
Text, Truth, and Theory: Rethinking History through Postmodern and Post-Structuralist Lenses

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Abstract

This paper aims to deconstruct the claim that postmodern narrative lacks historical truth by challenging the assumption that history no longer retains its representational authority. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's concept of *historiographic metafiction*, the study argues that postmodern historical fiction remains deeply engaged with history, though it reconfigures historical truth as a discursive and textual construction rather than a transparent mirror of the past. Through the theoretical frameworks of post-structuralism and historical skepticism, particularly the works of Hutcheon, Edward Said, and Hayden White, I argue that postmodern fiction does not abandon history but interrogates the conditions under which it is constructed, represented and legitimized. Rather than being ahistorical, postmodern historical fiction critically examines the processes of narrativity that shape historical understanding. Hutcheon emphasizes that texts are never severed from their historical and material referents, and postmodern fiction highlights this embeddedness by drawing attention to its own narrative strategies. I draw on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a case study of postmodern historical fiction that challenges conventional historiography. Morrison's work exemplifies how fiction can recover silenced voices and reconstruct forgotten histories, presenting history as a site of struggle rather than a settled truth. Ultimately, postmodern fiction does not retreat from history but instead foregrounds its complexities and contradictions. In an age marked by post-truth and historical revisionism, such fiction offers vital insights into the contested nature of historical knowledge and the ongoing need to question how the past is narrated.

Keywords: Historical Truth, Postmodern Fiction, Ahistorical, Historiographic Metafiction, History

1. Introduction

The status of historical truth has long been a central concern in postmodern thought, with many post-structuralist and postmodern theorists questioning the possibility of accessing a singular, objective version of the past. Postmodern theorists such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes have emphasized the extent to which discourse, power relations, and narrative conventions shape historical knowledge. From this perspective, history is not a neutral record of events but a constructed narrative, shaped by those with the authority to speak and write it. Within this framework, postmodern historical fiction is frequently interpreted as complicit in the denial of historical truth. Critics argue that through techniques such as narrative fragmentation, metafictional self-awareness, temporal disjunction, and intertextual layering, such fiction detaches history from

any material or factual grounding, portraying it instead as a product of language, ideology and interpretation. This reading aligns postmodern fiction with a broader cultural skepticism that is seen to erode faith in objective knowledge and factual continuity.

However, this interpretation oversimplifies the nuanced and often deeply critical relationship between postmodern fiction and historical inquiry. Far from being ahistorical or disengaged from the past, postmodern historical fiction is actively and profoundly invested in exploring how history is constructed, remembered and contested. It does not reject the reality or significance of historical events but calls attention to the means by which these events are narrated and the perspectives that are privileged or excluded in traditional historiography. In this sense, postmodern historical fiction functions not as a denial of history but as an interrogation of its epistemological foundations and ideological biases. It challenges the authority of dominant historical narratives by foregrounding their textual nature and by reimagining silenced or marginalized experiences. By doing so, it fosters a critical historical consciousness—one that embraces complexity, pluralism, and the political stakes of historical representation.

Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's concept of *historiographic metafiction*, along with the critical perspectives of Edward Said and Hayden White, this essay argues that postmodern historical fiction is fundamentally invested in history. While it may question the epistemological foundations of historical knowledge, it simultaneously affirms the significance of the past and insists on the continued relevance of historical inquiry. Thus, in this research, I contend that postmodern historical fiction does not reject history outright; instead, it reconfigures our relationship to it by acknowledging the textuality of historical truth. This position is supported by theorists like Hutcheon, who challenge the notion that postmodernism is wholly nihilistic about the past, as well as Edward Said and Hayden White, who foreground the material and rhetorical dimensions of historical representation. Ultimately, postmodern historical fiction offers a critical mode of engaging with history; one that recognizes the complexities of representation without abandoning the reality and importance of historical events. Toni Morrison's fiction exemplifies Hutcheon's theory of *historiographic metafiction* by blending imaginative storytelling with a deep engagement with historical realities, particularly those omitted from official records. Through fragmented narratives, non-linear temporality, and self-reflexive structures, Morrison challenges the authority of traditional historiography while reconstructing marginalized histories—especially those of enslaved African American women. Her novels do not reject historical truth but reframe it as a mediated, plural and politically charged process. In doing so, Morrison's work aligns with Hutcheon's view that postmodern fiction remains historically invested, using narrative form to interrogate, revise and recover the silenced past.

2. Textual Truth-Claims of History: Between Postmodern and Post-structural Thought

In one of those flashes of critical insight for which he became reputed to give voice to marginal groups, Jacques Derrida declares in his groundbreaking work *Of Grammatology* that "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" or "there is no outside-the-text," (p.185) which means that a text cannot be claimed to allude to a referent or material reality outside itself. Though Derrida's project aims to decenter the history of metaphysics by re-evaluating its structuring principles often, hierarchical binaries such as (speech/writing, master/slave, and male/female, ...), his most overarching thesis suggests the way "truth" is unattainable, either in its transcendental philosophical sense or in a material or historical referent. Derrida's notorious claim stresses the indeterminacy of the meaning of a "text," which he calls "a fabric of traces." Put simply, the intertextuality of the text denotes the impossibility of an absolute truth or meaning. Any text to Derrida, be it hegemonic or oppositional, is subjected to multiple layers of interpretation and cannot, by whatever means, be reduced to a fixed, coherent meaning. Derrida's argument challenges the idea that meaning can be anchored in an original presence, whether truth, subjectivity, or historical reality, revealing how history is shaped by language rather than reflecting fixed truths.

Following the lead of many post-structural critics, postmodernity becomes for many a landmark of the break with the age of modernity. It corresponds to the demise of teleological narratives related to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which sought to control and comprehend the world according to an overarching truth. Postmodern fiction, as theorized by pioneering critics such as Linda Hutcheon, Hayden White, Gayatri Spivak, and Jacques Derrida, brought the incredibility of the totalitarian metanarratives to an end. To most of these postmodern and post-structural theorists, postmodernism, being the 'end limit' of totality, is described by its celebration of difference and its de-legitimization of the metanarratives of modernity. Such narratives lock human history into a linear movement towards progress, defined by the rationalist knowing subject. Even though postmodern and post-structural theories wage war on totality in favour of new conceptions of discourse, textuality and difference, history turns out to be differential and representational, something whose 'reality' and 'truth' are far from being accessed. Along with its weakening of historicity, postmodernism is distinguished by the breakdown of the signifying chain because of the downfall of the referent and the associated crisis of representation.

Once historians and literary critics no longer believe that history presents privileged access to the real or the truth, they investigate the nature of history and its forms, its uses and abuses, and its links to a host of other issues, notably knowledge and ideology. In one of his famous essays on the nature and function of history, Roland Barthes' (1986) *The Discourse of History*, gives, from a post-structuralist vantage point, an account in relation to the question of referentiality. For Barthes and, evidently, for most post-structuralists, history is not a direct reflection of past realities. It refers to a multitude of other texts, and like history texts, they essentially enter a dialogue with other texts, more or less like in the Bakhtinian dialogism, so as to represent historical truth. Post-structuralists tend to label this linguistic operation 'intertextuality'. Barthes' skepticism about the materiality of history results in his belief that history is a mere "written text" or a textual representation. Henceforth, the

medium through which it is represented is a linguistic one and language, in the post-structuralist thought, is 'self-referential.' Moreover, according to Barthes, history is essentially a form of fiction; no different from a product of the writer's imagination. History no longer occupies its status as a distinct discourse or knowledge but rather, as White also believes, another literary genre. Barthes' argument lies in his belief that the historian is not a mere collector of historical events; rather, he is the one who establishes relations of cause and effect and ascribes meaning to events by positively filling in the "vacuum of pure, meaningless series" (Raddeker, p. 24). In this respect, Barthes draws on Nietzsche, who once said: "There are no facts in themselves, it is always necessary to begin by introducing a meaning in order that there can be a fact" (qtd. in Raddeker, p. 23). Barthes writes:

From the moment that language is involved (and when is it not involved?), the fact can only be defined in a tautological fashion. . . . The fact can only have a linguistic existence, as a term in a discourse, and yet it is exactly as if this existence were merely the 'copy', purely and simply, of another existence situated in the extra-structural [i.e. extra-linguistic] domain of the 'real.' (p. 22)

The ambivalence of whether history texts contain more facts or more fiction has inaugurated endless debates. Hayden White, the American theorist of history, launched a critique which equates history with fiction on a similar basis to Barthes. In an attempt to extend on Barthes' analysis, White skillfully dismantles the opposition between history and fiction; however, his distinct critique elucidates more critical responses from historians and anti-historians. White (1973) investigates history as a genre of literature. His argument posits that there is no clear-cut distinction between history or literature/fiction because history, like fiction, is a verbal structure and the historian, above all, is ultimately a writer. Henceforth, the tools that comprise fiction could be applied equally to historical texts. Furthermore, White contends that since history is solely transmitted through a linguistic medium, that medium is far from being transparent or neutral.

White's essay *The Historical Text as Literary Artifact* epitomizes all his ideas outlined in *Metahistory*. It provides an example of what Glifford Geertz (1973) describes as "Blurred Genres." In this essay, White further expands on the verbal structure of history. He argues that historical stories are understandable by their reliance on fictive forms, namely, "emplotment." He explains: "[s]tories in turn are made out of chronicles by an operation which I have elsewhere called 'emplotment'" (p. 397). By emplotment, White means the "encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures" (p.397). Like Barthes' reasoning, White believes that historians stitch factual events and fragments of history with the symbolic significance of a comprehensible plot structure. Unlike Barthes, however, White contends that although history is rendered through fictive strategies, it still refers to the real world.

While Derrida (1995) provides an enormous critique of the non-referentiality of any text, he further follows the lead of Barthes and White by unravelling scientific historiography's facticity. In his most celebrated lecture, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," Derrida argues that the history of metaphysics is based on logocentrism. This metaphysical center, the clear organizing principle by which meaning can be determined, is discarded and becomes unfixed, "a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (p. 112). As Derrida writes:

This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse [...] a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences, the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (p. 110)

With the advent of the linguistic turn, the concept of a fixed center or organizing principle collapsed, leaving truth entangled in the labyrinthine indeterminacy of meaning. Derrida's deconstruction of Western metaphysics offers a powerful critique of historiography, as the notion of a metaphysical center was inherently tied to a coherent, total history.

Although unnamed, Derrida's claim that "there is no outside-the-text" is not appealing to Edward Said, who, in his seminal work *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), pushes back against the deconstructive modes of criticism that dominated literary theory in the 1970s and 1980s. While Derrida emphasizes the endless play of signification and the self-referential nature of language-suggesting that meaning is always deferred and that texts exist in a closed system of signs-Said insists on the embeddedness of texts within material, historical and political realities. His overarching thesis is the *worldliness* of the text. For Said, a text cannot be divorced from the world in which it is produced and received. In contrast to deconstruction's emphasis on textual indeterminacy, Said argues for a politically engaged criticism that acknowledges the text's connection to institutions, ideologies and power structures. He labels what Paul Ricoeur called "a text" and "circumstantial reality" worldliness (Said, p. 34). Said claims that a text is not isolated or purely self-referential, it is shaped by and embedded within real-world circumstances. Its meaning is inseparable from the specific historical and social conditions in which it was produced. Said emphasizes that elements like worldliness, context, and historical contingency are not external to the text but are fundamental to how it conveys and generates meaning (p. 39).

According to Said, "A text in its actually being a text is a being in the world," (p. 33) a text is an act in the world; it is situated in the world and therefore has a material presence. He argues that the post-structural claim, which posits that a text has endless interpretations of meaning, denies the text its place in the world. Said argues that Recent critical theory has often overstated the idea that interpretation has no limits, suggesting that a text can be read in countless ways. I disagree with this perspective, not only because texts exist within the world, but also because part of what makes them texts is their capacity to position themselves in relation to the world and actively seek its engagement (p.40). Said implicitly attacks critics like Derrida and Paul De Man, who promote a "disinfected" textuality, without referring to the social and cultural network within which a text is embedded. Said argues that "to treat the text as merely a structure of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic, is to divorce the text, which is a cultural production, a cultural *act*, from the relations of power within which it is produced" (p.51). Said's most

succinct argument regards the text, apart from its connection to other texts, a production of the cultural, historical, social and even economic relations of power that have a material presence which makes the text indissoluble from the world. Contrary to Derrida, who privileges speech over writing, Said's notion of texts discloses their materiality and worldliness by their situatedness in just the same way as speech. Rather than dissociating from the world or speech, texts proclaim their bond with verbliness (p.51). Said's caveat regarding the worldliness of the text offers solid grounds for the postmodern text not only for its capability to represent the world but also for being in the world and interacting with other texts.

Belonging to the tradition of historians, Michel Foucault is probably deemed the theorist proper to the historical narrative; however, only his early work tends to follow the tradition of historiographical narrative. Following Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* (1977), Foucault launched a succinct attack on the teleological continuity of tradition and its generalization of concepts of truth and subjectivity in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Foucault appropriates the concept of genealogy coined by Nietzsche and applies it to history. He writes: "Genealogy does not oppose itself to history... On the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleology. It opposes itself to the search for 'origins'" (p.140). Therefore, Foucault argues that genealogy's aim is to reinvestigate our "masked" identities and knowledge caused by the hazardous play of the hypocritical hegemony of teleological continuity. Foucault argues that genealogy does not aim to trace history back to uncover a seamless continuity beneath the surface of forgotten events. Its purpose isn't to prove that the past somehow remains alive in the present. Instead, genealogy seeks to track the irregular path of history, acknowledging the scattered nature of events. It highlights the random turns, small deviations, unexpected shifts, mistakes, and flawed judgments that have created what persists today and holds meaning for us. Through this lens, truth and identity are not found in some deep-rooted origin, but rather in the external chain of unpredictable happenings (p.146).

Foucault rejects the idea of history as a smooth, continuous development leading to the present as if everything had an inevitable, coherent trajectory. Instead, genealogy traces the messy, fragmented, and contingent paths that produce the present, not by recovering a pure origin but by exposing the discontinuities, accidents, and ruptures that have shaped what we now take for granted as truth, identity or value. Genealogy unveils the bias and the stereotypes tradition is laden with, and in doing so, it excavates submerged histories, namely, women and minorities whose identities have been suppressed and inscribed in the margins of history. Foucault points to the possibility of constructing alternative histories and identities through genealogy, which aims to unmask "the face of the other" (pp.160-144). Foucault also suggests constructing a "counter-memory" that would alter the course of history into a "totally different form of time" (p.160) by critically challenging three essential foundations of history. These foundations include reality, which will be destructed by the new historian's use of parody; identity, which will be systematically dissociated by genealogy; and the sacrifice directed against truth and opposed history as knowledge (p.160).

While the post-structuralists claim that postmodern art is dehistoricized, Hutcheon wages a critique of this claim. Hutcheon's caveat offers a solid ground of theoretical framework for the postmodern historical novel. Her critique of mixing historical and fictive representation in "historiographic metafiction" in her seminal works, *The Politics of Postmodernism* and *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, conforms to the tradition of historical fiction. It disclaims the postmodern view posited by the post-structuralists and the Marxists that postmodern narrative is ahistorical. More importantly, Hutcheon departs from Derrida's claim that historical truth is not attainable by claiming that postmodern fiction provides us with historical truth, albeit textually. Hutcheon (1989) argues that "Historiographic metafiction" represents not just a world of fiction, as critics such as Barthes and White postulate, but a direct engagement with the history of the world, a world of human histories and experience (p. 54). In this respect, Hutcheon (1988) argues:

The referent is always already inscribed in the discourses of our culture. This is no cause for despair; it is the text's major link with the "world," one that acknowledges its identity as a construct, rather than as a simulacrum of some "real" outside. Once again, this does not deny the past "real" existed; it only conditions our mode of knowledge of that past. We can know it only through its traces, its relics. (p.119)

Hutcheon (1989) tends to agree with Barthes and White in their assumption that facts are events to which the historian has given meaning by making these fragments of the past into a discursive whole (p. 59). Nonetheless, Hutcheon argues that the construction of plots in history does not deny the existence of the reality of the past, but instead focuses on the act of "imposing order on the past, of encoding strategies of meaning-making through representation" (p. 67). In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the blending of ghostly presence and fragmented memory reflects Hutcheon's idea that events are not simply recovered but constituted through narrative, revealing the limits and possibilities of historical knowing. Hutcheon argues that Historiographic metafiction "shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured" (p.120). Through this discursive inscription, we know the traces of the past (p.97).

Hutcheon decisively answered claims made by the Marxists and the post-structural critics who denounce postmodern fiction as dehistoricizing and lacking a coherent vision of truth. In this respect, she contests the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson, who is adamant about defining postmodernism as ahistorical. Jameson (1991) contends that postmodernism declares a "revolutionary" break with the repressive ideology of storytelling generally (p.15). In attempting to invalidate such claims, Hutcheon asserts that postmodern fiction, which is inherently political and self-reflexive, incorporates history that belongs to 'real life' into fiction to explain and give meaning to our present, which is a product of the past and its textual representation. Hutcheon's argument posits that postmodern narratives critically engage with history and problematizes the past as an object of knowledge in the present. Hutcheon (1988) maintains that "there seems to be a new desire to think historically, and to think historically these days is to think critically and contextually" (p. 88). In *historiographic metafiction*, there is a tendency to blur fact and fiction, since history alone cannot be a transparent representation of truth. By blurring history and fiction, the latter

offers new possibilities to criticize and question historical knowledge, aiming to offer a new perspective on truth. In this respect, Hutcheon claims that "it is historiography's explanatory and narrative emplotment of past events that constructs what we consider historical facts" (p.92).

Hutcheon discusses the difficulty of accessing the past since the only medium through which it is represented is its textual traces. In her *Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), Hutcheon claims that the archive is the only medium to access the past; however, in postmodern fiction, writers turn to the archive while simultaneously challenging its authority (p. 81). This skepticism levelled against the archive originates from the post-structuralist theory in its questioning of the neutrality and the validity of the textual historical past:

If the past is only known to us today through its textualized traces (which, like all texts, are always open to interpretation), then the writing of both history and historiographic metafiction becomes a form of complex intertextual cross-referencing that operates within (and does not deny) its unavoidably discursive context. There can be little doubt of the impact of post-structuralist theories of textuality on this kind of writing, for this is writing that raises basic questions about the possibilities and limits of meaning in the representation of the past. (p. 81)

Hutcheon claims that even what we consider acceptable as documentary testimony is no longer reliable due to the openness of the archive to all kinds of uses and abuses. Her attack on such a post-structuralist claim is premised on her belief that the archive or any historical referent is not left undecided; it is filtered and interpreted by the historian. Historical facts do not speak for themselves; they need a writer's imagination to interpret these events discursively.

3. Morrison's Postmodern Historical Fiction as Historiographic Metafiction

In conjunction with most of Hutcheon's tenets of postmodern historical fiction, Toni Morrison (1984) produces inherently political and corrective narratives. This fact echoes her dictum saying that "the best art is political" (p.354). In her endeavor to unmask the "discredited knowledge" in the Morrisonian sense, or the "subjugated knowledges," as Michel Foucault claims in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (1977), Morrison's historical narrative excavates the archive in a quest for truth. Fully conscious of the archive's potential to falsify history, Morrison questions the truthfulness of such archival documents before interpreting these "bare facts" of history, to use Barbara Christian's words. Morrison's narratives demystify how Black people are categorized as Other and pejoratively represented in Western discourse, and how this category is locked in geopolitical agendas. Her underlying goal is to find historical truth and to correct misrepresentations through deconstructing monolithic and essentialized views on black identity. The entanglement of history and memory is a space wherein Morrison negotiates the complexity of recovering the identity of black people amidst growing feelings of negation and oppression. To Morrison, interweaving fact and fiction is the only way to recover historical truth.

Toni Morrison views history as an unfinished and often distorted project, shaped by entrenched biases and stereotypes. In her pursuit of truth, she engages with the silent, overlooked layers of the archival record for a new narrative interpretation and revival. Yet Morrison approaches the archive with a critical eye, refusing to accept its authority unchallenged. As a postcolonial female critic and literary historian, she dedicates herself to rewriting and re-envisioning historical narratives from the margins, bringing to the forefront those voices and experiences that dominant histories have excluded. In *Beloved*, Morrison illuminates specific moments in American history, particularly the brutal legacy of slavery, that have been silenced, erased, or misrepresented. Through carefully blending historical fact and imaginative reconstruction in *Beloved*, she recreates a version of the past that conventional history alone cannot fully capture. For Morrison, imagination is not a departure from truth but a necessary method for addressing the historical record's gaps, distortions and silences.

Morrison distinguishes truth from fact. She claims that while facts just exist, the truth needs human intelligence. Said otherwise, the archaeological site of the archive, with all its material artefacts, is considered facts or historical facts, but these facts cannot be rendered meaningful in their own. As Hutcheon (1989) claims: "Facts do not speak for themselves in either form of narrative: the tellers speak for them, making these fragments of the past into a discursive whole" (p.54). In *Beloved*, Morrison does not dismiss historical facts but acknowledges that they are often incomplete or selectively recorded. In *Beloved*, Morrison uses imaginative interpretation—such as ghostly hauntings and fragmented memories—to uncover buried truths about slavery and its traumatic impact on Black lives, particularly the untold suffering of enslaved women like Sethe. Through fiction, Morrison fills the silences left by official histories, using narrative to recover the emotional and psychological realities of Black subjectivity. In this way, her work bridges the gap between documented history and lived experience. Morrison (2008) writes: What makes fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image, on the remains, in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth. By "image," of course, I don't mean "symbol"; I simply mean "picture" and the feelings that accompany the picture. (p. 75). Sethe projects Morrison in her use of personal memory and what Collingwood calls the "constructive imagination" as a means of re-membering the dis-membered and the suppressed historical past (Andrews et al, 1999, p 90). This interdependence of past and present is a political act as it re-opens the past to be revised and re-questioned while it accesses the present. It rewrites or re-represents the past in fiction and history "to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (Hutcheon, 2000, p. 834). As Hutcheon (1989) claims: "Facts do not speak for themselves in either form of narrative: the tellers speak for them, making these fragments of the past into a discursive whole" (p.54).

Alongside Hutcheon's view that historical facts are fragmented and silent, Morrison demonstrates in *Beloved* the necessity of fiction to fill the gaps left by official records. Through narrative strategies such as interior monologue, non-linear time, and

the supernatural presence of the baby ghost, Morrison gives voice to those historically silenced by slavery. Sethe's memory, for example, becomes a battleground for reclaiming a past that refuses to remain buried: "*It was not a story to pass on,*" the novel warns—yet Morrison passes it on precisely through imaginative means. The fragmented storytelling mimics the fragmented nature of historical trauma, and the character of Beloved herself acts as both memory and metaphor—embodying the unspoken horror of slavery and the children lost to it. By re-patterning history through Sethe's personal story, Morrison exposes the limitations of traditional historical narratives and re-inscribes Black identity into the archive with emotional, cultural, and spiritual depth. Adhering to the fictivity of history, Morrison regards history an "imagined" discourse wherein the knowledge of the past is transmitted through representation, like in her novel *Beloved* where she seeks to picture a close to "life lived" life of slaves with the recognition that a whole truth is unattainable (Davis, p. 247). While Morrison inscribes her voice in history, she also works to subvert and deconstruct master narratives of "official history" in *Beloved*. Morrison's skepticism questions and problematizes the existing representations; her sociopolitical project parallels the idea of Hutcheon's postmodern project of new representations that remedy past misrepresentations of African-Americans. Therefore, Morrison's project is to change the debunked historical orthodoxies by new representation and in the process uncover the hidden realities of African Americans' stories that have been marginalized even after black nationalism. Since her fiction goes against the tradition of "Art for Art's Sake," as she has revealed in more than one interview, Morrison's writing is essentially political. She states: "Good art has always been political. None of the best writing, the best thoughts have [sic] been anything other than that" (qtd in Cuthrie, p. 3). As she posits in "Living Memory," her narrative is mainly directed to transmit agency to her black readers (Davis, p. 254). It is more concerned with the notion of agency and subjectivity than with the aesthetics of postmodernity (p. 254).

Morrison aims to achieve these ends in a novel that both historicizes fiction and fictionalizes history. In the following passage, she reflects on the events that inspired her novel *Beloved*: "I ... remember being obsessed by two or three little fragments of stories that I heard from different places. One was a newspaper clipping about a woman named Margaret Garner in 1851. It said that the Abolitionists made a great deal out of her case because she had escaped from Kentucky . . . with her four children. She lived in a little neighborhood just outside of Cincinnati and she had killed her children. She succeeded in killing one; she tried to kill two others" (Andrews, p. 82). After reading the narrative of Margaret Garner, the bits and pieces of Margaret's story grew more meaningful when Morrison narrates the story's other side of the coin. In Morrison's words: "but that moment, that decision was a piece, a tail of something that was always around, and it didn't get clear for me until I was thinking of another story" (Ruschdy, p. 570). Though history provides pivotal access to human self-knowledge, it merely reveals some truth instead of the whole truth about human reality. The story of Margaret Garner accompanied Morrison's mode of thinking, recovering black identity through fact and fiction. It took another story to clarify more precisely what Margaret Garner, and her story meant (p. 569).

Sethe, the cast shadow of Margaret Garner, epitomizes how the history of enslaved Black women is dehumanized and relegated to objectification and negation. As a matter of fact, memory is the most crucial device Morrison utilizes for the "emplotment" of her narrative. At "Sweet Home", Sethe was subjected to different acts of degradation. Sethe was subjected to profound acts of physical, emotional, and psychological degradation that reveal the dehumanizing nature of slavery. As an enslaved woman, her body was not her own. She was treated as property and used as a tool for labor and reproduction. One of the most disturbing examples is when schoolteacher's nephews forcibly take her breast milk, an act that strips her of maternal agency and turns an intimate, nurturing function into a site of violence: "They held me down and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it." This assault on her body is symbolic of the broader theft of Black motherhood under slavery. Moreover, the schoolteacher's practice of categorizing enslaved people based on "human" and "animal" characteristics reduces Sethe to an object of scientific curiosity rather than a human being with dignity. The psychological toll of such treatment is immense and contributes to the trauma she carries long after her escape. These experiences underscore the systemic effort to erase Black identity and autonomy, and Morrison uses them to expose the brutal mechanisms of historical dehumanization.

According to Rushdy, *Beloved* is a political critique of the capitalist racial system of American slavery, which dehumanized the Black body and soul. Schoolteacher, in *Beloved*, is trenchantly the source of white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy in the era of slavery. His tortures of Sethe lead her to rebellion. In fact, in the face of the violations perpetrated by the slave system and its agents, Sethe herself comes to realize how much her whole being is reduced to animality in the slave system. When Sethe was bringing her bitter memories of "Sweet Home" to Beloved, she told her about the incident when she heard Schoolteacher ask one of the nephews: "Which one are you doing?" and the boy answers, "Sethe," in response. This is, in fact one of the crucial passages in the novel that demonstrates how the institution of slavery dehumanized African-American slaves, especially women. Bell hooks claims that Black women are more oppressed than anyone else in the world. According to hooks, "The women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually—women who are powerless to change their condition of life...they are the silent minority" (Hooks, 2000, p. 1). Throughout the novel, memories of Sethe's past in Sweet Home intersect.

In *Beloved*, Morrison challenges the post-structural notion that the subject is fragmented and incoherent by deliberately constructing narrative strategies that explore and affirm African-American subjectivity, especially that of Black women. Through Sethe's complex inner life and traumatic past, Morrison resists theoretical erasure and offers a deeply embodied subjectivity forged in the context of slavery, gender oppression and historical silencing. By portraying Sethe not merely as a victim but as a woman who makes an unthinkable choice to protect her children from enslavement, Morrison deconstructs the notion of women as the passive "Other" and reclaims Black female agency. The novel's shifting perspectives and fragmented

structure reflect the fractured nature of memory and identity under slavery, yet they also chart a path toward self-definition. Morrison's feminist and anti-racist commitments are embedded in her narrative choices, allowing *Beloved* to interrogate dominant racial ideologies while refusing to reduce Black women's experiences to a single, essentialized identity. Instead, the novel presents subjectivity as dynamic, relational, and historically grounded-enabling a comparative understanding of Black womanhood that resists universalization while remaining politically and culturally potent.

In *Beloved*, Morrison's narrative strategy is deeply invested in deconstructing hegemonic formulations of identity, particularly regarding race, gender, and history. In her response to post-structuralist critiques of subjectivity, Morrison does not merely abandon the notion of the subject. Instead, she engages with Black women's fractured, marginal, and silenced subjectivities, *re-emplotting* them into narratives that grant them voice, agency, and historical density. As theorized by White, Emplotment refers to how events are configured into a coherent narrative structure, turning raw historical data into meaningful stories. Morrison's use of emplotment serves not only an aesthetic function but also a critical and political one. It functions as a radical strategy of counter-history, challenging dominant historical narratives that have traditionally erased or marginalized Black women. The novel's fragmented, non-linear structure mirrors the psychic and historical rupture inflicted by slavery, particularly through the experiences of Sethe, whose identity and memory are deeply entwined with trauma. Morrison deliberately disrupts conventional chronology to reflect the fractured subjectivity of her characters, crafting an aesthetic of disorientation that echoes the dislocations of the Middle Passage and the haunting persistence of unacknowledged histories. Rather than casting Sethe as a passive figure within a redemptive or teleological arc, Morrison positions her as an active narrator of her own pain and resistance, using the very form of the narrative to reclaim agency and articulate the inexpressible. The disjointed emplotment resists the closure and coherence expected in traditional Western literary forms, opting instead for a cyclical and recursive storytelling that allows Black female subjectivity to emerge not as a universal or stable identity but as a historically contingent and emotionally complex process. This narrative technique transforms *Beloved* into a site of ethical historiography, one where storytelling becomes a political act of memory, resistance, and reimagining of selfhood from the margins of recorded history.

4. Conclusion

This study reasserts the historical dimension of postmodern fiction by dismantling the widespread post-structuralist claim that postmodern narratives are inherently ahistorical. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's concept of *historiographic metafiction*, the analysis contends that postmodern fiction does not reject history but reconfigures it through a critical, self-aware narrative lens. Hutcheon argues that postmodern novels are not disengaged from the past but problematize historical knowledge by making the reader conscious of its textual construction. Through their self-reflexive narrative techniques, such novels reveal that history is not a transparent mirror of reality, but a mediated, ideological and constructed discourse. While they do not claim to offer unmediated historical truth, they assert a form of *textual referentiality*, a commitment to engaging with the past, not as a stable entity, but as a site of ongoing negotiation and contestation. Hutcheon's framework enables a productive way of understanding how postmodern fiction remains politically and historically invested, even as it challenges the epistemological assumptions of traditional historiography.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* serves as a contingent embodiment of Hutcheon's theory of *historiographic metafiction*. Morrison's narrative resists linearity and causality in favor of a fragmented structure grounded in memory, trauma, and spectral presence. This refusal of a conventional historical framework does not constitute a denial of historical truth, but a reorientation of it from the perspective of the marginalized. *Beloved* actively engages with the silences and absences within official histories of slavery, offering a deeply affective and experiential reimagining of the past instead. Morrison's use of narrative fragmentation mirrors the psychological disintegration endured by enslaved individuals and foregrounds the impossibility of narrating trauma through traditional historical discourse. Her story is not just a fiction set in the past; it is a political intervention to fill the voids left by dominant historiography. In this sense, Morrison enacts Hutcheon's idea of fiction as a space that simultaneously acknowledges its own constructed-ness and engages materially with historical trauma.

Moreover, Morrison's project critiques the inadequacies of both traditional historiography and earlier modes of Black cultural expression. She distances herself from the didacticism and identity essentialism of the Black Arts Movement, instead offering a more nuanced exploration of African-American identity as fractured, plural and historically situated. As she makes clear, her aim is not to indulge in private imaginings but to write for the community to bring forth truths that were never formally recorded but survive in memory, oral tradition, and cultural inheritance. This aligns perfectly with Hutcheon's assertion that postmodern fiction is overtly politicized and ideologically conscious, precisely because of its self-reflexive and revisionist engagement with history. Morrison's *Beloved* thus operates as a *historiographic metafiction* that takes seriously both the politics of representation and the ethical imperative of historical recovery.

In a nutshell, by drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory, this study affirms that postmodern historical fiction -far from being ahistorical- is deeply entangled with the past, though it redefines the terms of that engagement. Morrison's *Beloved* exemplifies this mode of writing: it resists dominant historical narratives, exposes the limitations of archival knowledge, and offers a powerful alternative mode of remembering. In doing so, Morrison contributes to a form of postmodern historiography that is not about abandoning truth, but about reconstructing it through a lens attuned to marginal voices, lost stories and the politics of memory.

This study challenges reductive readings of postmodernism as politically disengaged, reasserting its relevance in narrating traumatic histories and voicing the silenced. Second, it provides a methodological framework for analyzing other contemporary fictions that seek to bridge narrative form and historical accountability. Third, it opens new possibilities for literary scholars, educators, and historians to reassess the pedagogical value of fiction in constructing ethical, inclusive, and critical historical consciousness. In an era marked by historical denialism, cultural amnesia, and the manipulation of collective memory, works like *Beloved* demonstrate that postmodern fiction remains a vital space for confronting historical violence, questioning hegemonic truth claims, and imagining justice beyond the archive.

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