

The use of Metaphor in Toni Morrison's Beloved

Mustafa Wshyar A. Al-Ahmedi¹

¹ Koya University

Received: 15 December 2013 Accepted: 5 January 2014 Published: 15 January 2014

Abstract

This study explores some metaphorical uses in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Colors are used very widely because slavery is one of the main themes of the novel and the conflict between white and black skinned people is shown as a main reason of slavery. As a result of that conflict, white and black colors can be seen very frequently. Some of the speeches will be analyzed in which colors are used metaphorically. The use of white color will be explained in deep as it is used regularly by a slave character because this color is the color of the slave owners, hunters and masters. Black color is used mainly for two reasons: to show the insults which were committed towards black people and it is also used to exaggerate the beauty of eyes. Crossing water is also a metaphor and it will be discussed; it will be shown how it is used to show a change in some people's entire life.

Index terms— toni morrison; beloved; metaphor; black; white; crossing water.

1 Introduction

Beloved is a novel which was written in 1987 by Toni Morrison; she started writing it after she read the real story of Margaret Garner (an African American slave who lived in the 19th century). Margaret kills her youngest daughter to protect her from slavery. The novel mainly deals with slavery theme and tries to make the picture of this reality clear as much as possible through the use of different techniques of language. Metaphor is one of the figures of speech that can be realized in the novel which tries to show the bad effects of slavery.

Sethe is the protagonist and a former slave in the novel. She kills her youngest daughter, who is only two years old, to protect her from slavery. Then, she tries to murder her other children at the place where they hid after their escape from the house where they kept as slaves and had a bad experience for a long time: slaves were being insulted and tortured in that house. She fails in killing her other children after people arrive but she already killed the youngest child and they do not allow her to repeat that undesired commitment; after being kept in jail for a short time, she is freed by abolitionists.

The restless spirit of the murdered daughter as a ghost comes back and hunts the house where Sethe and her family live after being free for decades. She disturbs the house holds for a long time till she will be Author: Koya University, University Park, Daniel Mitterrand Boulevard, Koya, Iraq. e-mail: mustafa.wshyar@koyauniversity.org ejected from the house by Paul D (Sethe's lover). After that, she returns to the house as a flesh-and-blood girl and asks for the reason of being murdered in the past. The real name of the murdered babe girl is not known but she is called *Beloved* in the novel.

Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, is another character who used to be a slave and she experienced slavery for a long time. She speaks metaphorically in many places in the novel; she tries to show the reasons of slavery through her metaphorical speeches.

As it has been said the theme of slavery is the main theme of the novel and many efforts are spent to make it effective to show the reader how dreadful slavery was. Metaphor is a figure which is frequently used to show the theme or other things which are relevant to it. There are many metaphors in the novel and it is not possible to analyse all of them in this study as the space is limited. However, this article will explore some main metaphorical uses in the novel and the way they are used will be analyzed briefly. The white and black colors, which are used metaphorically, will be explored and explained; crossing water as a metaphor in the novel will also be discussed.

2 II.

3 Metaphor Theory

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 5) define metaphor very clearly and say: "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another". Regarding their definition, metaphor is referring a target domain to a source domain or expressing something through something else which is normally meant different. Metaphor is usually used to make a target domain easy to understand which might be difficult to be comprehended because of its complexity, and it is referred to a source domain that would be easier to understand or people might be more familiar with that specific source domain. For instance: JULIET IS THE SUN. Juliet is the target domain and the Sun is the source domain. As it is known Sun has very important features like shininess, beauty, necessity and the like. Juliet is referred to the Sun to emphasize her beauty and importance; the use of metaphor here helps to tell people that Juliet has the all the know features of Sun. There will not be a better way to praise her; referring her to such a significant object would be the rightest.

There are three different categories according to the functioning of metaphor: structural, ontological and orientation (Kövecses, 2002). Those metaphors The use of Metaphor in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* which are going to be analyzed in *Beloved* are orientational metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 14) say orientational metaphor "organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another" and they say "most of them have to do with spatial orientation: updown, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, centralperipheral". According to their explanation to the function of this type of metaphor, the metaphorical meaning occurs through the opposition of some certain words; for instance, HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN. The oppositions which may occur are cultural and they would vary from culture to culture; for example, in some cultures the future is in front of us, but it is in back in some other cultures (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).III.

4 Metaphors in *Beloved* a) Colors As Metaphors

There are many colors which are used metaphorically in the novel, but only white and black colors are going to be explored in this study as they are the most important to be analyzed. White and black colors are used as orientational metaphors because *Beloved* is a novel which concentrates on slavery and as it is known slavery is the result of the conflict between white and black colors. People are not literally white or black, but these colors are used by human beings to differentiate ethnicities. This differentiation leads to an opposition between both colors and it creates a reason to a conflict which becomes a great tool for the novel.

i. White Color Slavery is the main theme of the novel and it is known that slavery is a conflict between white-skinned and dark-skinned people: black people are commonly enslaved by white people. Colors become a great tool to be used as metaphors in a novel which is mainly dealt with slavery. Baby Suggs (Sethe's mother-in-law) is a character who uses colors metaphorically very frequently because she lived as a slave more than other characters and she experienced slavery for a longer time. That is why she talks about this issue more than others and when she describes slave hunters, she mentions white color metaphorically because slave hunters were white people. It is worth mentioning that white color is mainly used metaphorically because most characters of the novel are black people and they have a conflict with white people as a result of slavery; they express their views about white people through metaphorical expressions.

Baby Suggs does not trust white people even white abolitionists. Baby Suggs says: "there is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks." (Morrison, 2004: 89). The white slave hunters are the target domain and Whitefolks is the source domain. She states her bad experience from slavery through expressing her views about slave owners and hunters. Instead of mentioning them directly, she chooses whitefolks to use because she never met a white skinned person who would be good with her. As a result of her experience, she thinks that all bad deeds are done by white people. A generalized view can be seen here as she generalizes her thoughts about all white people without any exception because of the previous white skinned people who she met.

All Baby Suggs' views towards white skinned people can be accepted because of her experience with them. She used to be a slave since her childhood. After her marriage, she gave birth to eight children who were parted from her after their birth directly; even she did not have a chance to see some of them. All of her children were enslaved and this case was more difficult from being apart from them because she was aware of the situation in which slaves lived in. It was very hard for a mother when she was sure that her children were suffering from hard working and their masters, and she was not able to help them. She says: "Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed" (Morrison, 2004: 89). "White things" is used here metaphorically; she does not say slave owners, hunters or masters. "White things" is the target domain and the source domain is slave owners, hunters or masters. Those people were white skinned people and she mentions them by their color to differentiate them from black skinned people. In this expression, it can be seen that she does not only use a color metaphorically, but she also uses "things" for human beings. It is known thing is a word which linguistically should be used for inanimate objects: not alive. Human beings are animate (alive) objects and she uses this word to mention them because, according to her, those people have no emotion. Her hate to them makes her to talk about them as emotionless or something not important or inhumane.

Baby Suggs' reason for being against white color is her hate to those white skinned people who were enslaving black people. Her bad experience is a good reason to be against them. As it has been mentioned, she gave birth to eight children who all were enslaved by "white things". She did not see some of her children and even

cannot remember everything about others; she says to Sethe: "All I remember is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Her little hands I wouldn't know em if they slapped me." ??Morrison, 2004: 176). She says this statement to Sethe when Sethe complains about Beloved's bad fate and Baby Suggs' tells her to be thankful because her case is worse than Sethe's as Sethe have still three children alive while baby Suggs has no idea about her children. Baby Suggs' most favored son (Halle who is Sethe's husband) buys her freedom after hiring himself out for a long time. After being free, Baby Suggs stays alone without any children because her last child, Halle, is captured by his slave owner after a try to escape and nothing is heard about him since his capture. She never hears again her. Being made a slave with all family members by white people becomes a good reason for her to deny white color as it is the color of responsible people for their enslavement and fate; she never saw white color as a color of goodness because she just knew people with this color who were enslaving black people. That is the reason for her to use white color in the entire novel as a cause of trouble.

After a very bad experience with white skinned people, Baby Suggs always uses this color as a trouble and talking about it as a disaster or devil. She never uses it in a positive sentence. Morey (1988) analyzes Baby Suggs character and says that she hated white color and even did not desire to hear that word till her death. Other colors were desired and mentioned by her in all aspects of life. Before her death, she was still thinking and talking about colors which she mentioned pink, yellow, green and lavender. She did not mention white as she hated it while this color in Western cultures symbolizes goodness, purity and cleanliness (Ambrose and Harris, 2005). Her color choice shows her strong opinion about white people. Instead of loving the color of purity which is white, she prefers other colors which are symbolizing something else like pink that symbolizes love and fun (ibid). Not remembering hard life in the past and finding peace without white people in her life was Baby Suggs' aim.

White color is harmful for Baby Suggs'. She thinks all of the bad things she experienced were the results of that color. Other colors are harmless for her and she thinks colors do not hurt people except white. She thinks about this color obsessively even when she sleeps. In a conversation between her and another character who is called Stamp Paid (a former black slave), they talk about this issue. ??Morrison, 2004: 179) In this conversation blue and yellow colors are used and they are harmless for Baby Suggs as they are not antonyms of black color: it is only white color which is considered as the antonym of black color. She tries to sleep on a bed which those colors are its colors. There is no white color in her bedroom as she says she is going to sleep and there is nothing to harm there in which she means white color. According to her, these colors do not hurt anybody. They are not like white as it is the color of enemies of black people. White people hurt black people, but it is not the white color which hurts; people with this color enslave black skinned people and deprive them for their own benefits. Here it can be seen that Baby Suggs opposition to white color is a special case because colors are not very important to concern for Stamp Paid even white.

In her character analysis can be seen how a color can lead to a traumatic situation. White color makes her to change all her views towards that specific color which is harmless indeed. A bad experience with something which is holder of this color can make a color harmful. Thus, it is possible to think badly about something which is good but used negatively. For instance, most people do not like guns because it is recognized as a machine to kill innocent people as it is mainly being used to, but it might be a good tool when it is used by someone to be protected from a wild animal. After experience, a specific schema occurs in the mind and it leads someone to be against something which might be good to other people or in some special circumstances. White color is an example; it is a color which is accepted as a symbol of peace and goodness by most people but that way of thinking does not apply to black slave people as their owners and masters commonly were white people.

ii. black color Beloved is a novel which mostly focuses on slavery and it is known that slaves were black skinned people. Black is one of the most used colors; it is used in the novel for two purposes: to describe beautiful eyes, and sometimes by white people, to insult and make slaves invaluable. It is worth mentioning that black is a color which is considered as a contrary color to white by most human beings (Kotan and Kaya, 2010). Naturally when people think about these colors, the first thing which comes to mind is a conflict between them. Like the conflict between both colors, the same conflict between white skinned and black skinned people comes to mind. In reality, they all are human beings and there are not any differences between them but their colors. It is not fair to call it a difference among human beings and it is pointless, but there is a reality that it is used to be seen as a difference.

Black is a color which is used by Morrison in some places to emphasize the attraction of eyes. When eyes' color is described and if that color is black, that means the person, who describes them, tries to stress on the beauty of those eyes (ibid):

"Beloved?" Denver would whisper. "Beloved?" and when the black eyes opened a slice all she

The narrator mentions Beloved's eye color to show her beauty and innocence. Most people are attracted by eyes with this color and Morrison tries to make Beloved more lovely and lovable. To do that, she describes her eyes by focusing on her eyes' color which is black.

In the following description, the narrator again mentions Beloved's eye color and she says that her eyes are black and big; black color is again metaphorically used to tell the reader that her eyes are beautiful. The size of her eyes is another element to show their attraction because it is accepted by many people that big black eyes are beautiful and attractive (Kotan and Kaya, 2010):

Back in the keeping room, Denver was about to sit down when Beloved's eyes flew wide open. Denver felt

her heart race. It wasn't that she was looking at that face for the first time with no trace of sleep in it, or that the eyes were big and black. Nor was it that the whites of them were much too white-blue-white. It was that deep down in those big black eyes there was no expression at all. ??Morrison, 2004: 55) The narrator keeps continuing to describe Beloved's eyes through mentioning the color which is black: "She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have." Her eyes stretched to the limit, black as the all-night sky. ??Morrison, 2004: 76) Here, the attraction and beauty of eyes are described again through mentioning their color which is black. The description is also widened by adding "night sky" which is very beautiful because of its darkness and the stars gleaming in that beautiful darkness.

Black color is used in some places of the novel to mention black people or something which belongs to them. Instead of saying black people, the color of black with another word is used to mention them:

It was one thing to beat up a ghost, quite another to throw a helpless coloredgirl out in territory infected by the Klan. Desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it could not live, the dragon swam the Ohio at will. ??Morrison, 2004: 66) Here, black blood is used which means black people's life. As it is known blood is red and there is no black colored blood; therefor, black blood is the source domain and it is referred to black people's life (the target domain). If their black blood is taken, their life will be taken. The metaphorical use of black color here can be seen as a mention towards the insults against black people because it is a kind of insult to human beings and their spirit when their life is taken without any reason and legal aspects like being accused in a court for a crime: even though of committing a crime, death punishment is still denied by many people. The word of "thirsty" simply means taking or desiring to get which could be meant taking a life.

The black color is sometimes used in the novel to describe a white skinned person's hate or dislike towards black skinned people by using this color in disgusting and unpleasant sentences: Don't up and die on me in the night, you hear? I don't want to see your ugly black face hankering over me. If you do die, just go on off somewhere where I can't see you, hear? ??Morrison, 2004: 81) This statement is told to Sethe by Amy Denver (a young woman who discovers Sethe in the forest). Sethe is pregnant and she tries to hide herself from slave hunters after her escape. It is her time to give birth to her child and she is alone in a forest. At that time, Amy Denver sees her and starts conversing with her. At the beginning, when she sees a black woman, she does not feel any good thing about her and starts insulting her. She says that she does not want to see Sethe's "black ugly face" when she dies. In this speech, black color is used towards insulting a black innocent woman just because she is black and nothing else. Calling someone ugly face would be a general hate, but when black is added to this expression, it becomes racism and rudeness to black skinned people. Black color here is metaphorically used to mention and specify a specific race which is black community. Amy Denver uses this color to show her and white communities hate against innocent black people who have done nothing wrong; their guilt is being naturally black which does not make any difference among human beings. After a very polite response by Sethe to Amy which she moves away as she is asked to do, the young woman (Amy Denver) remembers her humanity and Christianity and feels pity for Sethe. She goes to her and tries to help her; she makes shoes for her from leaves and ropes as her feet are in a very bad situation after walking for a long time in a forest without shoes. Then, she helps her to give birth to her child. In return, for her repentant and good deeds, Sethe names the babe Denver.

Stamp Paid uses black color to specify black people and to show how they are insulted and treated badly by white skinned people: "Since when a black man come to town have to sleep in a cellar like a dog?" ??Morrison, 2004: 186). He tries to show the way that black men are treated by white people as they are forced to stay in improper places which might suit animals. In his speech, black color is used to emphasize those black men who are forced by white skinned people to live and stay in inappropriate residences.

Black Color is also used to differentiate a race; in other words, it is used to specify or describe a group of people who are sharing the same culture and fate:

When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through (?). ??Morrison, 2004: 87) The narrator differentiates a group of black human beings from white skinned people. ??Morrison simply say "man, woman and child", perhaps she adds the black color which is referred to black people only in the novel. Here, black color is metaphorically used to describe a specific group of people who are dark skinned and there is not any white skinned person among them.

A race differentiation can also be recognized in the following narration of the narrator as she specifies women by mentioning their color, but did not mention men's and children's colors:

Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eightyseven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. ??Morrison, 2004: 180) The narrator mentions raped women, but only black women are stated by specifying "black" color. There is no color used with men, children and adults because these crimes were also committed towards white skinned people in lower rates, but there was only the highest rape crime rate against black women and that is the reason of specifying raped women by mentioning their color. Black color here is metaphorically used to specify and mention those black women who sexually abused and treated badly.

5 b) Crossing Water As A Metaphor

Crossing water like white and black colors, which have been discussed in this study, in the novel is an orientational metaphor because its meanings are antonymic. In *Beloved*, crossing water has antonymic meanings: freedom-

slavery and civilization-barbarism. It can be seen that those concepts are mostly considered as opposition to each other. These meanings may vary among people. For example, enslaving black people was not considered as a barbarian behavior by white skinned slave owners, it was rather considered as a behavior which was needed to be committed to meet white people's farm or other work requirements.

Water crossings are very common in slave narratives because slaves had to cross water when they were transferred from Africa to America for being enslaved and they had to cross the Ohio River when slaves were escaping from slavery to freedom. Crossing water means a transition from a life to a different one. Water crossings are used in slavery novels to show these transitions; they do not mean simple journeys from a place to another one and they show a change in the entire life of a human being and this change might be positive or negative. Thus, crossing water is used metaphorically in slavery narratives to show the change in slaves' lives. In *Beloved*, it metaphorically used to show two aspects of life: a journey from slavery to freedom and from civilization to barbarism.

The first one is a transition from being a slave to a free human being. In America, all slaves who tried to escape from slavery had to cross the Ohio River. They had to cross this river to arrive the other parts of the country in which abolitionists lived and black people were treated humanely. Such as all other slaves who escaped from slavery, Sethe had to cross this river with her children and it was the only way for her to get freedom for herself and her children. She crossed this river and could escape from slavery. Her crossing water is a metaphor which means her freedom as she could get her and her children's freedom. They all could escape from their masters and they were no longer a property of a slave owner.

When they got their freedom, they started to feel like human beings. They recognized from that time on that they belonged to themselves as they belonged to their masters before their escape (Erickson, 2009). The change which was led by crossing the Ohio River can be seen when Baby Suggs cross it:

Something's the matter. What's the matter? . . . 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? ??Morrison, 2004: 141) It can be seen how Baby Suggs becomes aware of her body parts; she could not feel them before her freedom because they did not belong to her and because of the bad conditions in which slaves lived in. After crossing the water and becoming free, she becomes aware of her body parts even her heartbeat. Getting freedom is also very important for Sethe because she thinks that she could not love her children as they did not belong to her since they were slaves and served other people: "maybe I couldn't love them proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love" ??Morrison, 2004: 162) Crossing water does not always guarantee freedom in slavery novels. It sometimes means a journey from civilization to barbarism. Black people were also crossed water when they were brought to the United States of America from Africa to be enslaved. They faced many difficulties on that unpleasant voyage. It was a journey towards slavery and they knew this and that is why this crossing water was not a good journey for them. Another thing which made these crossings unpleasant was the way of treatment that black slave people were treated by slave hunters. They were insulted, tortured and sexually abused. When Sethe's mother was enslaved and crossed the water to America, she was branded under the breast for the journey and raped many times by the crew during the journey. She threw away the child that she gave birth to as a result of those rapes. In this case, crossing water is a change from someone's life that leaves a civilized world. Other slaves were also insulted in different ways like torturing and keeping them in animals' cages. All these deeds were done by slave hunters who were white skinned people and they were human beings just like black skinned people. There were not any differences between them but their skin. As a result, crossing water is metaphorically used to show a change from black people's life from a civilized life to a non-civilized one which was caused by white skinned slave hunters.

In all these situations, crossing water was a significant event in slaves' life because it had the power to change their life. They had to cross water even if they did not will to. It might change their life to better or worse but they were obliged to do that journey and their feelings were not important for slave hunters and owners. They crossed water by force when they were enslaved and they also obliged to cross water for the second time to get their freedom. The crossing water is metaphorically used in the novel which means change of life.

iii.

6 Conclusion

Beloved is a novel which is well structured By Toni Morrison. Her aim is to show the new generation what happened in the past between white and black skinned people. It can be said she could succeed through her successful novel as it could get many critics and organizations attentions. It could also win many internationally known prizes for the author, but the most important is the author's messages have been delivered. She just tries to show slaves' life and their difficulties, which they faced, to the world. The metaphorical uses in the novel have a main role in the delivery of the author's messages. They are used very cleverly to help the readers to draw a real picture of the situations in which slaves lived in.

There are many colors which are used metaphorically in the novel, but white and black colors are the major ones. They mainly show the conflict between white and black skinned people. These two colors are great tools in the novel to show the conflict because they are considered as antonyms. It is believed and considered by many

293 people that white color is opposite to black color. The same opposition of ethnicity could be seen between white
294 and black skinned people and it is shown in the novel very clearly through the characters speeches.

295 Crossing water is another thing which is used metaphorically in *Beloved*. In the novel, it gives opposite
296 meanings: freedom versus slavery and civilization versus barbarism. It means a change in some people's life
297 from freedom to slavery or civilization to barbarism when they cross the sea from Africa to the United States.
298 Crossing the Ohio River means opposite: moving from slavery to freedom.^{1 2 3}

¹© 2014 Global Journals Inc. (US) about any of her children and that is a very deep grief for The use of Metaphor in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

²© 2014 Global Journals Inc. (US) this part of the novel, uses black color to identify a group of people by using black color. She does not

³© 2014 Global Journals Inc. (US) The use of Metaphor in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

-
- 299 [Ambrose and Harris ()] , G Ambrose , P Harris . 2005. Switzerland: AVA Publishing.
- 300 [Morrison ()] *Beloved*, T Morrison . 2004. New York: Vintage.
- 301 [Erickson ()] *Ghosts, Metaphor, and History in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One*
- 302 *Hundred Years of Solitude*, D Erickson . 2009. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 303 [Kövecses ()] *Metaphor -a practical introduction*, Z Kövecses . 2002. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 304 [Lakoff and Johnson ()] *Metaphors We Live By*, G Lakoff , M Johnson . 1980. The University of Chicago Press.
- 305 [Kotan and Kaya ()] 'The Color Metaphor in OrhanPamuk's Novel, BenimAd?mK?rm?z?'. Y Kotan , T Kaya .
- 306 *Atatürk ÜniversitesiSosyalBilimlerEnstitüsüDergisi* 2010. 14 (2) p. .
- 307 [Morey ()] 'Toni Morrison and the Color of Life'. A Morey . *Christian Century* 1988. 1 (1) p. 1039.