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THE LITERATURE ENGAGED IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to present the prominence of linguistic material in the literature, showing resistance in comparison to the so-called Standard English. At first, specific relations of the use of black vernacular English in detail are used, to indicate the resistance of the theme in Morrison's writing compared to the English standard. The corpus chosen for this article is *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, in which the use of the African American vernacular dialect studied by Labov among other scholars is present. The author circumscribes her writing in the civil rights movement recommended by Martin Luther King. Such linguistic characteristics that permeate Morrison's writing are peculiar to a select group of speakers, disseminated by the segregation recognised by the white majority and, being present in literary materiality, reveals its chronological and sociological nature of resistance.

Keywords: *Beloved*, linguistic material, Resistance, Toni Morrison.

Introduction

This is a work of Comparative Literature that proposes a dialogue with Translation Studies and Linguistics. The justification for dealing with Toni Morrison in the study in question is not only because she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 (which denotes a certain degree of importance, given the fact that she is a minority writer who has become a canon) and for receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for the work *Beloved*, but what arouses interest in studying the work *Beloved* is that it is a linguistic landmark of the resistance of the black public in the face of American white hegemony.

Toni Morrison's work captures the attention for portraying the issue of slavery, in addition to being marked by the use of the *Black English* dialect, which allows us to affirm that we are and are enriched with this linguistic variety, which is still alive. And, to corroborate this reflection, we are in agreement with the words of Armando (2002), who tells us that Literature is what is expressed in a different language, being Morrison's work a proof of this.

In the field of Literary Studies, more precisely in the 20th century, one aspect that was significant for this field was the advent of post-colonial studies. Susan Bassnett (1993) is categorical when saying that the handling of literature in a political way is linked to the reconstruction and re-affirmation of cultural and national identity in different parts of the world, contributing so that voices, hitherto silenced, could register in writing literary not only a memory of suffering and subjugation before a dominant, but also the register of a language that was not accepted in the social and academic spheres, being segregated from what was taken as the standard.

North American literature served as a stage for the so-called *Afro-American Literature*, a niche of representations of the descendants of human beings uprooted from their African origins and enslaved, is biased, given the colonial past of North America. This context favored the African American to leave anonymity and start to be “nominated”, as Kimberly Benston demonstrates:

For the Afro-descendant North American, then, self-creation and the reformulation of a fragmented family past are incessantly interconnected: naming in genealogical review inevitably. All African-American literature can be seen as a vast genealogical poem that seeks to restore the continuity of the ruptures and discontinuities imposed by the history of the black presence in the United States. (Benston, 1984, p. 155)

The nomination issue is only part of a complex whole called restorative continuity, and this process was supported across the globe, as Comparative Literature was being redefined. For Bassnett, dealing with the relationship between language and national identity is an element for the study of Comparative Literature, thus allowing it to break with the current literary canon and standard linguistic norm, to make room for groups known as minorities, whose means of communication was via valuing the dialect. The comparison of forms and content in post-colonial literature and the history of these same literature offers countless possibilities (Bassnett, 1993, p. 76).

Regarding the rupture with the canon, David Damrosch (2006) points out that he was not left out, but that he is being re-read and reinterpreted by other perspectives, such as that of post-colonialism, for example. And, in order not only to reread the canon, Damrosch proposes that we read authors from the least favoured social spheres, as these authors are within the so-called world literature and certainly aim to contribute to the formation of critical fortune. Aware of these words so contemporary and so dear to our literary historiography, we move on to the next topic of this research, which concerns the work *Beloved* and the author Toni Morrison.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, the civil rights movement

The writer Toni Morrison, from Lorain, Ohio, started her career when the movement for civil rights in the United States boiled, which allowed her poignant production to be called resistance writing, in which she shows to the reader a portrait of the black body, an element that Stuart Hall (2003) treats as important in his reflections; the Jamaican theorist proposes to reflect how these cultures “have used the body as if it were, and many times it was, the only cultural capital we had. We have been working on ourselves as a representation screen” (Hall, 2003, p. 342).

About the riot of the representation screen, we have the character Baby Suggs, who at a certain moment in the plot, exposes the precariousness that she was subject to when she was a slave: “those white things took everything I had or dreamed of” and “broke the strings of my heart too. There is no bad luck in the world without white people” (Morrison, 2007, p. 127). Morrison's writing shocks the reader, reminding him of the times of slavery due to its penetrating pages, which provoke our interior through the dialect.

Regarding the question of post-colonial theory, the theorist Lois Tyson (2006) stresses that it is an amalgamation of other theories that serve us, writers and scholars of literature, to reflect on literary aesthetics of African American origin, the from the look of what she calls ex-colonized. This articulation of literary production with post-colonial criticism is exhorted in Tyson's words:

Postcolonial criticism is particularly effective in helping us see the connections between all domains of our experience - the psychological, the ideological, the social, the political, the intellectual and the aesthetic - in ways that show us how these categories are inseparable from the experiences we have of ourselves and our world (Tyson, 2006, p. 417).

From Tyson's speech, it is possible to say that Afro-American literature, in the early 1960s, began to have a voice within literary production, previously restricted by white hegemony, and that, being a minority, many particularities of literary production and the history of North America itself have been left or relegated to the background:

I choose these two examples - slave resistance and the Harlem Renaissance - because I think they illustrate more clearly the political reasons behind the exclusion of African Americans from American history. A conscientious history of slave resistance would have blown up the racist stereotype of the happy and stupid slave who was grateful for the paternal guidance of the white master, without whom the slave would have been a lost child or a dangerous savage. And a conscientious history of African-American literary genius would have triggered the myth of African-American inferiority on which so many racist policies and practices rested (Tyson, 2006, p. 360).

And while African-American literature captivated us with a literary history that dates back to the early 18th century, for a long time, that wealth was seen as an offshoot, but not as part of American literary history. This can be proven by Tyson (2006): the textbooks used for high school and higher education did not include these narratives in the compilation, only the works of white male writers, denoting the hegemonic character of the white literary canon.

In the meantime, it can be said that both post-colonial criticism as well as African-American criticism emerged to address and criticize the political character of this history and historiography, since the concern lies in bringing the artistic and literary productions of a people, whose history was oppressed in a social, political and possibly psychological way (Tyson, 2006). As critically emphasized:

For many black Americans, this means having a cultural self at home and a cultural self in public spaces dominated by whites, such as the workplace and school. And double consciousness sometimes involves speaking two languages. Black culture experienced at home sometimes includes the use of Black Vernacular English (BVE, also called Ebonics or *African American Vernacular English*), which fulfills all the grammatical criteria of a genuine language, but is still rejected by many whites and some black Americans as poor or incorrect English, rather than recognized as a language in their own right. For black writers, double consciousness meant having to decide whether to write primarily for a black audience, a white audience, or both. This decision involves, in turn, the type of language the writer uses (Tyson, 2006, p. 362-363).

Morrison's novels portray the complex issue of the identity of people of African descent, the central theme of which she addresses the way of life of a marginalized group in the American dream: black women descended from slaves in the United States. For Kathryn Vans Spankeren (1994), Morrison's fiction was so well embarked on as to grant it international prestige. On *Beloved*, the critic makes the following comment:

Beloved (1987) is the harrowing story of a woman who kills her children to prevent them from living as slaves. It employs dream techniques of magical realism by portraying a mysterious figure, *Beloved*, who returns to live with the mother who cut her throat. [...] Morrison suggests that, although his novels are consummate works of art, they contain political meaning: "I am not interested in giving myself over to a private exercise of my imagination ... yes, the work has to be political" (Vanspanckeren, 1994, p. 117).

Harold Bloom paid tribute to Morrisonian writing by organizing a collection of articles by scholars on the work, published by InfoBase Publishing House under the title *Toni Morrison's Beloved* in the *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations* (2009) series. The American critic begins his introduction with the following appreciation of Morrison: the author's work has great cultural importance that is difficult to overestimate, and, in the case of *Beloved*, in particular, it is a novel that intrigued him by the "remarkably skilled, baroque in its splendor and the authority of the narrative is firmly established" (Bloom, 2009, p. 1.). In addition to the possible similarity to William Faulkner and *Virginia Woolf's As I Lay Dying*, Bloom reiterates that Morrison's earlier novels were not so ideologically marked, and that the author "could have sacrificed much of his art on the altar of a policy perhaps admirable in itself, but not necessarily in the service of high literature (if anyone wants to grant that such an entity still exists)" (Bloom, 2009, p. 2), and he adds that the author owes Faulkner the inspiration needed to write the work, something she has firmly denied.

In the United States, the so-called *Afro-American* literature had the diaspora issue as its theme, not only to have its space in the literary poly-system, but also to show that slavery, as a malaise of society, left marks, which should not be erased, and, therefore, literature serves as a space to represent them. Having presented this topic about the author and her relationship with Afro-American and post-colonial literature, we now move on to the study of *Beloved*.

Beloved - a portrait of resistance

Morrisonian writing aroused the interest of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, a scholar of Cultural Studies, who, in his work *The Local Culture (O Local da Cultura)* devotes the first chapter to *Beloved's* analysis; Chapter in- titled "The Local Culture," Bhabha said that the work portrays "ambivalence traumatic personal history, psychic, to disjunctions broader existence politics" and that the murder of *Beloved* is for him, a repetition of the "violent history of the deaths of black children during slavery in some parts of the South, less than a decade after Bluestone Road 124 became shady" (Bhabha, 1992, p. 144).

On the topic and the plot of the novel, Bhabha makes a connection between the narrative and slavery and the descendants of enslaved beings, saying that Morrison rescues this past slavery and its unfoldings, as the cruel murder and possession and self-possession of black bodies, in a fiction "contemporary of the story of a woman that is at the same time the narrative of an affective, historical memory, of an emerging public sphere, of both men and women" (Bhabha, 1998, p. 25). In *The Global Bazaar and Gentlemen of the British Club* (2011) Homi Bhabha dedicates a complete chapter to Toni Morrison, entitled "Agora and Aur". The remembrance of the global history of slavery at the end of *Beloved* is commented by Homi Bhabha from the words of Toni Morrison's epilogue in *Beloved*: "This is not a story to pass on" (MORRISON, 1987, p. 275). For Bhabha, "it is intoned as it marks with fire, more deeply and densely, in the flesh "of that memory that spreads in a moment of danger" (Bhabha, 2011, p. 129).

Still on *Beloved*, Bhabha takes up the theme in the chapter entitled "The interlacing of cultures", in which he affirms that the work is manifested in rhythm and improvisation, and that it serves not only to impact, but to make the reader see in its chapters "the cure of history, a community appeased in the affirmation of a name" (Bhabha, 2011, p. 92). And he concludes:

Who's Beloved? Now we understand: She is the daughter who returns to Sethe, so that her mind will no longer be homeless. Who is Beloved? Now we can say: She is the sister who returns to Denver and brings hope for the return of her father, the fugitive who died on the run. Who is Beloved? Now we know: She is the daughter made morbid love that back to love and hate and break free. His words are broken, as people lynched of broken necks; disembodied, as the dead children who have lost the reins. But there is no mistake as to what the living words say, when they rise from the dead, despite their lost syntax and their fragmented presence (Bhabha, 2011, p. 92).

For Bloom (2009), the events described in *Beloved* "may be beyond the capacity of literary representation itself, which is an enigma that undermined any attempt to portray the Nazi killing of European Jews" (Bloom, 2009, p. 2), according to the following passage of the text:

He is staring at the quilt but he is thinking about her wroughtiron back; the delicious mouth still puffy at the corner from Ella's fist. The mean black eyes. The wet dress steaming before the fire. Her tenderness about his neck jewelry — its three wands, like attentive baby rattlers, curving two feet into the air. How she never mentioned or looked at it, so he did not have to feel the shame of being collared like a beast. Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that. He wants to put his story next to hers. "Sethe," he says, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow." He leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. "You your best thing Sethe. You are." His holding fingers are holding hers. "Me? Me?" (Morrison, 1987, p. 273).

Both Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple* (1982), and Toni Morrison highlight the means of interethnic communication, *African American Vernacular English, Ebonics, Black English* or *Spoken Soul* as a tool to

enhance culture. The novel Morrison's *Beloved* starts in Cincinnati, Ohio, where Sethe, like runaway slave, lives with her daughter Denver, eighteen. Sethe's mother-in-law Baby Suggs passed away shortly afterwards.

Regarding his novels, for which he is best known, Morrison weaves a narrative in a peculiar way, through techniques of flow of consciousness, with a range of perspectives and a non-linear chronology, revealing and portraying, through his characters, the individual and collective struggles of African Americans in a white hegemonic society. And an element that deserves to be highlighted is the orality mark through the aforementioned dialect, which it proves in the following quote from the text "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984):

There are things that I try to incorporate into my fiction that are directly and deliberately related to what I consider to be the main characteristics of black art, wherever it is. One of them is the ability to be oral and written literature at the same time: combining these two aspects so that the stories can be read silently, of course, but also heard (Morrison, 1984, p. 59).

For her, the novel *Beloved* served as a curative for a historically rooted pain: the enslavement of Africans, and the words that were written on it embody a historical marker to remind us that this malaise does not occur again. And as a verisimilitude effect, *Beloved* portrays the story of Margareth Garner, according to William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay (1999): she was a fugitive slave from Kentucky, who was chased to Ohio and captured by the slave-owning authorities. To prevent her family from having the same fate, she killed one of her three children, and if she hadn't been stopped, she would have killed the other two. Upon contact with this story, Morrison "was impressed by the enormity of his mother's achievement and filed the information for almost a decade before writing about it. This news was the core from which *Beloved* emerged in the late 1980s" (Andrews; McKay, 1999, p. 6).

Morrison carried out research to make *Beloved's* plot deep, such as slave torture instruments, however, despite having had contact with Garner's story, the writer opts for greater freedom with the narrative of her characters (Andrews; McKay, 1999).

At the beginning of the plot, the children of Sethe, Howard and Buglar, home fleeing plagued by the presence of a malevolent ghost that haunts the house from the street *Bluestone Road*. Denver is fond of the ghost who one day appears incarnate to live with them. Together with Paul D, Sethe and her husband Halle had been slaves on a farm called *Sweet Home*, owned by Mr. Garner.

The text is divided into chapters of the opposite order, with soliloquies and *flashbacks* of the events that occurred two decades ago in this property, in the state of Kentucky, alternating with the present of the narrative, in Ohio. The text requires several readings, in the style of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. The back-and-forth scenes, between the present and the past, comprise a diasporic Iliad of Africanity, with reports and descriptions of the sufferings imposed on fugitive slaves such as rapes and insubordination murders.

Garner's establish a more liberal relationship with their slaves than other slave owners. On their farm, Sethe arrived as a child and, at thirteen years old, there were men who courted: Sixo, Paul A, Paul D, Paul F and Halle. She marries Halle, a generous character who worked on the weekends to buy the freedom of her mother, Baby Suggs.

After Mr. Garner's death, the nephew takes control of the farm and is called by the slaves a 'school teacher' because of his rigidity. The teacher's attitudes make oppression unsustainable for slaves and they make the decision to flee. The slaves Paul D and Sixo flee, but are captured when they start to flee and severely punished. Sethe is victimized by the 'school teacher' nephews who forcibly express her baby's breast milk. Sethe's husband, Halle, witnesses the scene and goes crazy. Paul D is forced to remain with the curb in his mouth, an instrument of torture very common among slave owners, and Sixo is killed.

Upon discovering that Sethe reported to Mrs. Garner the violence committed by the professor's nephews, the slave is subjected to a whipping session and her back is deeply marked with an immense scar, shaped like a tree. Even so, she runs away and, on the way, gives birth to a girl, with the help of a white girl

who comes across her escape, Amy Denver. Sethe goes to Cincinnati to meet her mother-in-law, an evangelical pastor who serves a black community with meetings in the woods.

A month after Sethe's arrival at Baby Suggs' house, the 'school teacher' manages to discover her there and arrives to take her back to the farm. To prevent the two-year-old from suffering the horrors of slavery when he became an adult, Sethe saw his daughter's neck in an extreme act. She planned to kill the other children as well, but is prevented by those in the house with her. Her daughter's grave receives a headstone engraved with "Beloved", which means "beloved". Sethe is arrested and convicted, later released by abolitionists, and the family continues to live in isolation.

Paul D walks for seven years to get to Sethe's house, when he moves in with his old friend. Soon after his arrival, a mysterious girl appears at Sethe's house and remains there. Over time, this character appears to be Beloved herself. She seduces Paul D, becomes pregnant and then disappears. Sethe is only interested in Beloved, loses his job and falls ill. Her daughter Denver is looking for a job, meets a boy and reconstructs her life.

In the narrative, Morrison employs magical realism techniques in portraying the young Beloved. The aesthetics of the work is characterized by the use of the *Black English* or *Ebonics* dialect, as mentioned earlier, a subversion to the standard norm that mixes the standard norm and the dialect. The experiences of his characters are so grotesque and vulnerable that only the ability to remember them was shameful and dangerous, but nothing compares to the fact that Sethe is haunted by the memory of killing her baby. Beloved served as a way to restore dignity to a people victimized by history.

Beloved ebonics - the context of the civil rights movement

Morrison's work is marked by the frequent use of the dialect, however, it is necessary to contextualize the civil rights movement, which was a crucial moment for the work to emerge.

England had dominion over thirteen colonies, each with a different purpose. In southern states, agriculture relied solely on slave labor, whereas northern states were already industrialized, requiring little labor, and thus there were many political and economic, which came to be accentuated after the independence of the United States in 1776.

Such divergences resulted in the Civil War, committed by the separatist states of South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Texas and Georgia. The northern states won the war, and the abolition of slaves took place in 1863, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, however, the social, legal and political sphere of African Americans did not progress, and only a century later, more precisely in 1950, that the afro-american community was contemplated by the civil rights uprising in their favor, a movement that was led by the Baptist theologian, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. King's performance in favor of the cause was so extraordinary to the point of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1955. In 1968, when he organized a pacifist demonstration in Washington DC, he attracted two hundred and fifty thousand people to the streets, with his famous manifesto I have a dream. Whereas North American racism

American was more fierce in the southern United States, shortly after, Dr. King was murdered in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, at the age of 39, shot by a rifle. After their relentless struggle to end apartheid (Manifesto I have a dream) and murder on April 4, 1968, Afro-descendant peoples began to occupy the same spaces as whites, however, in the educational field, the linguistic system adopted was still the standard norm.

On August 21, 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of the civil rights movement mentioned above was celebrated, however, the date has not yet shown full applicability; the use of the dialect prevails as an element of social exclusion, mainly in the school space, which is where the journey towards learning begins, still in force with the standard "foreign language" to be taught to people of African descent. And, as well emphasized by Lucilia Lourenço (2014), even if there is a leap in inclusion, there is still "no prospect of changes that instruct

teachers in the dialect so that they can teach the standard norm as a new linguistic code" (Lourenço, 2014, p. 64).

The English term *Ebonics* was proposed in 1972 by the psychologist Robert L. Williams, known for the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity, which was designed to provide blacks with the same opportunity in common tests, which were aimed at the vocabulary of white hegemony however, this test followed an inverse orientation: instead of facilitating and allowing black children to access education, it ended up contributing to the high levels of black children's intelligence being elevated.

Another term that is also known to Afro speakers is the language called Spoken Soul, coined by Claude Brown in 1968 (cf. Rick-Ford, 2000, p. 3). In Morrisonian literature, this dialectal variant emphasizes the text. The work, as previously mentioned, is inspired by a true fact: the story of Margareth Garner, located in the middle of the 19th century, which culminated in the publication of the court order known as the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which rewarded captors for capturing slaves.

Morrison's resistencialist merit is given by the intertextuality with Garner's story, in which the author fictionalizes this character and his trajectory through Sethe, who takes the same radical attitude to avoid that his child is subject to the sufferings of slavery, the which allows us to denote that the literary text works as a rescue of the memory of a past that cannot be forgotten.

In addition to literary issues, Bhabha brings up the dialectal issue embedded in the American educational system. It is known that children have an education by dialect, both in their homes and in the community in which they are inserted, however, as the American educational system requires the use of the English cultured norm, which is unknown to these children because it is not part of their linguistic universe, consequently, when they attend school, they feel a complex process of adapting and including this standard system.

For this reason, for us, it is a failure of the educational system to fail to recognize linguistic diversity in the context of communication, children are allocated to special education classes, making them semi-annuals and, consequently, unable to enter the market work, crime being the only alternative. About the lack of knowledge of the black dialect on the part of teachers who apply the intelligence tests used by American schools to evaluate their students, Homi Bhabha says:

The sociolinguistic descriptions and definitions of vernacularization certainly have an important pedagogical contribution to make. Who can deny that knowledge of the blacks' deep English structure would not assist teachers in their attempts to assess performance and extract the best results from those who are educationally disadvantaged? (Bhabha, 2011, p. 64-65).

Of all that has been exposed to date, *Beloved* is not just a novel, a bestseller, it is a fundamental political and social manifesto for the history and condition of people of African descent.

Conclusions

The study of the novel *Beloved*, authored by Toni Morrison, reports the escapes that pregnant slaves undertook when crossing borders to other states. In the novel *Beloved*, the mother kills her daughter in order to free her from the ordeal of slavery. The text leads us to the surreal, introducing in the literary text the supernatural figure of the young woman who died as a baby who returns from another dimension to execute her revenge.,

Morrison's cruelty, racism, violence and misery are described by Morrison with the use of the African American Vernacular dialect, which leads the reader into a universe of inequality and perpetual suffering.

The *Beloved* novel directs the reader to reflections on the racial issue, poverty, the power of influential people, the evil of slave hunters. Considered one of the best novels on the ethnic issue, *Beloved* is also a text about love and hate.

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