

How does Toni Morrison present the trauma of slavery in *Beloved*?

What is trauma?

Below are some quotations about trauma in literature. Identify the key words in each quote – what can you infer about trauma?

Which are most helpful in explaining how Toni Morrison presents memories?

- Laura Di Prete: Trauma is a "foreign body" in the mind
- Coupland and Coupland (1997) have called trauma a "discourse of the unsayable"
- "The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them. Or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess (and thus which possesses them)." (Cathy Caruth)
- "The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of "normal" reality, such as causality, sequence, place, and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. [...] Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect." (Dori Laub)
- "Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves." (Bessel A. van der Kolk)
- "(People] think the fact that the traumatic experience is forcing itself upon the patient is a proof of the strength of the experience: the patient is, as one might say, fixated to his trauma. I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with not thinking of it." (Sigmund Freud)

Task: Go back to your work on the opening of *Beloved*. How can you use the critical perspectives on trauma to develop your analysis of key ideas in more detail (start by focusing on Sethe's scar and the poltergeist).