of Orientalism, as the narrator recounts her nursemaid’s warnings from her youth: “If you don’t stop plaguing the nursemaids, my beauty, the tiger-man will come and take you away. They’d brought him from Sumatra, in the Indies, she said; his hinder parts were all hairy and only from the head downwards did he resemble a man” (36). As such, the narrator reveals the Orientalist mindset she had been raised with as her nursemaids bestialize men from Sumatra—essentially possessing the image of Sumatran men through the white, Russian perception of humanness and beastliness. This Orientalist mindset infects the narrator as well as, upon their first meeting after her father loses her in the card game, she objectifies the Beast by commenting “he has such a growling impediment in his speech that only his valet, who understands him, can interpret for him, as if his master were a clumsy doll and he the ventriloquist” (34). From this description, the Beast appears so removed from humanity that he is dependent on his interpreting valet to perform humanness. This, however, does not describe the Beast himself; rather, it depicts the narrator’s perception of him based on her own colonial bias. Notably, her perception of the Beast is based in a mindset of sameness; she identifies the Beast exclusively through the ways he is Other than her based in her Orientalist upbringing. The Beast and his home are consequently presented as exotic because they are different in comparison to her own homeland of Russia.



As the tale progresses, however, Carter highlights the intersectionality of possessive trauma between the narrator and the Beast despite each one's attempts to possess the other. Just as the narrator acts a colonial Other to the Beast's non-white Self, the Beast is a patriarchal Other to the narrator's feminine Self. Before she is shown to her room, for instance, the narrator is brought before the Beast and is told by his valet that he desires to see her naked. In response, the narrator reports, "I remained standing. During this interview, my eyes were level with those inside the mask that now evaded mine as if, to his credit, he was ashamed of his own request even as his mouthpiece made it for him" (38). Though the Beast asserts his status as a patriarchal Other through his objectifying and humiliating request, the narrator is not as powerless under his gaze as she is under her father's. Rather, the narrator's eyes are level to the Beast's as she hears his request which suggests a sense of equality between the two as they are both Selves under threat of possession by Other forces. Moreover, when the Beast looks away out of shame, he allows the narrator to feminize him as he submits to her gaze rather than enforce his patriarchal power by gazing at her. He further encourages her to feminize him through her gaze by replacing his request to see her naked with the request that she gaze upon his naked body instead. Though this fills the narrator with dread at first and she expresses a dehumanizing view of the tiger-man's body, she stops the valet when he attempts to cover his master and instead reveals her own body to him. Through this interaction, the Beast demonstrates an internalized sense of femininity that the narrator perceives as an avenue to reach equality with her captor.

Soon after, the narrator embraces her own innate Otherness to find an ontological commonality with the Beast:

He dragged himself closer and closer to me, until I felt the harsh velvet of his head against my hand, then a tongue, abrasive as sandpaper. ‘He will lick the skin off me!’ And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and tricked down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur (45).

Despite her initial fears of being devoured, the narrator “nonetheless courageously approaches Beast, prepared to hold up her father's end of the bargain” and thus reverses the narrator’s complete lack of agency in the beginning of the tale (Tatar 29). Though she resigns herself to upholding her father’s bargain, it is not for the sake of her father as Beaumont’s version would value; rather, when she sees her father in the magic mirror, for the last time, she observes:

My father's circumstances had changed already; well-shaven, neatly barbered, smart new clothes. A frosted glass of sparkling wine sat convenient to his hand beside an ice bucket. The Beast had clearly paid cash on the nail for his glimpse of my bosom, and paid up promptly, as if it had not been a sight I might have died of showing. Then I saw my father's trunks were packed, ready for departure. Could he so easily leave me here? (43).

The narrator at last realizes in this paragraph the depths of her father’s indifference towards her sacrifice and the traumatizing experience his greediness has put her through. In response, she frees herself from the objectifying expectations of the patriarchal Other by, instead of returning to her father when he sends for her, sending back the automaton maid-doll and “dress[ing] her in my own clothes, wind[ing] her up, send[ing] her back to perform the part of my father’s daughter” (43). Thus, the narrator does not sacrifice herself to the Beast for the patriarchal motivations in

previous versions but rather faces the Orientalist fear instilled in her of beasts since childhood. In doing so, the Beast, as another Othered individual, licks the fleshly performance of humanness from her own coat of fur underneath—ending this retelling with the narrator confronting and healing from her trauma through her realization of how “oneself [is] inasmuch as being other” (Ricoeur 3). Still, while Carter ends her retelling with a physical transformation of the individual narrator, her focus on these two’s ending forebodingly infers that the same Orientalist and patriarchal forces that sought to possess their images remain in power over the realm of humans. Thus, Carter’s happy ending she affords to the narrator and the Beast as they escape the possessive gaze of the patriarchal and colonial Other emphasizes the possessive trauma that stains and persists in patriarchal and postcolonial societies.

#### **1.4 Reliving the Traumas of Slavery: Colonial Possession and Magical Realism in *Beloved***

As previously stated, magical realism has a similar shape to classic fairy tale retellings in that it is a narrative element of the fantastic that may challenge and rewrite current literary canons to highlight societal conflicts between the Possessing Other and the Possessed Self. As stated in this study’s introduction, Wendy B. Farris denotes magical realism as a decolonizing tool for postcolonial cultures as it “radically modifies and replenishes the dominant mode of realism in the West, challenging its basis of representation from within” (1). Moreover, Farris’s identification of magical realism’s innate dualism of the fantastic and the real corresponds with

the dualism imposed on postcolonial societies seeking to heal their cultural identities from the traumatic possession of the colonial Other.

Toni Morrison exemplifies this correspondence between magical realism and postcolonial trauma in her groundbreaking novel, *Beloved*, to provide a “powerful identification—not connection, but identification—of the present-day African American subject with a slave” (Dubey 786). Though this novel may not necessarily be fantasy in genre, much of its narrative operates within the fantastic to portray the generational trauma of the American Slavery system: particularly through the ghostly character of Beloved. Psychoanalytic scholar, Cathy Caruth, illustrates the characteristics of the trauma *Beloved* encapsulates as she challenges traditional attempts of locating trauma within or outside of the psyche in favor of concentrating on trauma’s noncorporeal nature and focusing our understanding of trauma on its temporal location as “the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, [and] in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time” (9). Likewise, Morrison taps into this temporal distortion through magical realist imagery to effectively relay the trauma of the Black Self after being possessed by the white Other during and after enslavement.

Brian Finney relates this effort through the temporal defamiliarization Morrison utilizes to convey “subtle linguistic ways that originate in the Black tradition of oral narrative” (20). These subtle linguistic ways he refers to reflects the temporally distorting structure of trauma as he indicates that,

Almost every significant incident [in *Beloved*] from the past is recounted or remembered on more than one occasion. In part, this is because the past is placed at the disposal of the

present; in part it is the result of telling the story through the eyes of a number of characters into each of whose minds we are given privileged access by the omniscient narrator (24).

Thus, Morrison's fluid presentation of events eludes chronological order to encapsulate the repetitive possession of past violent memories through the polyvocality of blurring past and present. In doing so, Morrison both reasserts the validity and power of Black oral traditions by rejecting the chronological structure of most western literature and establishes the strong connection between past and present in the experiences of the traumatized.

Throughout *Beloved*, the issue of identity underlies the characters' traumatic experiences as they attempt to heal from their horrific past as slaves on the plantation, Sweet Home. Reminiscent of Ricoeur and Said's notions, the White Self lingering in *Beloved* measures Black identities only as they relate to its own Whiteness. Thus, the White Other refers to the American slavery system and the white characters who benefit from it at the traumatic expense of the Black protagonists. The resulting traumatic impacts of the slavery system on both agents is immeasurable: without a recognition of the Self outside of its relation to the Other, the people of color in *Beloved* are eroded into a singular identity under the American slavery system in the eyes of the white characters. By defining the Black Self through sameness, the White Other fails to take into account the existence of multiple identities in a community as it only recognizes what is different than its own identity—consequently blending all individuals within the Black community as a singular Other than White.

Likewise, Morrison demonstrates the consequence of the White Other's perception of sameness. For instance, When Sethe shares with Halle an empathetic contrast of Mrs. Garner's softspoken treatment of her and the abuse they'd suffered by Schoolteacher, Halle responds, "It doesn't matter, Sethe. What they say is the same. Loud or soft" (231). Based on Halle's assessment, slaveowners' actions do little to differentiate them from one another as they are all motivated by the self-imposed entitlement they feel toward the Black Self and body. Consequently, the White Self traps both it and the Black Self in a contagion of sameness. Suffering from this contagion, white possessiveness manifests itself within Sethe as she too can no longer recognize the individualism of those who sought to own and brutalize her—exemplifying the traumatic effects of the White Other's colonizing mindset. For example, upon Mr. Bodwin's visit to 124 at the end of the novel, Sethe experiences a traumatic distortion of time as she perceives Mr. Bodwin's innocent visit to the traumatic experience of white slaveowners invading her home to steal her and her children. Despite the initial trauma having taken place many years before and having been inflicted by Schoolteacher, Sethe is triggered back into the defensive mindset she had to adopt when she and her children were threatened with enslavement once again and attacks Mr. Bodwin with an ice pick. To explain this traumatic response, scholar Scot D. Hinson elaborates in his text, "Narrative and Community Crisis in 'Beloved'," that, "although the target of her vengeance is arguably a better man than the schoolteacher, he is, nonetheless, white, and in Sethe's brain, Mr. Bodwin's ride up to her gate repeats schoolteacher's invasion; as a result, his approach produces in her the previously repressed anxiety" (Hinson 159-60). The trauma of her experiences at Sweet Home possesses Sethe so strongly that she no longer

differentiates between the “Loud or soft” and consequently attacks the wrong man (Morrison 231). As such, this scene demonstrates the contagion of sameness perpetuated by the violent system that is American slavery. Rather than identifying the approaching white figure as Mr. Bodwin, Sethe is overwhelmed with traumatic memories triggered by slavery’s imposition of sameness. Therefore, Mr. Bodwin is not recognizable as a singular identity but rather cast as the collective white Other who had posed a threat to Sethe and her family. In this sense, Morrison turns the White Other’s attempts to possess and control the Black Self on itself as its own method of erasing identities based on their degree of sameness leads to violence committed against a White man by a Black woman.

With this contagion of sameness identified in the novel, we turn our attention back to the resolution offered through the Ricoeurian notion of self-hood. In application to *Beloved*, the issue of the Black Self and the White Other coexisting is, rightfully, recognized as not possible in the immediate time period after slavery had been abolished—rather, Morrison concentrates the narrative on the Black Self’s confrontation of and healing from trauma through the magical realist emphasis on physicality. In doing so, Morrison communicates the residents of 124 are not merely agentless victims of their overbearing trauma, but active agents engaging with it to heal their whole Selves via the act of self-reflection.

To illustrate this, we turn to the parallel Morrison draws between Baby Suggs and Sethe and her use of physicality to portray an *ipse*-based relation to the post-enslavement trauma possessing them. In regards to Sethe’s internalized sense of sameness, scholar, Jean Wyatt, examines the possessive relationship between Sethe and Beloved in the text “Giving Body to the

Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." Through this text, we may garner that Sethe harbors the mindset of a slaveowner inasmuch as feeling an entitlement to the lives of her children through repetitive statements such as "You are mine" (Wyatt 481). In this sense, Sethe, as a result of the trauma she's endured, projects an oppressive control over her children out of fear of having them taken from her. Though this sense of motherhood is rooted in love for her children, it is also based in Sethe's traumatic fear of losing them and results in disastrous ramifications such as Sethe taking the life of her infant daughter. This trauma grounds Sethe in a toxic, dependent relationship with her dead daughter's ghostly figure as she allows Beloved to consume her life force: effectively denying her ontological status as a singular Self beyond her relation to her children. As such, Sethe seeks to heal her trauma by blurring the physical and mental lines between her and Beloved. This melding of daughter and mother is given greater magical weight and meaning with the narrative understanding that Beloved is not an actual 19-year-old woman who randomly appears on the doorstep of 124 but rather a ghostly manifestation of both Sethe's murdered daughter and of the "whole lineage of people obliterated by slavery, beginning with the Africans who died on the Middle Passage" (Wyatt 474). In this interpretation, Beloved's noncorporeal multiplicity reflects the characteristics of trauma in its refusal to be simply located in one temporal location as she reflects the very roots of the generational trauma inflicted on the Black Self by the White Other's possessive control and kidnapping of Africans in the slave trade. Sethe's desire to meld with Beloved therefore transcends even her own individual trauma at the hands of slaveowners as Morrison establishes through Beloved's ghostly



appearance the polyvocality of the Black Selves' trauma as a result of the colonial, White Self's possessive control.

Baby Suggs expresses a similar, yet opposite, experience of seeking healing from her trauma through her motherhood. For instance, when reflecting on the children that had been stolen from her throughout her enslaved life, Baby Suggs reveals that she had stopped allowing herself a deeper connection with them. As such, the part of herself that feels a natural, motherly love toward her children is possessed by the White Other through the constant threat of having her children taken from her at the hands of cruel and indifferent slaveowners. Still, Morrison acknowledges Baby Suggs' desire to reclaim that motherly part of herself as she writes: "[t]he sadness was at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home. Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like" (165). In this passage, we can understand Baby Suggs' lack of an established identity, due to her enslavement, makes her more prone to defining herself by what little she knows about her stolen children. However, unlike Sethe and *Beloved*, Baby Suggs recognizes her children as separate Selves outside of her own identity.

Furthermore, Morrison interweaves Sethe's sense of self and the slaveowners' definition of her beyond the scope of her relationship with her children by bestializing her. For instance, when enslaved at Sweet Home, Sethe overhears Schoolteacher and his boys categorizing her by her "human" and "animal" characteristics. In return, Sethe seeks to understand what this means by asking Mrs. Garner who, after some coaxing, responds in the following passage:

“Umm. Like, a feature of summer is heat. A characteristic is a feature. A thing that’s natural to a thing”

“Can you have more than one?” [Sethe asked].

“You can have quite a few. You know. Say a baby sucks its thumb. That’s one, but it has others too. Keep Billy away from Red Cora. Mr. Garner never let her calve every other year. Sethe, you hear me? Come away from that window and listen” (230).

Throughout this conversation, Sethe seeks to learn more about how to define herself via language. However, having had her existence only defined by its lack of sameness to a white identity, Sethe is limited to the slaveowners’ characterization of her. Mrs. Garners’ possession of Sethe is further solidified by her comparison of Sethe to cattle—effectively dehumanizing Sethe to re-enforce the possessive slaveowner mindset. From this definition, Morrison asserts the slaveowners’ focus on physicality to define Selfhood as Schoolteacher instructs his boys to list Sethe’s physical traits and Mrs. Garner instructs Sethe on characteristics through the example of cattle.

Just as she had for the definition of sameness, Morrison turns the white Other’s mindset on itself to express a healthy *ipse*-based relationship between the Black Self and the Otherness of trauma that results from the brutality of slavery. Sethe’s crisis for identity does not result from the use of physical characteristics to define a Self; rather her crisis is the result of the White Other’s imposition of physical characteristics to define her. As such, Morrison literalizes characters’ Otherness imposed by the slavery system as characters’ physical body parts to emphasize how “trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that

experience on mind, brain, and body” (Van de Kolk 21). Morrison parallels this struggle with that of Baby Suggs’ own journey to self-reflection as the Otherness within ex-enslaved individuals is instilled by the White Other and leads Baby Suggs to the perception that neither she, nor her children, are her own. Therefore, Morrison turns to the physical body as a representation of selfhood when Baby Suggs is freed from slavery by her son’s devotion and love for her as she is essentially overwhelmed with the concept of owning herself. Also of note is Baby Suggs’ motivation for accepting freedom which stems, at first, from her desire to make Halle happy rather than a desire for her own freedom—a detail that emphasizes Baby Suggs’ lack of Selfhood apart from her last living child. When she takes her first steps onto free ground, Baby Suggs has an intense feeling of something, beyond her comprehension, being off. Morrison denotes this something in the passage: “But suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, ‘These hands belong to me. These *my* hands.’ Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own heartbeat. Had it been there all along? This pounding thing?” (166). In this instance, Baby Suggs’ hands carry the symbolic weight of the othering imposed on her body by a lifetime of forced labor. Due to the possessive nature of the slaveowner-slave relationship, Baby Suggs has never viewed her own body as belonging to her. It is only after she gains freedom—not by Mr. Garner but by her own son—that Baby Suggs notices her heartbeat for the first time. The something-off that Baby Suggs senses, therefore, is the simple but dazzling development of a loving relationship between all parts of her identity through self-reflection.

Baby Suggs' moment of self-reflection is given more symbolic weight when contrasted with the scene just before in which Beloved reflects on the insecurity of her body parts as a result of the possessive relationship between herself and Sethe. In the chapter prior to Baby Suggs' self-reflection, Morrison implants the concept of a character achieving or failing to undergo self-reflection and understanding the self-inasmuch as being Other (as opposed to being wholly Other or wholly Self) through corporeal body parts. When sucking on her forefinger, for example, Beloved orders Denver to rid the house of Paul D's influence as she feels threatened by the opportunity for Selfhood he offers Sethe. After Denver's reply that Sethe may not like Paul D leaving, Beloved pulls out a tooth and Denver asks Beloved if it hurt, but Morrison writes:

Beloved looked at the tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed. When her tooth came out—an odd fragment, last in the row—she thought it starting (157).

This “accumulation of realistic details...[that] describes [the] impossible event” of Beloved losing body parts exemplifies Morrison's treatment of the physical body as a representative for the internal self (Farris 90). As established, the relationship between Beloved and Sethe is based on a measurement of sameness: without Sethe's complete attention, Beloved's

corporeal being is under threat of falling apart. Morrison solidifies this message with *Beloved*'s vivid fixation on exploding and being swallowed. The imagery of a body exploding evokes a sense of violent disharmony within the self as the parts of a whole are blown apart from one another by a strong, othering force. In a similar fashion, the imagery of being swallowed evokes the sensation of being absorbed into the other. While Baby Suggs' moment of self-reflection is delivered through her hands—which are the intimate instruments by which an individual interacts with the world and themselves—*Beloved*'s moment of self-reflection is distorted by the disturbing imagery of pulling out her own tooth—a symbolic reference to *Beloved*'s stunted sense of identity as she is infantized through her oral fixation. Hence, *Beloved* is a symbol for the stunted trauma of the Black Self.

Before concluding with Morrison's final example of productive self-reflection, however, it is also noteworthy to examine Morrison's treatment of Denver's sense of self apart from the possessive relationships surrounding her. Baby Suggs' emphasis on physicality positively contributes to Denver's sense of identity apart from the outward Other which paves the way for a meaningful relationship with the Otherness of trauma imposed on her. While Baby Suggs' and Sethe's Otherness is inscribed by slaveowners' dehumanization of them as enslaved women and *Beloved*'s Otherness is a result of her otherworldly/ghostly status, Denver's Otherness is inflicted by a combination of the community's tendency to internally scapegoat and the white slaveowners' possessiveness over black identities (Hinson). For instance, Denver locates the Otherness imposed on black women within their physical ability to experience pleasure as she reflects:

Grandma Baby said people look down on her because she had eight children with different men. Colored people and white people both look down on her for that. Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down. She said for me not to listen to all that. That I should always listen to my body and love it (246-47)

Due to the White Other's possessive domination over a black community's values, then, Black women's sense of identity is further Othered from them through the denial of their bodies' natural ability to experience sexual pleasure. To combat this possessive mindset, Morrison vocalizes the simple and dazzling revelation of listening to and loving one's body through the advice of the self-actualized Baby Suggs.

To finalize our discussion of Selfhood and Otherness in *Beloved*, we turn to Morrison's final definition of possession to understand the splintering of the Black Self by the White Other's infliction of possessive trauma. Within the last few pages of the novel, Morrison summarizes for her readers the terrible truth that dictates all relationships between Selves and Others throughout the narrative: "...anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up" (295-96). As such, the Black characters of *Beloved* do not possess their own bodies or identities when in relation to the White Other; rather, their bodies are Othered from themselves by the possessive nature of the American slavery system. It is only through Self-reflection that characters, such as Baby Suggs, finally

recognize the Otherness inflicted on them to understand themselves as freed, Whole selves with agency and voices of their own.

Fittingly, the last line of the novel is a spoken revelation from Sethe after Beloved's physical removal from 124. When Paul D—a symbol of hope for Sethe's future ability to have healthy, meaningful relations with another—comforts Sethe, she initially grieves for Beloved and claims, "She was my best thing" (Morrison 321). In return, Paul D reflects on Sixo's realization about Self-hood through his relations with the Thirty-Mile Woman: "'She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gathered them and give them back to me in all the right order'" (321). This moment signifies a non-possessive relationship between the Self and Other through the recognition of the outward Other as separate from Self; the Thirty-Mile Woman understood Sixo as his own being and gave all his being back to him. From this separation, then, the Self may feel wholeness with its own Otherness. Trailing along this line of thought, Sethe's self-reflection is laid out in the syntax of the book's final statement after Paul D tells her she is her own best thing: "Me? Me?" (322). In this line, Sethe's amazement at the revelation of self-reflection is communicated as a question—reflecting the same level of bewilderment Baby Suggs had experienced when recognizing her hands and heartbeat as her own when she had finally been freed. Through the simple repetition of "Me? Me?", Morrison invokes Sethe's moment of self-reflection as she and her trauma mirror each other in syntax. With this final line of self-reflection, Morrison homes in on the truthful revelation of the Otherness enforced on the Black Self by slavery and the self-hood they reclaim through freedom.

Yet, similar to Angela Carter's ending of "The Tiger's Bride," Morrison's individualized ending infers a greater, ontological concern: the fact that the possessive mindset enforced by the American slavery system continues beyond the time period of *Beloved* despite slavery's abolishment. As such, Morrison leaves her readers with the uneasy recognition of slavery's possessive trauma as it continues to transcend a singular temporal location.

## 1.5 Conclusion: Healing Forward

Across fantastical narratives, the literary community cannot overlook the effectiveness of magic in corporealizing the incorporeal trauma that results from possessive relationships. An example of the increasing discourse around fantasy and its vital role in trauma theory is the 2021 scholarly article, "The Thorns of Trauma: Torture, Aftermath, and Healing in Contemporary Fairy-Tale Literature," by Jenna Jorgensen in which she argues, "using trauma as a lens is one way in which we see reality in fairy tales: tales of magic that nonetheless contain a human core and emotional truths" (2). Another can be found in Madhu Dubey's 2010 text, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery. American Literature," in which she examines how magical elements from bodily possession to time travel "rupture narrative realism in order to offer an immediate bodily experience of the trauma of slavery" (788). As such, fantastical narratives are essential for cultural recognition of trauma due to its unique, narrative affordances which better encapsulate the "impossible history" imposed on those ontologically traumatized (Caruth 5). That is, if we "think of the imaginary as referring to social spaces where we focus more on identity than on difference," the function of fantasy in trauma theory is undeniable as fantastical narratives disrupt



cultural and literary status quos so the possessive Other is no longer the measurement by which the Self is identified (Parker 143).

To end this study I borrow once again from Edward Said on his examination of the eastern Self and western Other: “[it] is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when the peculiar entity ‘the Orient’ is in question.” Likewise, this study’s objective is not to assert that every piece of fantastical literature written by or about women and people of color inherently depict trauma. If we were to assume as much, we threaten to limit marginalized authors’ breadth of narratives—the happy, the sad, the angry, the forgiving—that are produced by the simple and complicated status of existing. Nor does this study aim to suggest that cultural traumas are automatically healed through these narratives as the endings of both Carter’s fairy tale retelling and Morrison’s magical realist novel both remind audiences that while their characters have individually survived the possessive Other, possessive trauma persists on a cultural level. Therefore, as psychoanalysis evolves and more and more painful histories are reimagined through fantastical lenses, it is this study’s aspirations for the literary community to understand “the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another” (Caruth 11).

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