that she has not fully left the olic Order of normal language words and often hesitates to e—that is, she is unwilling (or inner normally associated with in perspective, then, Sethe has n this point of view, her psyche : structure," which would make pret Sethe's killing of her baby least not without careful conness. For one thing, we must r characters, not real people. rs who represent large groups t political dimension to Sethe's t only of language but also of this authority is also inevitably sluded from the Symbolic Order ration is the process by which incomplete castration is easily deny her fully human status. t of Beloved, one intention of ion between "madness" (which Once) and sanity (which, taken together, can be a form of madness recalls Michel Foucault’s the work of Freud or Lacan. be Sethe's situation, but those ess of the importance of Sethe's el all, is not treated as a subject language is used, whether he be and his pupils or in the literal n the form of her scarred back. on to language results from her but also in a social order that those it defined as objects of n Beloved is Morrison herself, guage use in numerous ways—adroitness with language in the n the traditional tendency of is and women as linguistically in numerous ways, but Freud’s al. Jacques Derrida, in a reading bseerves that the famous episode rnal image, or mise en abyme, of the book as a whole. Derrida notes that Freud seems to reject, then bring back the pleasure principle much as Ernst does the spoon: "In every detail we can see the superposition of the subsequent description of the fort/da (on the grandson's side of the house of Freud) with the description of the speculative game, itself so assiduous and so repetitive, of the grandfather in writing Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (119). We might apply a similar procedure to Beloved, which centrally deals with elements of American history that have traditionally been pushed aside but that continually return. Morrison's book is itself a powerful contribution to the bringing back of this history. We might interpret Morrison's extremely skillful writing as a means of helping her cope with the painful subject matter of her book by using language to establish some control over it—much as Freud's grandson establishes a sense of control over the comings and goings of his mother by learning to use language to describe the phenomenon.

Works Cited


**MARXIST CRITICISM**

*Beloved* centers on the phenomenon of slavery in the American South in the nineteenth century, and slavery was first and foremost an economic institution. But slavery constituted a noncapitalist (or, more accurately, precapitalist) economic
system. Moreover, the social oppositions on which slavery was founded seem
to be based on race rather than class in the Marxist sense. At first glance, then,
Marxist analysis might not seem directly applicable to Morrison’s book. But there
are several reasons Beloved can be usefully approached from a Marxist per-
spective. For one thing, the book is carefully constructed to indicate that the
techniques of oppression associated with slavery were not limited to the
American South. The physical and psychological abuse suffered by Sethe and Paul
D (and by the black Americans on whose real-life stories these characters are
based) ends neither when they move spatially into the “free” North nor when
they move temporally into the years after the “emancipation” of the slaves in
the Civil War. For another thing, the race relations on which Beloved focuses
may be more relevant to class relations than is immediately obvious, especially
in the United States, where the complexities of class society are inseparable from
the question of racial and ethnic differences and where, as Fredric Jameson
points out, “the system of class is complicated by “American social reality with
its racial and ethnic groupings” (Marxism 401). Indeed the centrality of race
in Beloved potentially makes a Marxist critique of the book all the more valu-
able, leading to analysis that might usefully address the special problems of
American society.

Dorothea Drummond Atabia notes the relevance to Morrison’s work of the
arguments by numerous scholars that slavery and capitalism are intimately related
as historical phenomena (18–20). Contrary to the conventional belief that slavery
was made possible by racism, Walter Rodney argues that racism was made
thinkable merely by economic necessity and that racism was a product of slavery
rather than the other way around: “Having been utterly dependent on African
labour, Europeans at home and abroad found it necessary to rationalize that
exploitation in racist terms as well” (99). Eric Williams emphasizes the economic
motivation for slavery as a form of cheap labor and concludes that “racial
differences made it easier to justify and rationalize Negro slavery” (18). African
political leader Kwame Nkrumah argues that “it was only with the capitalist
economic penetration that the master-servant relationship emerged, and with it,
racism” (29). Nkrumah, moreover, goes on to suggest that the end of capitalism
is necessary to end racism: “Race is inextricably linked with class exploitation;
in a racist-capitalist power structure, capitalist exploitation and race oppression
are complementary, the removal of one ensures the removal of the other” (27).

In any case, racism involves the overt oppression of one group in society
for the economic benefit of another, so slavery and capitalism are related
structurally; if in no other way. We should not forget the very real suffering of
American slaves, who were subjected to confinement, torture, brutalization, and
humiliation in their everyday lives. Even the most abject events in Beloved are
based on historical reality. But the extension of the suffering of Morrison’s
characters beyond the spatial and temporal bounds of the slave South suggests
that their experience may have broad, almost allegorical, relevance to American
society as a whole. Morrison carefully extends the slavery motif beyond strictly
racial bounds as well, introducing into the text a band of renegade Cherokee
Indians (who help Paul D escape from imprisonment in Georgia) and the escaped
which slavery was founded seems suggestible. At first glance, then, one to Morrison’s book. But there appears from a Marxist perspective to indicate that the irony was not limited to the abuse suffered by Sethe and Paul. Life stories these characters are into the “free” North nor when “emancipation” of the slaves in the film on which Beloved focuses immediately obvious, especially less society are inseparable from and where, as Fredric Jameson says “American social reality with...). Indeed the centrality of race in the book all the more Validate the special problems of resistance to Morrison’s work’s of the capital. It is intimately related to conventional belief that slavery which racism was made a product of slavery utterly dependent on African race necessary to rationalize that economic system and concludes that “racialize Negro slavery” (18). African it was only with the capitalist lessions emerged, and with it, suggests the end of capitalism linked with class exploit; exploitation and race oppression the removal of the other” (27). Session of one group in society ties and capitalism are related. Orget the very real suffering of others, tortures, brutalization, and events in Beloved are of the suffering of Morrison’s, and of the slave South suggests a geographical, relevance to American he slavery motif beyond strictly a band of renegade Cherokee (sent in Georgia) and the escaped white indentured servant Amy Denver (who crucially assists the escaped Sethe in childbirth, establishing an interracial bond that provides a direct reminder that many white workers lived in a condition of virtual slavery in the nineteenth century as well).

From a Marxist perspective, these suggestions of a broader relevance in Morrison’s depiction of slavery acknowledge that the treatment of human beings as property in slavery makes it a particularly overt example of the commodification of human beings that occurs in more subtle ways in capitalist society. Indeed Morrison calls a great deal of attention to the way slaves were often regarded merely as aspects of the economic system, not only because their labor was crucial to the operation of the agricultural economy of the American South, but also because they were quite frequently bought and sold, used almost as a secondary form of currency. Slaves were, in short, valued for the uses to which they could be put as farm laborers and household servants and for their exchange value, for the price they could be expected to command on the open market.

In one crucial scene, Paul D and his friend Sixo attempt to escape from slavery on Sweet Home Farm but are recaptured by a group of white slave catchers. Sixo is brutally murdered because of his stubborn defiance of these captors, while Paul D is shackled and taken back into captivity. On the way, Paul D overhears the white men discussing his market price, and he understands for the first time that he is primarily valued by his white masters not for the work he can do on the farm but for the price he can command at sale. In a moment of realization of his status as a commodity, Paul D learns the “dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future” (226). Moreover he learns that he will probably be sold soon (for about $900) but that the farm can use the money to purchase two younger slaves to rebuild the farm’s “stock” after the recent escapes. Slaves, in short, are exchanged much in the mode of cattle, with no attention to their needs (or abilities) as individual human beings.

Beloved also emphasizes that slaves were often regarded as breeding stock, a woman slave often being treated merely as “a breed mare purchased to produce human capital” (Keenan 60). And this emphasis is quite true to history. As Hazel V. Carby points out, the slave woman’s “reproductive destiny was bound to capital accumulation; black women gave birth to property and, directly, to capital itself in the form of slaves” (24–25). In this sense, the process of “labor” through which infant slaves come into the world becomes a sort of pun on the way capital in general is produced by the labor of workers. The sexuality of slave women is a mere mechanism for the production of capital rather than a potential source of genuine human relationship, contributing to their alienation in a radical way. Understanding this phenomenon well, the white neighbors scoff at the policies of Mr. Garner, the former master of Sweet Home, who allowed his slaves to marry rather than simply mating them like animals to produce the maximum number of new slaves (226).

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the slaves in Morrison’s book find it difficult to establish meaningful personal relationships among themselves. Indeed Beloved extensively explores the way the commodification of slaves
contributes to their alienation. Knowing that they might be sold at any moment, slaves have trouble feeling at home anywhere. Moreover, they shy away from meaningful personal relationships because anyone to whom they become emotionally attached (including their own children) might be taken away from them, sold to a distant owner, and never seen or heard from again. Seth’s mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, thinks of her life as a game in which people she loves are moved around like checkers, subject to sudden and permanent removal from the board. She hardly remembers most of her eight children or their six different fathers, all of whom were merely temporary presences in her life: “Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off or been flanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, bought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen, or seized” (23).

In a similar way, Paul D knows that it is dangerous in a slave economy to become too attached to anyone or anything. So he tries to love everyone and everything a little, but not so much that its removal will be too painful. This strategy of universal (if limited) love represents a potential gesture toward the kinds of communal relationships that informed the traditional African societies from which American slaves were originally removed. But for most of the book, the emphasis is not on the universality of Paul D’s love but on its muted quality, on his inability to establish a genuinely meaningful connection with anyone. In this sense, the attempts of the reincarnated Beloved to seduce Paul D (and thus impede his connection with Sethe) can be read as an allegorical representation of the way the legacy of slavery continues to make personal relationships difficult for former slaves. The relationship that is nevertheless established between Paul D and Sethe in the course of the novel is particularly crucial because it suggests that the two former slaves, by learning to love and trust each other, have at least partially overcome the alienating effects of the past.

For Mbali, in fact, “solidarity” is the major theme of Beloved, which details the possibilities for resistance to oppression through collective action by the African people (89). Morrison thus introduces into her text a number of positive images of interpersonal communication and cooperation as a counter to the alienation experienced by the slaves. These include the network of former slaves and sympathizers who work together to help Sethe and other slaves escape from the South and who later continue to function as a cooperative community in the Cincinnati area after the nominal end of slavery. A scene early in the book in which Paul D, Sethe, and Denver attend a carnival suggests a more private form of solidarity, as does a later scene in which Sethe, Beloved, and Denver function for once as a real family during an outing in which they go ice skating in “a moment of Utopian unity, of mythic resolution” (Keenan 76).

The central example of intersubjective contact in the book is the connection between mother and child, often powerful despite the fact that under slavery the two might be separated at any moment. Sethe, for example, describes her children as parts of herself, apparently feeling—in direct defiance of the alienating strategies of the slave system—that she has the right to take their lives because those lives are inseparable from her own. Here the book’s central
might be sold at any moment, moreover, to whom they become attached might be taken away from or heard from again. Sethe’s attempts to love everyone and be too painful. This potential gesture towards the traditional African societies reared. But for most of the book, love but on its muted quality, il connection with anyone. In order to seduce Paul D (and thus an allegorical representation of personal relationships difficult less established between Paul and Ellen) crucial because it suggests trust and each other, have at he past.

The specific economic terms of Omolade’s description point to a direct parallel between the fragmentation in the lives of the slaves depicted by Morrison and the fragmentation of life that Marxist critics such as Georg Lukács and (more recently) Fredric Jameson have seen as central to the alienating effects of a capitalist economic system on the lives of those who live within it. Relevant
here is Jameson's suggestion that "third-world" literature (including African) might function quite differently from "Western" literature because third-world societies lack the strong sense of separation of life into private and public spheres that is characteristic of Western capitalist societies ("Third"). African societies, according to this reading, might be expected to rely more centrally on communal activities than do Western societies, with their central ideology of bourgeois individualism. The intentional alienation of individual slaves by their white masters can thus be read as an attempt to separate the slaves from traditional African culture and to assure that African cultural traditions will be unavailable as a source of potentially subversive inspiration for the slaves. But this motif has a number of possible implications for Western capitalist society as well. For one thing, it points toward the way Western culture, by promoting the ideology of individualism, increases alienation and fragmentation rather than providing a source of communal feeling. For another, that the fragmentation of the slaves' lives leads to an almost total suppression of their private lives might point toward the way the separation of private and public life under capitalism, while seeming to glorify private life, in fact impoverishes it. The suppression of communal relations among the slaves leads not to the development of genuine individuals but to the suppression of genuine individuality, much in the way that Marxist critiques of the ideology of bourgeois individualism have frequently emphasized that this ideology prevents individuals from realizing their full potentials as human beings.

Fragmentation is also central to the historical turn from storytelling to the novel as detailed by Walter Benjamin, and *Beloved* might seem to embody this turn. Yet Morrison's novel contains so many elements of storytelling and oral culture that it can also be read as an attempt to resurrect, through the novel, the African-American tradition of storytelling as a means toward the establishment of community. In a similar way, *Beloved* appears to be implicated in Lukács's criticisms of modernism, especially as its allegorical mode is combined with radical textual fragmentation and a focus on the kinds of abject details that Lukács associates with the "pathology" of modernism. But the horrific events detailed in Morrison's book are typical of the historical epoch of slavery, and Jameson's comments on third-world literature suggest that Morrison's use of allegory is a sign of totality rather than reification. Finally it is clear that the textual fragmentation of *Beloved* is true to the slave experience and that the mixture of genres that constitutes one of the more interesting formal features of Morrison's text has highly positive political implications, suggesting a combination of different modes of accessing the world in opposition to the bourgeois tendency to treat such modes as separate and incommensurable.

Jameson's analysis of third-world literature supports the positive potential of Morrison's allegory. He suggests that all third-world texts—and particularly the major characters in those texts—must necessarily be read as "national allegories," as stories of the development of the new postcolonial nation in which they arise. For Jameson, the allegorical nature of such texts derives from the fundamental nature of third-world societies, in which the lack of the clear
culation (including African) might be because third-world societies private and public spheres that are ("Third"), African societies, rely more centrally on communal central ideology of bourgeois individual slaves by their white rate the slaves from traditional al traditions will be unavailable 1 for the slaves. But this motif in capitalist society as well. For sure, by promoting the ideology stagnation rather than providing a incisional fragmentation of the slaves' private lives might point toward an ideology that Marxist think have frequently emphasized alizing their full potentials as

I turn from storytelling to the "I" might seem to embody this means of storytelling and oral resurrection, through the novel, means toward the establishment to be implicated in Lukács's rical mode is combined with the kinds of abject details that nons. But the horrific events storical epoch of slavery, and suggest that Morrison's use of on. Finally it is clear that the slave experience and that the are interesting formal features implicating, suggesting a world in opposition to the rate and incommensurable. supports the positive potential world texts—and particularly necessarily be read as "national" postcolonial nation in which such texts derive from the which the lack of the clear separation between public and private realms typical of Western societies effaces the boundary between individual characters and the societies in which they live, leading to a situation in which "the story of a private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" ("Third" 69). In Beloved, the generic mixture of personal biography and public history suggests that the characters serve not as unique individuals in the bourgeois sense but as allegorical representations of black America as a whole.

The most obviously allegorical character in Morrison's text is Beloved herself, whose generic name suggests that she stands in as a representative of "all the loved ones lost through slavery, beginning with the Africans who died on the slave ships" (Wyatt 479). As a ghost returning from the dead in reincarnated form, Beloved also suggests the slave past in general, which continues to haunt Sethe, Paul D, and other former slaves long after the nominal end of slavery. Beloved's allegorical function seems clear throughout the text, though it becomes most forceful in the strange chapter late in the book when Beloved begins to narrate the text from a position in which she at one point merges with a woman on one of the early slave ships coming from Africa (210–213). This scene is rather confusing, and Morrison gives no explanation for the sudden shift in narrative voice, which also involves a radical textual fragmentation. But this fragmentation is less confusing if we read it as an attempt to represent the bewildering experience of Africans who were captured, sold into slavery, then taken halfway around the world on squalid and stifling slave ships to new lives that bore little relation to their former lives in Africa.

The white characters in Beloved play allegorical roles as well. Most obvious here is Morrison's treatment of "Schoolteacher," whose representation by a professional label rather than a personal name already suggests that he may stand in for larger phenomena. In particular, Schoolteacher can be taken to represent knowledge and education and the roles they play in slavery. His "scientific" studies of slave behavior—which are clearly designed to gather information about the slaves that might be useful in furthering their domination—can be read as a particularly overt example of the ideology of domination that Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno see as underlying Western Enlightenment science in general. Schoolteacher's studies are not driven by a genuine interest in the lives of slaves or by a search for genuine knowledge and understanding. His observations, which reduce slaves to objects of measurement and description, merely contribute to the dehumanization of slaves. Indeed the information he collects (like the parallel listing of "human" and "animal" characteristics of the slaves) is clearly based on the assumption that slaves are subhuman and on a desire to verify that assumption.

Morrison's indictment of science is especially appropriate given the crucial role played by European science and technology in the domination and colonization of Africa and America and in the establishment and maintenance of the institution of slavery. The depiction of Schoolteacher also suggests that the domination of slaves was achieved not only through the direct physical control
provided by superior weapons technology, but also through the aid of science and other ideological discourses that were used to justify the institution of slavery to official white society and to endow the slaves themselves with a sense of inferiority and a tendency toward submissiveness. We might note here Stanley Elkins’s influential (if often disputed) argument that the obedience of slaves was largely assured because the slaves, faced with a sense of the overwhelmingly superior power of their white masters, assumed a childlike and “feminine” submissiveness.

Regardless of whether we accept the specifics of Elkins’s argument, his indication of the important role play by psychological—in addition to physical—domination in slavery is useful and accords well with Morrison’s emphasis in *Beloved* on the psychic effects of slavery. As Barbara Schapiro notes, *Beloved* suggests that the “internal resonances” of slavery “are so profound that even if one is eventually freed from external bondage, the self will still be trapped in an inner world that prevents a genuine experience of freedom” (194). This internalization of the bondage of slavery can be compared to Louis Althusser’s notion of interpellation. In this case, individual blacks are constructed by the ideology of slavery as subjects who are subjected to the domination of their white masters. They are exposed throughout their lives to a barrage of discourses that define them as slaves and provide them with no source of identity apart from servitude. As Sethe puts it after escaping into Ohio, “Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (95).

Clearly Marxist analysis can help illuminate many aspects of Morrison’s complex novel. The fundamental Marxist concept of commodification is relevant to the treatment of slaves as property, and the concept of alienation pertains to the fragmentation of social relations and of individual selfhood experienced by slaves. In addition, *Beloved* indicates the important role played by the Western discourses of reason in the domination of slaves, a role that is usefully elucidated by the Horkheimer/Adorno critique of Enlightenment science. Finally Althusser’s notion of interpellation provides a valuable framework within which to understand the important role played by psychological conditioning in the domination of slaves. Morrison’s focus on the precapitalist phenomenon of slavery does not vitiate Marxist analysis. Indeed such an analysis makes an important contribution to more general discussions of the relationships among slavery, capitalism, racism, and gender oppression.

**Works Cited**


