

## Revivification of Ghost- Goddess tales: Exploring Cultural Haunting and Spirituality in Minority American Fiction.

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### ABSTRACT:

The aim of this paper is to examine minority American writers Ana Castillo and Toni Morrison's novels, exploring their interest in supernatural phenomena, their aesthetics and choice of portrayal of ghosts, sometimes evolving as spiritual goddesses, through the lens of the Brogan's Theory of Cultural Haunting. They manage to depict their characters as not just dwelling on the atrocities in their ethnic pasts, but ones thwarting the current patriarchal paradigm, and investigating and opting for various ways of survival in the contemporary world , while battling to construct a practical option in contrast to their intangibility inside the existing predominant culture. For this reason, I will dissect the novels *So far from God* and *Beloved*, also calling to attention the supernatural element's effect on the remainder of the characters, on both individual and aggregate levels, and its relationship with the Ethnic American community. The paper hopes to elaborate on the ways in which Castillo and Morrison develop their ghost characters not just to reminiscence about the traumatic oppressions and the stigma of slavery of the past , but they also appropriate the feminine in their use of spirituality to empower their characters ,delving into their pasts and ending up reformulating a better future .This study hopes to advance further interest in similar comparative analyses of minority literary works exploring other forms of spirituality in the fantastical realm and the relevance of its use .

**Keywords:** Castillo, ghost, goddess, spirituality, cultural haunting

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Ethnic American writers frequently opt for the theme of supernatural Ghost –Goddess reincarnations, thereby stressing that they have a dual-cultural role to play .The objective of this paper is to justify this choice in the chosen novels by novelists Ana Castillo and Toni Morrison. The reason for the presence of ghosts/goddesses in the plot is to remind the various characters of their personal pasts and losses and serves as a means of reflection and healing from the traumas of past oppression and violence. In the Theory of Cultural Haunting, according to Kathleen Brogan, the ghosts are playing the cultural role of linking past events and the present, in which they may be used as a method of revisiting the past, witnessing present and redesigning the future.(Brogan,1998) The paper also examines the relationship of the Ghost-Goddess to the other personages and to the Chicano American and Afro American community. It thus shows how the ghosts of *La Loca* and *Beloved* have an impact both on individuals and collectively on everyone that has a relationship with them.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In contemporary Literature the role of the appearance ghosts has been altered to be something beyond a plot development technique. In current American writing, ghosts are intended

to have a conclusive or emblematic significance and reason. In her book on Cultural Haunting, Kathleen Brogan points out that this new disruption of ghost American authors is based on the cultural haunting stories: talk about the past as well as the present of characters, not just the passion of medieval plots. Evidently, in times of rapid and extreme change, these records often appear. (Brogan,1998, P-174)

As per Brogan, the abstract portrayal of ghosts is the vent of people who actively seek to reconsider their relationship to the past and effectively develop its future. (typically African American writers ) The researchers wish to apply this hypothesis of Cultural Haunting to a Latin American composition by Ana Castillo , and contrast it with that of African American novelist Toni Morrison .Castillo utilizes apparitions as vehicles of recuperating the past inventively. In Castillo's *So far from God*, the apparition – Goddess La Loca is utilized to interface the characters' pasts to their future, and their societies, permitting them to find the strength to deal with themselves and their undertakings inside the American Chicano society. Ana Castillo gets her inspiration from stories of medieval women mystics in order to explore the importance of a new feminine spirituality. With that purpose, she opens up a new perspective for Chicano spirituality and tries to revive it effectively. Eventually, Castillo gives women the ability to assert their spiritual power by creating a world in which every woman can be a Goddess-Saint.

Brogan therefore affirms that contemporary African American writers, for instance Toni Morrison, are increasingly using phantoms as vehicles for recovery, and re-examining their ethnic past . The ghost in Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) combines characters of the past with their lifestyles. The presence of the ghost constantly affects the rest of the characters as they are forced to encounter their past. Clearly, this association with the traumatic past makes the characters mature as people.(Brogan,1998)

## METHODS

The presented research was formulated using Qualitative –Interpretative Methods, used mostly in the analysis of literary texts. The data for the research was primarily taken in the form of a library study, which includes the novels by American authors Toni Morrison and Ana Castillo .The texts *Beloved* and *So far from God* constitute the primary sources and secondary sources include journal articles and books related to the topic. No other research participants were employed as the researchers themselves identified and interpreted the data. (George, 2008)

After reading the selected literary texts repeatedly and thoroughly, the Thematic Analysis method was applied to each text to examine the appearance of spiritual and magical figures , and correlating this phenomena with Brogan’s “Story of Cultural Haunting” which defines this presence of phantoms as a medium of recovery from the trauma and violence of common ethnic pasts of the American writers and reflect in their choice of supernatural characters. Finally the researchers have contextualized this with Brogan’s Theory of Cultural Haunting and reported the findings of the research. Both Castillo and Morrison being ethnic Americans themselves envision a de-colonial society based on the profound standards of inclusivity and equality, believing that this is impossible if their shared past of oppression is not addressed. They manage to do this by means of Cultural Haunting, by introducing the supernatural, ghosts and goddesses into their plots to help their other characters and the community through them to revisit and heal from their past oppressions and subjugation. This scenario is evolved by the efforts of conscientious feminist

characters in the novels, who demonstrate the hidden integrity of every form of life, both rational and divine. Through her spirituality she motivates her characters, rather than just self-interest, to recognize all life as sacred, and sometimes even feeling empathy with their former oppressors, for the general welfare of all.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What follows is an analysis of the texts 'So far from God' and 'Beloved', the appearance of the Ghost/Goddess apparitions, their relevance and healing powers, tracing its roots to the shared history of oppression and trauma in their distant pasts. As a Chicano writer, Ana Castillo attempts to discover a response to the question that what made Latin American women to be viewed as useless, abandoned and frail by the society in general. Her answer would be Christian Patriarchy. With the mystical story of La Loca, what she attempts to do is reestablish the power which they once had. She inspects issues of faith and spirituality, without the trappings of male dominated religion. Focusing on every day's issues of being a minority woman, not totally eliminating the faith in God, but remodeling it to suit the feminine community.

Basically, Morrison also believes that the past horror of oppression and subjugation is a concept similar to the nebulous idea that has not been given space, which comes back inconsistently to the prevailing African American thinking. Morrison examines these past injuries in her book *Beloved* through a compelling story that tries to heal her people from their tragic abuse in history. Morrison has a lot to reveal to the African Americans in making these assumptions regarding their past enslavement and the magnitude of their responses. As Brogan correctly pointed out that the depiction of apparitions in Modern American writing leads us into the heart of our country's talk of cultural diversity and ethnicity. When they are closely examined, the elements of social and artistic integration are uncovered. (Brogan, 1998, P-174)

### **Chicano past of oppression:**

Brought up in Chicago as a Latin American author, Ana Castillo records her thought process for writing as one that was not premeditated, she just started writing and it got out of hand. However, she characterizes her specialty as something spontaneous, her honor winning novel *So Far from God* brought her fame as it was about Chicano women empowerment, in spite of being oppressed. Occurring in the Chicano world, *So Far from God* consummately depicts the difficulties and abuse the Mexican ladies face and offers a world where they gain the power to overcome patriarchal society and free enterprise simultaneously.

Like the former colonists in the United States, both Blacks and Chicanos tolerated the effects of deep-seated economic, social, and racial prejudice, were overcome by the effects of World War I in the developed world, and saw their own indigenous characteristics and ways of life crushed. Inward Colonialism originated in Latin America as part of a major Marxist exploration of advanced belief systems and was explicitly described by rare scholars to explain the racist effects of despair and resilience in traditional organizations. Patriotic activists and Chicano reformists understood this philosophy, and believed that Internal Colonialism was responsible for their low status in the United States, which was the result of repression and military recruitment after the Mexican American war. [1846-48] Henceforth a Mexican American culture emerged, reflecting the cultural experience of many of these people under Anglo-American financial management and philosophy, which was the beginning of the emergence of Chicano Literature. Recent

developments in 1960 signaled the revival of the Chicano literature that offered to go to a new mysterious discourse depicting local Mexican roots.

All through the book, Castillo acclaims Chicano spirituality, mixed with the Medieval supernatural. The plot seems to be inspired from Medieval female mystic tales, such as those of Christina Mirabilis, who was one of the earliest strong female voices. Subsequently, feminist spirituality can be viewed as a pathway through which women try to assert their power, therefore challenging certain aspects of religion which does not see them as an equal to men. As Michelle Sauer contends in her article "Saint-Making in Ana Castillo's *So Far From God: Medieval Mysticism as Precedent for an Authoritative Chicano Spirituality*," Ana Castillo seems to have mitigated the power of the feminine community and of a new feminine spirituality by using a medieval feminist mix. So, she presents a new perspective for Chicano spirituality, eventually giving women the ability to assert their spiritual power by creating a world in which every woman can be a saint, just as all baptized Christians were viewed as saints. (Sauer, 2000)

### **Analysis of Ana Castillo's *So far from God***

The story *So Far from God* takes place in the natural city of Tome, New Mexico and depicts the presence of a Chicano mother, Sophie, and her four girl children Fe, Esperanza, Caridad and La Loca. In view of the withdrawal of the father of the family who had left before the scene of the novel, Castillo is preparing the audience to develop an awareness of a female led Chicano home promoted by the absence of a male character. Castillo's female protagonist Sofia's tale is based on that of Martyred Sophia, an ancient Christian saint and her three daughters - Saints Faith, Hope and Charity. According to the Orthodox Church in the United States, the real Sophia was a religious Christian widow who named her daughters with names of the three Christian values of self-confidence, anticipation and tenderness of heart. [Martyred Sophia]. As the Christian story progressed, the young girls were mentioned as having appeared before a Roman emperor who claimed to have seen the goddess Artemis. For their reluctance to obey him they were asked to tolerate various forms of torture including arson and beatings. Still the three girls remained undeterred in their faith until they were killed one by one while their poor mother watched.

Undoubtedly Castillo has deliberately based her novel on the medieval story of Martyred Sophia and her three young daughters, keeping their names, like the three Christian virgins, the three daughters in Castillo's book Esperanza, Fe and Caridad bear various forms of emotional and physical abuse throughout their lives. Esperanza is attacked and abused by her boyfriend Rubén, and eventually moved on to work as a journalist in the Persian Gulf during the Gulf War in the 1990's, where she finally dies. Fe's character is further abused when she is abandoned by Tom, a man she desperately needed to marry. She continues to overcome various pains and injuries in her personal life and eventually dies due to her work with dangerous, radioactive chemicals at a factory where she worked. Caridad, the kindest of the three, is extremely tolerant of her emotional relationship with Memo, her high school sweetheart. After hearing about his lack of faith and dishonesty, she loses her senses and begins leading a wayward life. (*So Far from God*, 27) Eventually, she is mercilessly attacked and molested, left to die in the wild. After her recovery, she turns into a therapist and a recluse, and falls in love with another woman. Her life is further cut short when she and her girlfriend end it all by falling off a cliff together.

Central to this is the examination is the youngest girl, specifically identified as La Loca, who does not feature in the tale of Martyred Sophia and her three daughters and therefore exists without any reference to the said family. With the introduction of the La Loca's character, Castillo seems to be giving a female activist angle to the general story, actually turning the record into a Chicano reality and introducing a fourth girl, rather than the other three, with no recollection, or point of reference. In this way, through the eyes of La Loca, Castillo can explore desirable opportunities to raise awareness of another Chicano who has been raised in the absence of any male strength and power, giving a feminist angle to the narration.

### **Rebirth of La Loca- Spiritual resistance to Religious Patriarchy.**

The tale starts with a miracle as La Loca, a three-year-old young lady dies of an epileptic seizure and resurrects afterwards as a Ghost -Goddess. This wonder eventually leads to an animosity between the establishment of the church and the people of the town of Tome. During the family's upheaval that is an outcome of this unexpected event, the mother Sophie is unable to record the significance of her little girl's passing. (So far from God, 22)

After her mother's failure to understand the meaning of her death, La Loca is driven to submission as she suddenly returns to life, opening her coffin, as all the believers in the Church look confused. La Loca states that God had sent her back to help them all, to intercede them. She admits that she was the chosen one and had come back to improve the lives of the people of Tome. (So far from God,24) Up until then, Father Jerome, the local church priest, who had been managing La Loca memorial service was the person in control, leading the church congregation. He is portrayed as a dominating religious figure who humiliates Sofi, a self-deprecating teacher who instructs Sofi to stop talking to God, the Father about her daughter. Speaking of the Church's all controlling design, Father Jerome talks to La Loca to oversee the situation. He avoids her continued prominence on the roof of the church and which tarnished his superior position as a religious leader. Father Jerome trying to retain his lost sense of dignity implores La Loca to come down from the roof of the Church. [So far from God, 24] Regardless of Father Jerome's demands, La Loca triumphs over the Church. This episode can be viewed as the first step to assert the Chicano spirituality, for women to declare their capacity against the Christian patriarchy that had silenced them for ages.

As a Chicano author, Ana Castillo through her story, attempts to discover a response to the question as to what caused Chicano women to be viewed as worthless, miserable, and frail. The common response to this crucial question could be Christian Patriarchal oppression. For these minority women to engage themselves positively, Castillo brings back the Medieval and Latino spirituality as a solution, dismisses Christian Patriarchy and draws attention to Medieval mysticism with the tale of La Loca, inspired by the real-life Lady saint, Christina Mirabilis.

### **La Loca's relationship with the family and community:**

As a Ghost Goddess and saint, La Loca puts a lot of effort and energy into protecting and nurturing her family and the community. [So far from God] When his sister Caridad was severely attacked, it was La Loca who retaliated by pleading with her to return to her original state. In addition, La Loca took care of Fe sincerely after her abuse and brought her back to heal her wounds. Finally, La Loca sent the news to her family when her elder sister Esperanza was murdered during her work in the Persian Gulf. Maybe her ability to fight death is the most unimaginable of La Loca's amazing works. She continued to visit Esperanza and talk to her even

after her death . La Loca thus focuses on traditional understanding of death by expressing feminine reality. Caridad and her boyfriend, for example, chose to end it all they settled down well on the decision to live in succession without the presence of a man. The Ghost-Goddess La Loca actually leaves the material world in the novel, but succeeds in bringing about the idea of her being a saintly female activist. Indeed, even Sophie, her mother reveals this fact and furthers La Loca's drive, by imagining and arranging a meeting of mothers who focus on this cause. In the years to come, Sophie becomes the founding leader of an organization called MOMAS. (Martyrs' Mothers and Saints). In this way, Castillo grants La Loca undeniable licenses in the novel and her transformation to a saintly status is equated to the elevation of the Chicano feminine identity. (So far from God, 248).

### **African American Trauma of Servitude**

African Americans face the history and tragedy of slavery in their daily lives , an unhealed wound to their spirits . They feel that this affects them gravely in their daily life. Morrison firmly believes that reconstructing and reliving the past is the way ahead to recover from past atrocities as the past is a living history. Morrison is among the various African American creators who are bold enough to address the past of slavery and its impact on the present and, thus, on the recreation of the African American people. Morrison once pointed out that if they don't keep in touch with their predecessors, they will be lost . (Lucie, 2000).This assertion appears in every last section of her work. In order to live in the present, Morrison admits it is important to reconsider the history of the African American people. Her story records the order of unification and social reaction, which are nothing short of racial or discriminatory, since in a country persecuted no other group of people was forcefully brought to the United States as slaves. Morrison has examined the issue of revisiting slavery of the African Americans in her book *Beloved* (1987) and feels that in order for the local environment to recover it is important to recall the traumatic past. Morrison sees the grey shadow of slavery haunting the African Americans and it has a huge influence on their time and future. Jenny Sharpe has clearly explained why it is the modern construction of African America that provides an opportunity to be represented as a mirror. (Sharpe,2003)

Morrison comprehends that the feeling of servitude will continue to haunt the Afro American community as a ghost since it isn't appropriately covered and healed in the aggregate memory of her kin. She actually accepts that recollecting this past is fundamental for African-Americans to mend their hearts from the indecencies meted against them and to empower them to push ahead into what's to come.

### **Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.**

The key steps of formulating a successful and active phantom story are the setting and presence of heavenly components of supernatural elements that provide a sense of purpose for the story's reference. In this sense, one can argue that Morrison's *Beloved* started out as a common gothic story, In a sense, it is a "living development of the dead" (*Beloved*, 1987)

As the setting here contributes greatly to a phantom story, the possibility of the supernatural is very obvious too. Directly from the earliest starting point of the novel, we are acquainted with a phantom that is simply making noise yet never harms anyone. Directly from the

first immediate episode of the novel, we are familiar with an apparition that is already showing chaotic behavior but has never harmed anyone. The ghost, impresses and tricks Seth's fellow housemates, especially the men, urging them to leave the house . (Beloved, 1987) The escape of Seth's children shows Morrison's spirit of being a Womanist in introducing a bold confrontation and domination of African American woman characters, such as Seth and Denver, who are determined to confront and address the problem of the spirit rather than leave. Both Sethe and Denver did what they could. They pursued a fight against the phantom not to drive it out but rather to know about its requests. (Beloved,1987) Understanding the shock, both Sethe and Denver attempted to exorcize the child's apparition to converse with that phantom as an approach to discover the purposes for its demonstrations. They are prepared to trade perspectives to discover what that phantom truly needs:

In the light of the thought that made them think like that, Seth and Denver decided to end the harassment. Perhaps they were thinking of a conversation, an exchange of ideas or anything. So they shook hands and tried to be nice to her. (Beloved, 1987) Seth acknowledges that she must recognize why her newborn daughter has appeared, and Seth is ready to reveal the reason for murdering her. (Beloved, 1987) The presence of Paul D is hindering Seth's commitment to understanding the ghost's expectations. In a culture which embraces fantastic motives and inspiration, Paul D explains why the fantastic appearance exists. He endeavors to exorcize the child phantom and he is fruitful in doing so. At that point the young specter transforms into a woman who is nineteen or twenty years old. Then the child apparition turns into a lady of nineteen or twenty years of age. Beloved's apparition changes significantly from being an inconspicuous phantom to, a real ghost in flesh and blood. In this respect the sudden appearance of ghosts in Dorothy Scarborough's article "Present Day Ghosts" is part of the present category of spirit. Scarborough claims that in reality, the fictional fantasies of today are more convincing than ideas from early events. They are more grounded, more essential , being more stable, diverse and vibrant than ever. (Scarborough ,1981)

As a way of dealing with the scourge of this risky matter of historical truth and fictional credibility, Morrison discovers that subtlety and the use of magic realism is the best way to hold the harmony between this present reality and the dream by introducing Beloved's spirit to the literary content. The function of Beloved's apparition, which one can contend, is to arrange the union between the real and the supernatural in the novel. The phantom faithfully remains at a place between two universes: a reality and a dream, history, and myth at different times. Throughout the novel, the ghost of Beloved walks through these two familiar and glorious supernatural spaces. For example, at the opening of the novel, Beloved is not yet seen, but the characters can point to her world with the unpleasant impact she used to make. The story revolves around both historical and mythical tales, present and past, true, and deceptive by mixing scenes of the disturbing effect of Beloved in Seth's presence with dreams from Seth's memories, many of which are very disturbing and profoundly upsetting.

### **Beloved's relationship with the other characters and the community**

Morrison's hand is compelled to develop Beloved's strong link to other primary characters after her transformation from a ghost to a living creature of flesh and blood. This connection with the ghost reveals that Sethe still lives in the past, though she belonged to today's generation, . Paul D

is trying to live with Sethe in the present , depicting the image of struggling African American man. Denver, being an image of practicality, has tried to avoid the past, to live in the present and to anticipate the future. The discovery of the ghost in the novel has an impact both on the novel's main characters and on the Afro-American Community. Sethe acknowledges directly from the first stage that her youngest kid was trying to get back in the form of a ghost. Sethe therefore stressed with joy and acceptance that Beloved was her lost daughter and tries to review and revisit that agonizing time in the past, during which she had had to kill her child to save her from being a slave. The strange relationship between Sethe and the Beloved Ghost is the connection between her marginalized past and her sad present and future. Seth had tried to erase her daughter's memories and her past existence as a slave at Sweet Home but the ghost's appearance forces her to address her repressed feelings , thereby healing her and reuniting Sethe and Denver with the rest of the community from which they had alienated themselves.

The spirit of the phantom has a profound effect on Paul D. Near the beginning of the novel , Paul D does not realize that the Beloved is a ghost. For Paul D, she could be a real young woman, undoubtedly attacked, raped and mistreated by a white man. Paul D's logical explanation for the presence of Beloved continues to test every aspect of the novel. His desire not to expel Beloved from Seth's house is a direct result of his obscure memories and experiences during his own past as a slave. He feels that if he let a young, vulnerable black girl out of the house, she might be eventually abused or raped by white men who were eager for her black blood. . Paul D's attitude towards the personality and character of Beloved changed dramatically when he began to look at her as an apparition and realized the control that she held over Sethe and the rest of the house.. Paul D's earlier sympathy for Beloved turned to fear. (Beloved,1987).

## CONCLUSION

By medium of a critical analysis of the literary texts the researchers conclude that both Morrison and Castillo use the presence of supernatural elements of ghosts and goddesses to recreate a record of coercion and subversion of the atrocities of the past on the ethnic minority Americans, thereby charting a way to deal with it in the present. Castillo uses La Loca's ghost to remind the other characters of their past personal experiences and in the process, reminding the Chicano American community of the suffering in their common history that their ancestors went through, offering solutions to uplift the community in the present era. In order to achieve that objective, Castillo renders her ghost a sense of spirituality and the community confers sainthood to the reincarnated ghost of La Loca. Morrison's ghost is utilized as a way to remind every person in the story of her/his own past, also reminding the entire Afro American people of the atrocities their progenitors experienced during subjugation. By using apt literary techniques, the writers elevate the dull realities of the day to day lives of the characters, to the realms of the fantastic by employing exotic, supernatural characters. Through the 'Cultural Haunting' of their characters they manage to reveal that there is a way to address the gory past of slavery and subjugation in the history of Afro American and Chicano American people so that the present generation can learn to address it and heal , as the characters in the novels do.

This research can be a medium to initiate many such discourses and textual analysis of Minority American literary works of art, both individual and comparative, exploring other varied representations of spirituality and the writers' ulterior intent in unveiling such plots, thereby delving into the myriad history of subjugation and pain faced by the minority population. In the



process of formulating the paper, the researchers have limited the study to the concepts of spirituality, Cultural Haunting and the Ghost Goddess representations by the chosen writers, paving a pathway for future in depth research in this particular genre.

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