

SILENCED VOICES AND REAL MAGIC: EXPLORING REALIST AND MAGIC REALIST LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF SLAVERY

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ABSTRACT

Historical fiction can be a powerful aid to understanding past events and experiences. Some aspects of history, however, have been lost or distorted in their retelling. This article compares the representations of transatlantic slavery in two works of historical fiction: *The Tobacco Lords Trilogy* by Margaret Thomson Davis, published originally in 1976-77, and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987). It shows how the former gives a one-sided perspective on events through its use of realism, a style that aims to portray events in a manner as close-to-life as possible. This article, however, argues that the realist depictions in the trilogy merely prioritise experiences and interpretations of white, colonising powers over those of the enslaved. Davis' trilogy is contrasted with Morrison's novel, chosen for its magic realist depictions of characters living in the aftermath of their enslavement. This style, although depicting a recognisable world, also allows for magical elements to be real. This article argues that magic realism allows for a more complete representation than realism of experiences and voices omitted from historical discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Examining historical fiction is a valuable source for exploring changing understanding of marginalised voices in history. Comparative Literature is an essential field for this exploration, as it has the power to bring previously disparate ideas and representations into conversation with one another. Through comparison, we can examine our changing relationship to history and acknowledge the inappropriate nature of the kinds of narratives once deemed acceptable, using this acknowledgement to inform how we want future narratives to appear. This article explores the complexities of fictionally representing the experiences of people who have been severed from the narrative of historical slavery. Inspiration for this research came after learning of Glasgow's historic involvement with the transatlantic slave trade, a past that was little discussed until recently (e.g., Mullen, 2022).

The first work examined is Margaret Thomson Davis' *The Tobacco Lords Trilogy*, a thoroughly researched historical fiction series published originally in 1976-77 and republished as a single volume in 1994 (the edition to which this discussion refers). It is written in the realist style, meaning that it tries to describe events in a realistic way. I selected this series as an example of one of few fictional works of this genre set in Glasgow during the slavery-facilitated tobacco trade in the 1700s. It follows the lives of two Glaswegian women from different economic backgrounds as they emigrate to colonial Virginia, where they are shown to benefit from slavery. This article argues, however, that the lack of challenge to slavery within the trilogy, particularly given its realist style, merely normalises slavery's place in the narrative. To demonstrate the issue with its style, I highlight and problematise scenes that describe uncritically, in seemingly realistic ways, the dehumanising brutality faced by enslaved people on tobacco plantations in the American South. I argue that it is problematic to enable a realism that shows one perspective as though it were the whole reality. In contrast, I examine the radically different style used by Toni Morrison in her historical fiction novel *Beloved*. Set 100 years after events in *The Tobacco Lords*, *Beloved* explores characters trying to piece together traumatic memories of their enslavement, while living alongside ghosts who are a real part of their everyday lives. I chose this text as an example of a creative re-imagining of history from the perspectives of enslaved people.

One might initially question fiction's place in our exploration of the past, particularly when considering that the term 'fiction'

itself is synonymous with invention. We assume, and hope, that history is the opposite of fabrication, that it is rather an assemblage of facts. Perhaps it may seem intuitive that historic events could inform an entertaining fictional story, but it may still seem illogical to claim that fiction can do anything to aid historical discovery. In response to this, however, I offer the following ideas that underly my research. First is the consideration that history is already made up of stories, but its scope is determined by which of those stories are deemed tellable, and which are not. This is not to imply that history itself is fictional, but that its creation allows one to see similarities between the selection process at play when recounting historical events and the creative decisions used when writing fiction. My second consideration for the place fiction has in historic exploration comes from novelist and historian Richard Slotkin. Slotkin (2005) theorises that historical fiction, if undertaken responsibly, can encourage interest in history and act as a valuable supplement to historical research. He observes that: 'because the novel imaginatively recovers the indeterminacy of a past time, the form allows writer and reader to explore those alternative possibilities for belief, action, and political change, unrealized by history, which existed in the past' (Slotkin, 2005, p. 221). Imagination is therefore as essential to history as it is to fiction, something that the following discussion aims to explore. To do so, the limited perspective of the realism of *The Tobacco Lords* is contrasted by Morrison's use of metaphor and imagination as integral parts of reality in *Beloved*. I will explore how the existence of magic, alongside what is perceived as real, can allow for a more complete representation of historical experiences that are, in many respects, unrepresentable. Through this analysis, I demonstrate the importance of fiction for history writing by showing that imagination is perhaps the only way of exploring alternative perspectives from the past that have been previously silenced.

NORMALISED SLAVERY IN MARGARET THOMSON DAVIS' 'THE TOBACCO LORDS TRILOGY'

Fiction and/or history

Richard Slotkin suggests that we treat historical fiction as though it were a thought-experiment for testing the things we believe to be most significant about the past, to uncover what the resulting human experiences may look like (Slotkin, 2005). In the case of this research, this framework is used to look specifically at experiences of the silenced and

forgotten. Historical fiction, therefore, must also be based on thorough research of available evidence about past events. This is certainly the case in Margaret Thomson Davis' *The Tobacco Lords Trilogy*: Davis confirms in her autobiography, *Write From the Heart* (2006), the importance she places on research for her novels. Her archival inquiries lead her to include certain linguistic features and real-life anecdotes of Glasgow life from sources such as contemporaneous biographies and newspapers. The way in which Davis, to use Slotkin's analogy (2005), 'tests' the conclusions drawn from such research is through their exploration in the style of literary realism, a form that aims to depict the everyday world in a realistic manner. Described by Mary Francis Slattery as 'reference that gives an illusion of exact correspondence with reality' (1972), realism may be an informative, imaginative way of recapturing and amplifying events from the past. However, it also has its downfalls, and it is this illusion of correspondence with reality that will be problematised through examples from *The Tobacco Lords*.

In representing the societies of eighteenth-century Glasgow and colonial Virginia realistically, many vivid scenes are brought to life in Davis' work. Much attention is given to depicting certain customs from the period, particularly those set in Glasgow, including details of the nefarious dealings underpinning the tobacco merchants' trade:

All the tobacco that was brought into Britain had as usual gone into bonded warehouses until it was time for it to be re-exported. Ramsay, having taken his out to sell, would now be able to claim a 'drawback'. He had found a dishonest customs man and arranged that the certificate issued by the Customs House showed double the number of hogsheads than had actually been landed. As a result, now that he had withdrawn the tobacco he got double the drawback of tax money he was entitled to. (Davis, 1994, pp. 274- 275)

These descriptions, based on factual research of methods used by the tobacco lords, help the reader imagine and understand the mindsets and events relating to the Glaswegian merchants. When it comes to the representation of slavery, however, it becomes apparent that there are gaps in the reality being depicted.

Throughout the trilogy, slavery and enslaved people are not accorded the same painstaking detail as other elements of the novels. Although there is some mention of the brutalities of lived experience, such as a harrowing scene in which a young couple fleeing slavery are caught and hanged, there is little depiction of characters challenging this reality. For example:

Slaves surrounded the room, drooping back against the walls, but as soon as Harding entered, they shuffled forward, bumping into one another in general chaos in their efforts to lay out plates. (Davis, 1994, pp. 444-445)

Portrayed as a clumsy, frightened collective, individual enslaved characters are not even named. Shown to be animated only to serve a purpose to their so-called masters, they seemingly have no identity beyond that which defines them in relation to those in power. This is reminiscent of the 'subaltern' figures identified in Gayatri Spivak's essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?*, published originally in 1988, which examines the relationship between colonised and coloniser in India. Spivak describes subaltern subjects as being 'on the other side of difference' (2010, p. 45.) These figures are either absent altogether or further silenced through their representation, so that individual identities are lost to what are essentially stereotypes held by the representer – i.e., the coloniser, or in this case, the author. This complements the aforementioned illusion of correspondence with reality that can occur with realism as a

literary genre. The concept poses the difficult philosophical question: who defines reality? According to Spivak's interpretation, the definers have been people and stories whose viewpoints normalise slavery. The above extract from Davis' trilogy shows little challenge to this, suggesting that Davis has not taken steps to re-define this reality as anything other than acceptable. Taking a closer look at the origins of literary realism can help further understand this problem.

What's real about literary realism?

In *Theories of Literary Realism* (1997), Dario Villanueva shows that the origins of realism may be found in the classical philosophical ideas of Aristotle (384-322 BC), who posited the theory of 'mimesis'. Mimesis is concerned with the representation of reality and its reproduction through art and literature and was, as Villanueva observes, 'the classical name [for] the relationship between literature and reality before it was replaced by the relatively recent term 'realism'' (Villanueva, 1997, p. 2).

The theoretical basis of realism therefore emerged from Western traditional schools of thought. This is significant for the discussion of historically dominant representations of reality, as it shows that the so-called reality intrinsic to the concept has been defined by Western thought. In the context of slavery in particular, the voice defining reality has, with few exceptions, been that of the enslavers, the European colonisers and the wealthy minority profiting from the trade in human misery. Realism appears to blur the boundaries between literature and reality. However, the characterisation of realism since its inception by Western thinking implies that the kind of reality it is concerned with portraying excludes non-Western perspectives. In turn, this delegitimises those perspectives from the categorisation of reality.

Although a complete objective reality is arguably too elusive and controversial a concept to define concretely, the exclusion of non-Western perspectives in realist historic fiction excludes entire systems of knowledge from representation and legitimisation. Yet it still claims to be representative of a whole 'reality'. When enslaved people in *The Tobacco Lords* are described as 'crowds of half-naked slaves, blend[ing] into dark corners' (Davis, 1994, p. 413), it serves as a reminder of the 'epistemic violence' that Spivak attributes to the colonial project (2010, p. 82). By this, she means that some voices are highlighted while others are obscured. One must question the implications of Spivak's conclusions, considering that *The Tobacco Lords* is one of the only pieces of fiction that addresses this particular period in Glasgow's history. Answering this question requires further examination of the relationship between literature and perceived reality, in which emphasis will also be placed on the significance of colonialist discourse.

Colonialist discourse

Colonialist discourse is defined by postcolonial theorist Elleke Boehmer as:

[T]hat collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions [...] which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion and, in particular, in understanding the bizarre and apparently unintelligible strangeness with which it came into contact. (Boehmer, 1995, p. 50)

Colonialist discourse has denied much of what Boehmer calls 'the internal life of the colonized' (ibid), which *The Tobacco Lords* reinforce, giving little sense of individual identity or validation to enslaved characters. As in much colonial-era writing, there is a dehumanising lack of insight into the inner lives of individual oppressed people. This occurs for instance in

the othering attitude exhibited towards the enslaved people within the trilogy ('othering' referring specifically to the phenomenon of the exclusion of one social group – the colonised – by another, dominant, group, the coloniser). An example in *The Tobacco Lords* may be seen when central character Regina takes over the running of the plantation household.

She had suspected that because she was young and for most of the time of silent disposition, the slaves might take this as weakness (Davis, 1994, p. 479).

The suspicion and Davis' wording 'take this as weakness' dehumanises the enslaved people, more befitting of the behaviour of a threatening pack of animals. It shows an implicit fear of what author and theorist Homi K. Bhabha calls 'the return of the oppressed':

those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation [...] in colonial texts (Bhabha, 2004, p. 104).

Although it is not necessarily incorrect to depict, through fiction, certain mindsets that normalised and justified slavery in history, it becomes problematic when these are the only depictions of slavery, particularly when alternative views and challenges to these mindsets go unprobed.

Granted, not all of Davis' (1994) white characters are desensitised to the horrors of slavery. Mistress Kitty, the wife of plantation owner Harding, does not approve of violence towards the enslaved characters. However, the only attitude presented from the perspective of the enslaved themselves is gratitude towards a mistress who is shown to the reader as kind, administering medicine to sick children (Davis, 1994, p. 481). Here, Mistress Kitty is depicted as having superior knowledge and capability through her knowledge of Western medicine, a representation that does nothing to dispel a common trope of Western superiority in stories of encounters between 'the white man' and 'the Other'. Her actions may also be read as an echo of the mindset of the so-called civilising mission used to justify colonisation. This rationalisation, argues Kenneth Pomeranz, declares that colonised subjects benefit from the 'alleged cultural superiority' (Pomeranz, 2005, p. 35) of an imperial presence. This is akin to the white saviour mentality ingrained in colonialist thought, still persisting today. Showing Mistress Kitty as saving the lives of enslaved persons bound to her plantation reflects the patronising justification of colonial oppression, defined by the narrative that white knowledge is superior. Moreover, it constructs the idea of 'the Other as in need of civilization' (Boehmer, 1995, p. 55.), which problematically implies a need to be 'saved' by a white person. The limited representation of different kinds of experiences of enslaved characters in Davis' trilogy prevents the reader from imagining alternative realities from the sense of 'history' that normalises Western superiority.

In the context of the limited fictional exploration of this era of Glasgow's history, passages such as the following are troubling:

To her they were alien creatures with their black skin and tight frizzy hair and as much savages as the Indians or forest people. (Davis, 1994, p. 481)

Uncriticised, these descriptions are incredibly harmful, as they perpetuate existing problematic stereotypes, including that of the dangerous, 'savage' Other. Were this observation to represent the point-of-view of a character more explicitly showing just one perspective on events, it could perhaps have been effective in highlighting the racist, dehumanising attitudes of the trilogy's setting. However, the view comes from a main

character whose perspective is a central lens through which events are shown. This again is a pitfall of realism; it can deceptively hold up a single perspective as though it were in fact a complete reality.

The lack of criticism towards slavery in *The Tobacco Lords* not only reminds us that a dominant voice has historically dictated the perception of reality, but also that, once taken as reality, it can be hard to re-envisage as anything else. Fiction, in this way, may 'function in truth', as Michel Foucault observes (1980, p. 193): 'one 'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of historical truth'. This highlights how history, politics, and literature may influence one another, and challenges existing literature that deals with the colonial past, for the latter – like Davis' trilogy – does not exist in isolation but is casually embedded in a historical timeline.

Imagination and decolonisation

With the imposition of colonialist structures over cultures comes the suppression of the ability to imagine reality as having been, or having had the power to have become, something different. According to Mohsin Hamid, 'part of the great political crisis we face in the world today is a failure to imagine plausible desirable futures' (2016). The ability to imagine things differently, therefore, is a vital step towards changing them. To move away from lingering colonialist representations of history, literature has particular significance in what philosopher Walter Dignolo terms the 'decolonial project'. Decolonization, Dignolo states, is 'a form of liberation' (2014, p. 175) that must extend beyond academia and into all aspects of society, including literature.

Uncriticised literary representations that normalise slavery perpetuate colonial discourse rather than challenge it, preventing readers from imagining the possibility of a different, better world. Enslaved characters in *The Tobacco Lords* are presented through realism as clumsy, passive, or helpless. It is possible to see that this is the case because the necessary steps have not been taken to re-imagine their existence as something other than how it was defined by white colonial discourse. Imagination is essential for exploring alternative perspectives from the past, and fiction may be more effective in the imaginative endeavours of the decolonial project. The following section explores how alternative approaches to fiction may highlight voices silenced in the telling of history. It examines how realities of slavery are portrayed through the magic realism of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, analysing ways in which the magical, supernatural elements of the novel work to foreground lost realities and decolonise literary representations of the past.

MAGIC REALISM TONI MORRISON'S 'BELOVED'

What is magic realism?

Where the lack of perspectives in *The Tobacco Lords* omits voices and threatens to normalise slavery in history, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* powerfully brings silenced figures back to the fore using magic realism. Like realism, the magic realist genre is also concerned with the representation of reality, but also allows for magical elements to be an unquestioned part of the depicted world. In magic realism there is less conflict between 'the laws of nature and supernature' (Watson, 2000, p. 165), distinguishing it from the genre of (high) fantasy. In particular, Morrison uses ghosts as her supernatural addition to the realities of those living in slavery.

When magic is incorporated into reality, rather than being diametrically opposed to it, it captures what Brenda Cooper

describes as ‘the paradox of the unity of opposites.’ (1998, p. 1) She observes that ‘[magic realism] contests polarities such as history versus magic, the precolonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death.’ (Cooper, 1998). As a genre, magic realism arose predominantly out of previously colonised spaces, with key proponents in the likes of Latin American writers, such as Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014). In these postcolonial, ‘unevenly developed’ (Cooper, 1998, p. 216) societies, these kinds of binaries and views of the world co-existed. Colonial powers typically imposed their own systems of thought and perceived reality onto colonised spaces, in much the same way that the realism in *The Tobacco Lords* falsely showed one single perspective as though it were a complete reality. Magic realism may be seen as an anti-colonial literary reaction to this imposition. Often, the magic is representative of the knowledge held by colonised people that was unrecognised or misunderstood by colonisers. In *Beloved*, ghosts are not only a metaphorical but also a real part of the everyday for characters haunted by the realities of their previous enslavement.

Through the existence of ghosts, which do not exist in the eyes of empirical, scientific worldviews, *Beloved* challenges the colonial imposition of those views and values on the spaces and characters depicted. This may be seen in the character named ‘schoolteacher’, who takes over the running of Sweet Home farm where the central characters have been enslaved. Schoolteacher is obsessed with facts and measurements concerning Sethe and the other characters. ‘Schoolteacher’d wrap that string all over my head, ‘cross my nose, around my behind’ (Morrison, 1997, p. 191), Sethe recalls. However, these ‘facts’ are rendered meaningless from the perspectives of those being measured, who find the procedure absurd: “‘I didn’t care nothing about the measuring string,” says Sethe. “We all laughed about that [...]” (Morrison, 1997). This resistance to schoolteacher’s ‘facts’ highlights, ironically, that slavery itself defies the self-ascribed rationality of dominant thought.

There are some things that the characters in *Beloved* never discover, such as the fate of Sethe’s husband, Halle. This is an example of the facts from history that remain unknown because they have not been recorded. Even those remaining, Toni Morrison observes in her discussion *The Site of Memory* (1995), censored certain experiences to appeal to readers. She writes:

[P]opular taste discouraged the writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience’ (Morrison, 1995, p. 90).

It is hard, therefore, to consolidate scientific ‘fact’ with the complete absence of knowledge of certain experiences. Morrison cleverly subverts this absence when schoolteacher beats Sixo, another enslaved character, for arguing with him: ‘schoolteacher beat him anyway to show that definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined’ (Morrison, 1997, p. 190). Again, we are reminded that a dominant power has defined and dictated which stories in history are told and which voices are heard. Where *The Tobacco Lords* fails to challenge this reality actively, Morrison highlights it cleverly through the difficult and emotional passages that describe the experiences of ‘the defined’, giving them a voice. Again, the absences in history are foregrounded. The reader can clearly see the absurdity of schoolteacher’s idea of ‘fact’ when there are few recorded facts to contradict his narrative.

Decolonisation and living magic

The deconstruction of the binary between what is realistic/scientific and what is magic unveils a realm of possibilities for what magic realist historical fiction may portray. Suddenly, it is not just a Euro-centric understanding of the world that is taken as legitimate reality. For instance, the

ghosts in *Beloved* symbolise not only the lives that have been lost, but also the trauma that endures, even after the official abolition of slavery. In *Beloved*, the world that the characters inhabit is recognisably our own, as opposed to a completely new fantasy realm such as Tolkien’s ‘Middle Earth’. However, supernatural elements also occur within these recognisable places, not as an exception to the rationality of the world but as a part of it, making them uncannily familiar as well as magical. A primary example of the trope in *Beloved* is the ghost of Sethe’s baby, which haunts the house. Although the central characters are disturbed by the haunting, there is an implicit acceptance of ghosts as real, as highlighted by the fact the house itself is often personified and seen as a character in its own right:

So Sethe and the girl Denver did what they could, and what the house permitted...Together they waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behaviour of that place (Morrison, 1997, p. 4).

The rationality of the ghost’s existence is never questioned and, in fact, is compared to a natural phenomenon where the characters ‘under[stand] the source of [the house’s] outrage as well as they knew the source of light’ (ibid).

In *Beloved*, there is an acceptance also that the level of grief that the characters experience cannot ever be fully explained in rational terms. Baby Suggs, Sethe’s mother-in-law, explains why it would be pointless to move away from the haunted house, declaring poignantly: ‘[there isn’t] a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief’ (ibid, p. 5). Wherever they go, she confirms, they will not be able to escape the ghosts. This motif works as a symbolic metaphor for the widespread suffering caused by slavery; a suffering that finds its expression through this image where words have not succeeded. But more than this, the haunted house is also real, not just a metaphor, and the suffering that has been felt there is likewise just as real as the violent disruptions caused by the ghost.

Eugene Arva (2006) theorises that magic realism may simulate the unspeakable, thereby recreating traumatic events in a way that may be therapeutic. The violence of the ghost of Sethe’s daughter, for instance, acts as a simulation of trauma. The physical manifestations cause damage to the house, a reflection of the violence inflicted upon Sethe and the other enslaved characters. However, the fact that the ghost can be seen and heard through its anger is a symbolic un-silencing of the voices of those whose suffering went unmarked; Federico Campagna (2018) observes:

My main concern was: how can we still have a dignified life, even when everything seems to have been taken away from us [...] (Campagna, 2018, p. 7).

To this, he proposes:

[A] possible therapy to the historical maladies that affect us today [...] Precisely, to the malady of having to live within history – [is what] I call ‘Magic’ the therapeutic path of embracing a particular, alternative reality-system (Campagna, 2018, p. 7-8).

In allowing ghosts to be not just a metaphor, but also a real part of the reality system within the world of the novel – a world that is otherwise recognisably our own – *Beloved* legitimises the trauma of slavery. Embracing this magic brings enslaved experiences to the foreground and acts as a therapeutic engagement with the past.

‘Rememory’ as decolonial magic

Another interesting feature of *Beloved*’s confrontation of the dichotomy between magic and the scientific may be observed

in what Morrison terms ‘rememory’. Distinct from remembering, rememory describes the revisiting of memories, of images attached to places that remain and are reconstructed from lives characterised by loss, irresolution, and traumatic events that are painful to recall.

If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around there outside my head. (Morrison, 1997, p. 36)

Sethe explains to Denver that memories may come to exist out in the physical world, insisting that she can never visit Sweet Home despite the fact that slavery has been abolished, for the memories will still be there, in the physical place, awaiting her. This again symbolises the trauma that exists as a real part of the physical world, which may be a painful and terrifying thing. Though Sethe tries to ‘disremember’ (ibid, p. 118) painful events and ‘remember as close to nothing as [is] safe’ (ibid, p. 6), rememory may also be a powerful way to reconstruct a sense of identity and lost heritage. Once out in the world, these images cannot be forgotten, and have the power to enter into the rememories of others:

Some day you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on [...] And you think it’s you thinking it up... But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. (ibid, p. 36)

A tangible impact of rememory is seen in this collective aspect of the phenomenon. As Caroline Rody proposes, it has the supernatural ability to ‘connect all minds’ (1995, p. 102). Parts of Sethe’s life, therefore, may be seen to exist in the memories of other people, such as Paul D:

She knew Paul D was adding something to her life – something she wanted to count on but was scared to. Now he had added more: new pictures and old rememories that broke her heart. (Morrison, 1997, p. 45)

As someone with whom she once shared a life, Paul D shares some of Sethe’s memories, but also holds parts of memories that she is either missing or has chosen not to remember. Rememorying is a way to highlight these gaps, these absences in the stories of the lives of enslaved people. The grief with which Paul D and Sethe are faced is inexplicable; it drives them to ‘disremember’. But in sharing that pain and rememorying their stories together, it allows their grief to be acknowledged as real. The process also allows them to reclaim a heritage of their own, despite the omissions from historical discourse. Their minds and memories, connected, start to tell a more complete story.

While the facts of countless lives are fragmented and lost, rememory is an attempt to revisit and piece together some kind of truth from what is (re)discovered through collective remembering and imagination. Arguably, this is analogous with what historical fiction aims to do. As discussed, imagination is also an essential aspect of fiction examining the past. *Beloved* itself, as a novel, may be seen as a rememory, an act of the imagination that addresses the gaps in history. Morrison describes this imaginative act as ‘reliance on the image [...] in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of a truth’ (1995, p. 92). Crucially, Morrison insists that there is a distinction not between fact and fiction, but between ‘fact and truth’ (ibid, p. 93). This is where the real magic of rememory lies. It states something about the world; the truth that events and voices have been omitted, that they are present only in their absences, and

that with a little help from the imagination, they may return to haunt us.

The creative and therapeutic powers of rememory and fiction sit somewhere between the scientific and the supernatural. The supernatural power posited by Rody is characterised by the elevation of memory through imagination in *Beloved* and is a response to those experiences that cannot be conveyed merely in a scientifically ‘factual’ manner. The regenerative social power of rememory is, arguably, a tangible, factual thing, which makes it uniquely situated in the decolonial project. Looking forward, it is important that the attempted homogenisation of thought and culture from colonialism continues to be balanced by a medley of different voices contributing to literature. In particular, Boehmer argues that:

Due to the hybrid nature of postcolonial texts, the development of the success of magic realism and the proliferation of postcolonial migrant writing in English are “almost inextricable”. (1995, p. 235)

This article proposes that the normalisation and recognition of the powers of the magic realist genre simultaneously boosts appreciation of the powers of minority and migrant writing, and of the least-heard voices in general. These are people who have known ‘a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural displacement’ (ibid). The more these voices are heard, the more we as readers may re-learn what the forces of colonialism have oppressed and silenced. In this way, we might avoid the continued othering seen in fiction like *The Tobacco Lords*, of voices pushed to the margins of history. Works of magic realist fiction such as *Beloved* may reinvent these voices and re-imagine depictions of lives that have endured generations of negation.

CONCLUSION

This article has undertaken a critical examination of the representation of slavery in examples of both realist and magic realist texts, with specific focus on *The Tobacco Lords Trilogy* and *Beloved*. It has argued that there are dangers to the realist genre to which the former belongs, highlighting examples of where so-called realistic depictions show limited perspectives towards slavery. I have argued that this assumes the reality of the coloniser as the complete reality and further silences enslaved people’s voices from historical representation. What is tangibly real about the literary realist depictions of slavery in *The Tobacco Lords* is the leftover structures of colonialism pervasive within the realist genre and colonialist discourse in general. Attempts to represent the colonial subject as other within the construction of historical discourse may still be seen in these depictions. Therefore, the chapter emphasises the pressing need for decolonisation, where fiction has a unique ability to platform previously silenced voices. In the second section, I have explored the unique powers that the magic realism in *Beloved* can exercise, examining features of the genre, such as its representation of multiple, contrasting realities, which result in the deconstruction of colonial binaries between magic and science, fact and fiction, and imagination and memory. This, I have shown, may help portray events in a way that is no longer dominated by a single voice or worldview. Magic, such as Morrison’s ghosts, as a living reality within the novel, is a way to resist and undermine colonial representations and definitions. The idea of ‘rememory’ in *Beloved* has uniquely supernatural powers, demonstrated as analogous to the powers that fiction itself may have to re-examine the past. Fiction, like rememory, has the potential to piece together fragmented stories and memories, using the power of the imagination to bring silenced voices back to the fore.

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