

“What kind of evil you got in there?”

Memory and psychological trauma in Jonathan Demme’s *Beloved*¹

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Palavras-chave: Toni Morrison, Jonathan Demme, *Beloved*, trauma, história afro-americana

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As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind –

Emily Dickinson, “1129”

On January 28, 1856, a slave named Margaret Garner, her parents, husband and four children fled from the atrocities of a plantation in Kentucky to Cincinnati, across the frozen Ohio River. They were helped by the Underground Railroad, a network of anti-slavery northerners who hid and guided African Americans on the run. However, the federal *Fugitive Slave Act* (1850) ensured that escaped slaves could be recaptured by the authorities, hunters or their legitimate owners (Zinn, 2003: 181). Under these circumstances, a group of deputies, led by the U.S. marshal in Cincinnati, tracked the Garners and surrounded the house where they hid.

Knowing that she and her family would be re-enslaved and punished, Margaret made the most dramatic decision of slaying her offspring. With a knife, she cut the throat of her three-year-old daughter, and slashed at the other children, crying, “Before any of my babies will be taken back into Kentucky, I will kill every one of them” (Findsen, 2003: 1).

African American author and Nobel laureate Toni Morrison was compiling material for the *Black Book* (a collection of historical documents related to African American heritage), when she read an article published in *The Black Baptist*, narrating the shocking story of Garner’s infanticide. Morrison was touched by the suffering of the young mother, which she describes as “a despair quite new to me but so deep it had no passion and elicited no tears” (Century, 1994: 23).

The episode inspired Morrison to write *Beloved* (1987), the author’s most celebrated

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novel and winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction (1988). Morrison's narrative is not an historical account but rather a free adaptation of Garner's ordeal, which reflects upon the difficulties in dealing with traumatic memories.

In 1987, Oprah Winfrey bought the rights to Morrison's novel and, after seven years of planning and three years of filming, white director Jonathan Demme (*Silence of the Lambs, Philadelphia*) offers the viewers his cinematic adaptation of the novel.

Set in the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1873, *Beloved* narrates the story of Sethe (Oprah Winfrey), a slave who had risked death to escape from the Sweet Home plantation, in Kentucky. Sethe lives with Denver (Kimberly Elise), her adolescent daughter, in a house named 124, on Bluestone Road, isolated from the community. The decayed building is haunted: there is a mysterious red light, terrifying sounds, rattling furniture, etc. The spectre responsible for this turmoil is nothing less than Sethe's unnamed other daughter.

Eighteen years before, a group of white men, led by a marshal and a slave hunter, came after Sethe. Refusing to see her babies returned to slavery, Sethe tries to kill them — but only succeeds in slaying the second youngest daughter, with a saw.

In 1873, two visitors come to 124: one is Paul D (Danny Glover), a former slave from Sweet Home plantation, who also endured the horrors of a prison for blacks, where he worked in a chain gang. The second is Beloved (Thandie Newton), an enigmatic girl, who emerges from the water, dressed in mourning and covered with butterflies and ladybugs. Soon it becomes clear for Sethe that she is the breath-taking incarnation of the past, which intrudes to the present, and reminds her of the infanticide.

Beloved proves to be a malicious and parasitic presence: she seduces Paul D, befriends with her sister only to take advantage from her, and dominates her mother, who gladly pampers her child with sweets and new clothes. While Beloved grows stronger, Sethe grows thinner and loses her determination, unable to duel with the ghost and the memories it brings.

Beloved is, then and above all, a film about a series of traumatic recollections that haunt a former slave. Sethe saw her mother's hanging, fled from her plantation, was milked, beaten to the point of being scarred for life, murdered one of her children. As a result of her predicaments, Sethe suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, a mental condition that interferes with memory. Similarly to PTSD patients, Sethe: a) Experiences memory flash-backs to horrifying events (Groeger, 1997: 67, 330); b) Struggles with recurring nightmares (Parkin, 1993: 99); c) Distorts the chronological order of the events; d) Represses or lessens the accessibility to emotionally threatening memories (Searleman and Herrmann, 1994: 110).

Beloved is also about the strenuous difficulties Sethe faces when circumstances force her to narrate her memories to Paul D. Sharing recollections with others is an essential part of

the healing process, according to psychologist Pierre Janet:

Memory, like belief, like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially it is the action of telling a story. [...]. The teller must not only know how to [narrate the event], but must also know how to associate the happening with the other events of his life, how to put it in its place[,] in that life-history which each of us is perpetually building up and which for each of us is an essential element of his personality. (Janet, 1976: 661-662, my italics)

It is by telling her story that Sethe *heals* herself and finds a long-sought peace of mind. In this spirit, the main goal of this paper is to identify and analyse the film devices used by Demme to recreate the process of dealing with traumatic memories and narrating them. I analysed the film according to four main aspects: the plot, the setting, the characters and the music. All articulate to give an encompassed vision not only of Sethe's past, as an individual, but also of slavery as a part of the History that still haunts the US.

The plot of *Beloved* is not easy to follow. The non-linearity of the story parallels the way traumatized people (in this case Sethe) remember the past: fragmentarily and confusingly. What essayist Philip Page argues about Sethe's ramblings in the novel can also be applied to the film: "[Sethe] says a little, then digresses, then circles back, so the narration does likewise; Paul D only catches fragments and must wait until she circles closer and closer, so readers must be content with fragments and must wait until they are told enough" (Page, 1995: 140).

This technique results in suspense: since it is very hard for Sethe to deal with her memories, she reveals her past slowly and hesitantly, making us guess what happened: she begins by telling Paul D that her house is haunted by the ghost of one of her daughters, but does not disclose that she had murdered her (3). Then, she narrates the less traumatic part of her memories: how she run away and lived, for twenty-eight days, a life of freedom (22). The final revelation is delayed by a sequence that shows Baby Suggs performing a collective healing ritual of emotional outpouring, in a clearing near the house (22). Finally, Sethe discloses the climax of the episode: having been found by a slave hunter, she tried to kill all her children, and succeeded in cutting the throat of her two-year-old daughter, Beloved (22 and 23).

Interestingly enough, nowadays, several directors seek to tell a story in an unconventional manner, by: a) Altering the chronological order of the events; b) Omitting some meaningless or important facts; c) Distorting others; d) Narrating activities according to a hierarchy of importance established by the person who lived them.

The main objective is not to narrate a story according to a logical sequence of actions but to provide us with an image of *how* we remember, a much more multifaceted process. Two

recent examples are David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) where Diane/Betty's dreams, memories and fantasies combine in an intricate — not to say confusing — pattern, and Alejandro Amenábar's *Abre los Ojos* (1997), a similarly strange plot, where present and past fuse. These narrative strategies may be somewhat perplexing for the viewer and they demand that he/she pays a great deal of attention to the plot, since the slightest distraction may result in losing the Ariadne thread.

Traumatized people usually experience their horrific memories in sudden flashes, because they cannot endure the pain of facing long recollections. Cutaway shots (of no more than three seconds each) display fragments of Sethe's most painful moments: while pregnant, she was milked (4); as a punishment for her attempt to escape, she was whipped (4); in childhood saw her mother being hung (11). In addition to the powerful cutaway shots, low-angle and point-of-view shots allow us to see the offenders from Sethe's perspective, while being raped, for instances (4). Other times, Sethe experiences nightmares and Demme employs superimposition to show both hers and Paul D's nasty dreams, which reflect their past as slaves (6).

In this film, setting plays a particularly important role. The house where most of the action takes place is 124 on Bluestone Road: a decayed, two-storey wood building, in the middle of an open field. It fits within the American tradition of haunted houses, as presented in the literary works of Edgar Allan Poe (the short story "The Fall of the House of Usher"), Mark Twain (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The House of the Seven Gables*) or Henry James (*The Turn of the Screw*). In my opinion, the haunted house symbolizes Sethe's troubled conscience for having murdered Beloved. Interestingly enough, according to Carl Jung, in dreams and nightmares, houses and rooms (usually basements, attics or cellars), frequently represent ourselves, a part of our ego or of our subconscious (Jung, 1961: 158-161). Moreover, in dreams, houses symbolize the female genitalia: in this context, I wonder if 124 could not stand for Sethe's *haunted* uterus, after the infanticide.

Establishing shots and aerial shots reinforce the idea of isolation (2). The remoteness of the setting is a common element in horror stories: far from everywhere and everyone, the victims become helpless. Also, isolation is symbolic of the way the community ostracizes Sethe for being an infanticide, a fact ignored by Paul D, who had just arrived to Cincinnati.

Saturated colours, especially dark blue (7, 10, 19, 27), are used when depicting the house. These colours help create an atmosphere of terror and oppressiveness, that can also be experienced indoors. In fact, a mysterious and strong red light (a colour usually associated with devil in the Jewish and Christian symbolism) illuminates Paul D's face when he enters the house, leading him to ask Sethe: "Good God, girl! What kind of evil you got in there?" (3). It signals the

moment of clarity, when Paul realizes the building is haunted. Only near the end of the film is the house seen in its natural colours.

I argue that *Beloved* is a detective story in which both Sethe and the viewer must try and guess who Beloved is. Demme offers a clue to Beloved's true identity: though physically the young lady is eighteen years old (the age she would have if she had survived), she behaves like an eighteen-month old infant (the age she had when slain by her mother): she urinates herself, grunts and has trouble pronouncing words (7).

According to Gülşen Teker, the desaturated colours (earth tones, yellow, and washed out colours) in the clothes of Sethe, Paul D and the slave hunter make them look like ghosts, thus contributing to the idea that they still live in the past due to their terrible memories (Teker, 2004: 4).

The last aspect I would like to focus on is music, which has several functions in this film. First, music helps define the characters: Beloved sings children's songs, Paul D cheerful work songs, and Sethe traditional tunes. Secondly, non-diegetic music creates an atmosphere of sorrow, throughout the entire story. Significantly, the film opens with a scene from a cemetery, during winter, and we listen to an *a capella* elegy that sets the mood of the story. Finally, source music (traditional African American songs and black spirituals) plays an important role in the final exorcism, performed by a large group of black women, who gathered to help Sethe. It is by singing that they scare away not only their fears, but also the spectre that for thirteen years haunted 124.

"What kind of evil you got in there?" asks Paul D. Sethe answers: "It ain't evil. It's just sad". In my opinion, the lesson we learn from this film is that to lead a peaceful life and to relieve the pain, one must accept and share both past and present. Significantly, in the novel, instead of using the words "remember" and "forget", Sethe applies the expressions "rememory" (both as a noun and as a verb) and "disremember". In her mind, "rememory" is both the act of remembering and the process of courageously knowing how to narrate the past events, no matter how painful, as the only path to achieve a cure or some relief.

In conclusion, by resorting to various narrative strategies and film devices, Demme constructs the world and mind of a traumatized former slave, and offers us a magical reality film, with outstanding performances. *Beloved* will stay in our memory and *rememory*, haunting us in a 21st century world where slavery is still allowed to exist in some countries.

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Abstract

In 1998, Jonathan Demme directed the cinematic adaptation of Toni Morrison's masterpiece *Beloved* (1987). Both the novel and the film narrate the story of Sethe, an African American slave who risked death to escape from Sweet Home plantation, in Kentucky, in 1873. Sethe suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, due to a series of painful events that include separation from her husband, torture and rape, and culminated with an attempt to kill her children to prevent them from being enslaved again. As a consequence of this ordeal, and like any other PTSD patient, Sethe experiences difficulties in remembering and narrating her memories. She tells her story by altering the chronological order of the events; strategically omitting some relevant facts; distorting others; establishing a hierarchy of importance to the episodes. The goal of this paper is to identify and analyse the film devices used by Demme to recreate Sethe's process of dealing with traumatic memories and narrating them. Instead of telling the story according to a logical sequence of actions, the film director manipulates time to provide the viewers with an image of *how* we remember, a complex and multifaceted process. I analyse the film according to four main aspects: the plot, the setting, the characters and the music. All

articulate to give an encompassed vision of Sethe's past, and of slavery as a part of the History that still haunts the US.

“What kind of evil you got in there?”:

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1. Um relato antigo, um romance novo

Em 28 de Janeiro de 1856, uma escrava chamada Margaret Garner, os seus pais, marido e quatro filhos fugiram das atrocidades de uma plantação no Kentucky para Cincinnati, atravessando o rio Ohio, gelado naquela época do ano. No empreendimento, foram auxiliados pelo Underground Railroad, uma organização de abolicionistas do norte que ocultava e guiava os afro-americanos em fuga. No entanto, a *Fugitive Slave Act* (1850), uma lei federal, assegurava que os fugitivos podiam ser recapturados pelas autoridades, caçadores ou legítimos proprietários (Zinn, 2003: 181). Neste contexto, um grupo de agentes, liderados pelo “marshal” de Cincinnati, descobriu os Garners e cercou a casa onde se encontravam.

Ciente de que ela e a família podiam ser capturados e punidos, Margaret tomou a drástica decisão de matar as crianças. Com uma faca, cortou o pescoço da filha de três anos, e atacou as restantes, gritando: “Before any of my babies will be taken back into Kentucky, I will kill every one of them” (Findsen, 2005: 1).

Toni Morrison encontrava-se a compilar material para o *Black Book* (uma antologia de documentos históricos relacionados com a herança afro-americana), quando leu o artigo publicado em *The Black Baptist*, narrando a história chocante do infanticídio de Garner. Morrison sentiu-se tocada pelo sofrimento da jovem mãe, que descreve nestes termos: “a despair quite new to me but so deep it had no passion and elicited no tears” (Century, 1994: 23).

O episódio inspirou Morrison a escrever *Beloved* (1987), o mais célebre romance da

autora e vencedor do Pulitzer Prize in Fiction (1988). A narrativa não constitui um relato histórico, mas antes uma adaptação livre do relato de sofrimento de Garner, que reflete acerca das dificuldades em lidar com memórias traumáticas.

2. Palavras filmadas

Em 1987, Oprah Winfrey comprou os direitos do romance e, após sete anos de planeamento e três de filmagem, o realizador euro-americano Jonathan Demme (que já dirigira filmes como *Silence of the Lambs* ou *Philadelphia*) ofereceu aos espetadores a sua adaptação cinematográfica do livro.

Passado nos arredores de Cincinnati, Ohio, em 1873, *Beloved* narra a história de Sethe (Oprah Winfrey), uma escrava que arriscara a vida ao escapar da plantação de Sweet Home, no Kentucky. Sethe vive com Denver (Kimberly Elise), a sua filha adolescente, numa casa conhecida como a 124, na Bluestone Road, isolada da comunidade. O edifício em ruínas encontra-se assombrado: existe uma misteriosa luz vermelha, sons aterrorizadores, mobília que estala, etc. O espectro responsável por este tumulto é nada menos do que a outra filha, sem nome, de Sethe.

Há dezoito anos, um grupo de homens brancos, liderados por um “marshal” e um caçador de escravos, tinham vindo em perseguição de Sethe. Recusando ver as crianças serem devolvidas à escravatura, Sethe tenta matá-las, mas apenas consegue degolar uma das filhas, com uma serra.

Em 1873, dois visitantes chegam à 124: um é Paul D (Danny Glover), um ex-escravo da plantação de Sweet Home, que também sofreu na pele os horrores de uma prisão para negros, onde executou trabalhos forçados. A segunda é Beloved (Thandie Newton), uma rapariga enigmática, que emerge da água, vestida de luto e coberta de borboletas e joaninhas. Cedo se torna evidente para Sethe que esta rapariga de cortar a respiração reencarna o passado e a recorda do infanticídio.

Beloved demonstra ser uma presença maliciosa e parasítica: seduz Paul D, finge ser amiga da irmã apenas para se aproveitar dela, e domina a mãe, que alegremente a mimia com guloseimas e roupas novas. À medida que Beloved engorda, Sethe emagrece e perde a sua determinação, incapaz de lidar com o fantasma e as memórias que este lhe traz.

Beloved constitui, pois, e acima de tudo, uma película acerca das recordações traumáticas que assombram uma ex-escrava. Sethe assistiu ao enforcamento da mãe, fugiu da plantação, foi mugida, chicoteada até ficar com cicatrizes para o resto da vida, e assassinou uma das suas filhas. Em consequência de tanta dor, Sethe sofre de stress pós-traumático, uma doença mental que interfere com a memória. À semelhança de outros pacientes, Sethe: a)

experiencia imagens fragmentadas de eventos terríveis (Groeger, 1997: 67, 330); b) debate-se com pesadelos recorrentes (Parkin, 1993: 99); c) distorce a ordem cronológica dos acontecimentos; d) reprime ou diminui a acessibilidade a memórias ameaçadoras (Searlman e Herrmann, 1994: 110).

Beloved lida também com as dificuldades que Sethe enfrenta quando as circunstâncias a forçam a relatar as suas memórias a Paul D. Partilhar as recordações com outros é uma parte essencial do processo de cura, segundo o psiquiatra Pierre Janet:

Memory, like belief, like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially it is the action of telling a story. (...) The teller must not only know how to [narrate the event], but must also know how to associate the happening with the other events of his life, how to put it in its place in that life-history which each of us is perpetually building up and which for each of us is an essential element of his personality. (Janet, 1976: 661-662)

É ao narrar a sua história que Sethe se cura e encontra a tranquilidade há muito procurada. Neste espírito, o objetivo principal do presente artigo é identificar e examinar as técnicas fílmicas usadas por Demme para recriar o processo de enfrentar e narrar as memórias traumáticas. Analisarei a película de acordo com quatro aspetos principais: o enredo, o local, as personagens e a música. Todos estes elementos se articulam para transmitirem uma visão global não apenas do passado de Sethe como indivíduo, mas também da escravatura como parte da história que ainda assombra os EUA.

3. Passos em redor de um trauma

O enredo de *Beloved* não é fácil de seguir. A não linearidade da história imita a forma como uma pessoa traumatizada (neste caso, Sethe) recorda o passado: fragmentariamente e de modo confuso. O que o ensaísta Philip Page argumenta acerca das digressões de Sethe, no romance, pode aplicar-se ao filme: “[Sethe] says a little, then digresses, then circles back, so the narration does likewise; Paul D only catches fragments and must wait until she circles closer and closer, so readers must be content with fragments and must wait until they are told enough” (Page, 1995: 140).

Esta técnica resulta em suspense: dado que é difícil para Sethe lidar com as memórias, esta revela o seu passado lenta e hesitantemente, levando o próprio espetador a tentar adivinhar o que sucedera: começa por contar a Paul D que a casa se encontra assombrada pelo fantasma de uma das filhas, mas não revela que a assassinou (Demme, 1998: 3). Depois, narra

a parte menos traumática das suas memórias: como fugiu e gozou, durante 28 dias, uma vida de liberdade (Demme, 1998: 22). A fase final da revelação é adiada por uma sequência que mostra Baby Suggs a fazer um ritual coletivo de cura e de purgação emocional, numa clareira perto da casa (Demme, 1998: 22-23).

Curiosamente, na atualidade, vários realizadores procuram contar uma história de forma não convencional: alteram a ordem natural dos acontecimentos; omitem alguns factos com ou sem relevância; distorcem outros; narram as ações de acordo com a hierarquia de importância estabelecida pela pessoa que as viveu.

O principal objetivo não reside em narrar uma história de acordo com a sequência lógica de ações, mas sim em proporcionar a perspetiva de como recordamos, um processo multifacetado. Dois exemplos são *Mulholland Drive* (2001), de David Lynch, onde os sonhos, memórias e fantasias de Diane/Betty se combinam num intrincado enredo; e *Abre los Ojos* (1997), de Alejandro Amenábar, com um enredo também estranho, onde o passado e o presente se unem. Estas estratégias narrativas podem deixar a audiência perplexa e requerem concentração, pois qualquer desvio pode resultar na perda do fio de Ariadne.

Os indivíduos traumatizados normalmente experienciam as lembranças mais horríficas através de “flashes”, pois não suportam o sofrimento de enfrentar longas recordações. Planos breves (de não mais de três segundos) desvendam fragmentos do passado de Sethe: enquanto grávida, foi mugida (Demme, 1998: 4); como castigo por ter tentado escapar da plantação, foi chicoteada (Demme, 1998: 4); na infância, viu a mãe ser enforcada (Demme, 1998: 11). Para além destas imagens brevíssimas, planos em contrapicado ou subjetivos permitem vislumbrar os agressores segundo a perspetiva da escrava, enquanto decorria a violação, por exemplo (Demme, 1998: 4). Noutras ocasiões, Sethe experiencia pesadelos, e Demme recorre à sobreposição para mostrar tanto os seus sonhos como os de Paul D, ambos refletindo o seu passado como servos (Demme, 1998: 6).

Nesta longa-metragem, os locais desempenham um papel particularmente importante. A casa onde decorre a maior parte do enredo é a 124, na Bluestone Road, um edifício em ruínas, de dois andares, construído em madeira, no centro de um campo aberto. Esta insere-se na tradição norte-americana da casa assombrada, tal como descrita por escritores como Edgar Allan Poe (o conto “The Fall of the House of Usher”), Mark Twain (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The House of the Seven Gables*) ou Henry James (*The Turn of the Screw*). De acordo com Carl Jung, nos sonhos e pesadelos, as casas e as salas (caves, sótãos, arrecadações) representam com frequência a própria pessoa, uma parte do ego ou do subconsciente (Jung, 1961: 158-161). Para além disso, nas incursões oníricas, as habitações também representam o sexo feminino: neste contexto, pergunto-me se a 124 não simbolizará

o útero assombrado de Sethe, depois do infanticídio.

Planos de abertura e aéreos reforçam a ideia de isolamento da casa onde o pequeno agregado familiar reside (Demme, 1998: 2). A localização remota constitui um elemento comum nos filmes de terror: isoladas de tudo e todos, as vítimas tornam-se presas mais fáceis. Por outro lado, o afastamento representa também a ostracização a que a comunidade vota Sethe, por ter cometido infanticídio, um facto ignorado por Paul D, que acabara de chegar de Cincinnati.

As cores saturadas, em especial o azul-escuro (Demme, 1998: 7, 10, 19 e 27) representam a casa, gerando uma atmosfera de terror e opressão, tanto externamente como no interior. De facto, uma intensa e misteriosa luz vermelha (uma cor normalmente associada ao demónio no simbolismo judaico-cristão) ilumina o rosto de Paul D quando penetra na casa, levando-o a questionar Sethe: “Good God, girl! What kind of evil you got in there?” (Demme, 1998: 3). Trata-se do momento de epifania, quando o ex-escravo percebe que a casa se encontra assombrada. Significativamente, só perto do final da película, após o ritual de expulsão e purga, é que a habitação é apresentada nas cores naturais.

Argumento que *Beloved* constitui uma espécie de história policial, em que tanto Sethe como a audiência tentam perceber quem realmente é a estranha jovem. O realizador oferece uma pista para desvendar a identidade desta: embora, fisicamente, a rapariga tenha dezoito anos (a idade que possuiria se tivesse sobrevivido), comporta-se como uma criança de apenas dezoito meses (a idade que tinha quando a mãe a tentou degolar): urina-se, grunhe e tem dificuldade em pronunciar certas palavras (Demme, 1998: 7).

Segundo Gülsen Teker, as cores dessaturadas (tons de terra, amarelos e cores pálidas) das vestes de Sethe, Paul D e do caçador de escravos fazem-nos parecer fantasmas, contribuindo, assim, para a ideia de que vivem no passado, devido às memórias tormentosas (Teker, 2002: 175-183).

O último aspeto que gostaria de focar é a música, que desempenha diversas funções no presente filme. Primeiro, ajuda a definir ou realçar as características das personagens: Beloved entoava canções infantis, Paul D canta, alegremente, músicas ligadas ao trabalho, e Sethe opta por trovas tradicionais. Em segundo lugar, a música não diegética cria uma atmosfera de lamento ao longo de todo o enredo. Significativamente, o filme principia com uma cena rodada num cemitério, durante o inverno, acompanhada de uma elegia *a capella* que estabelece o tom da história. Por fim, as fontes musicais (canções afro-americanas e espirituais negros) desempenham um papel importante no exorcismo final, cantado por um vasto grupo de mulheres negras que se reúne para ajudar Sethe. É através do canto que exorcizam não apenas os seus medos, mas também o espectro que, ao longo de treze anos, assombrara a 124.

4. Desassombrar a memória

“What kind of evil you got in there?”, pergunta Paul D. Sethe responde: “It ain’t evil. It’s just sad”. Acredito que a lição que ressuma deste filme é simples: para viver uma existência tranquila e aliviar a dor, é primordial aceitar e partilhar tanto o passado como o presente. Significativamente, no romance, em vez de usar os termos “remember” e “forget”, Sethe emprega as expressões “rememory” (como nome e adjetivo) e “disremember”. Na sua mente, “rememory” é tanto o ato de recordar como o processo de corajosamente saber relatar os eventos do passado, não importa quão dolorosos, para atingir a cura ou, pelo menos, algum alívio.

Em conclusão, Demme recorre a diversas estratégias narrativas e fílmicas para reconstruir o mundo e a mente de uma ex-escrava traumatizada, oferecendo ao espetador uma película de realismo mágico, com desempenhos excecionais. *Beloved* permanece na memória e *rememória* do espetador, assombrando-o, num século onde a escravatura ainda não foi completamente erradicada.

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Abstract

In 1998, Jonathan Demme directed the cinematic adaptation of Toni Morrison's masterpiece *Beloved* (1987). Both the novel and the film narrate the story of Sethe, an African American slave who risked death to escape from Sweet Home plantation, in Kentucky, in 1873. Sethe suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, due to a series of painful events that include separation from her husband, torture and rape, and culminated with an attempt to kill her children to prevent them from being enslaved again. As a consequence of this ordeal, and like any other PTSD patient, Sethe experiences difficulties in remembering and narrating her memories. She tells her story by altering the chronological order of the events; strategically omitting some relevant facts; distorting others; establishing a hierarchy of importance to the episodes. The goal of this paper is to identify and analyse the film devices used by Demme to recreate Sethe's process of dealing with traumatic memories and narrating them. Instead of telling the story according to a logical sequence of actions, the film director manipulates time to provide the viewers with an image of *how* we remember, a complex and multifaceted process. I analyse the film according to four main aspects: the plot, the setting, the characters and the music. All articulate to give an encompassed vision of Sethe's past, and of slavery as a part of the History that still haunts the US.