

“You Can’t Do the Past Over” But You Can Remember it: An Analysis of the Gothic, Magical Realism, and Rememory in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*

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Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* tells the story of Macon “Milkman” Dead, an African American man on a journey of self-discovery. The novel begins with Milkman’s birth and follows his upbringing under the conflicting ideologies of his Aunt and Father. The different lifestyles and values of Milkman’s Aunt and Father confuse him, and in turn he struggles to develop a strong personal identity. *Song of Solomon* continues into Milkman’s young adulthood, and ends with his eventual return to the homeland of his ancestors in an attempt to free himself from his overbearing father and the constraints of generational identity loss. Through the story of Milkman, Morrison engages in a discussion of race, specifically concerning the notion of the black body in a post-bellum America, and the struggle to regain an identity that has been silenced by a history of racial violence, enslavement, and oppression. Many critics agree that the text is a meditation on the oppressed black culture in America, and the ability language and memory possess in reviving such culture. However, the novel has frequently been assigned different genres, despite its larger themes of racial memory and identity reclamation. *Song of Solomon* has been categorized as African American Literature, and has also been read as an alternate history. More specifically, Susana Vega-González refers to *Song of Solomon* solely as a magical realist text, while Melanie Anderson identifies tropes of the gothic within the novel. Though the majority of critical work agrees on the story’s themes and final lessons, not one theorist has attempted to apply a single genre to the novel. Therefore, I will argue that *Song of Solomon* cannot be definable in terms of a single genre because it involves the interplay between multiple genres. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison juxtaposes the gothic and magical realism to

bring to the forefront effects and memories of a haunted past, while highlighting the necessity of preserving such memories to maintain a strong personal and cultural black identity in an oppressive society. In other words, the memories of an oppressive past can be transcended to construct a cultural sense of self that has been silenced by a white America.

I. Definitions

To begin, it is necessary to define the gothic and magical realism and identify tropes within each genre that are both similar and dissimilar to one another, in order to determine how magical realism is able to surpass the intentions of the gothic. As well, I will define “rememory,” its presence in both genres, and Morrison’s own use of remembering in *Song of Solomon*.

First, it is important to define rememory, as it is vital to understanding the gothic and magical realism, as well as Morrison’s own texts. In much of her work, Morrison incorporates rememory: the act of remembering memories that have otherwise been too painful to speak of and therefore forgotten or repressed. The term rememory was first used in Morrison’s novel *Beloved* when the character Sethe describes a “thought picture” she has in her mind, and the ability that exists for others to experience the same picture or memory (Morrison 36). However, despite not being officially labelled at the time, the concept of rememory is still prevalent in *Song of Solomon* in its use within the gothic and magical realism to reconstruct a forgotten past. Amanda L. Littke writes, “Morrison’s fitting term rememory can be defined as the active remembrance of a memory which allows for a comingling of the past and present, creating an alternate sense of reality for those who remember. Furthermore, as Mae G. Henderson highlights, “[i]f dismemberment deconstitutes and fragments the whole, then re-memory functions to re-collect, re-assemble, and organize the various discrete and heterogeneous parts into a meaningful,

sequential whole” (89). However, rememory as it functions within the gothic is different from its use within magical realism. Though, as Morrison highlights, rememory involves an active look into one’s past in order to retrieve repressed memories and piece together a less fragmented future, the memories presented within the gothic only exist in the form of haunting and ghosts associated with the forgotten and oppressive past of slavery and colonialism, and the plight of the antebellum African American. In the gothic, characters are reminded of the need to remember by way of the haunting and persisting ghosts that represent this oppressive past. In magical realism, characters are not haunted by oppressive memory, rather they consciously remember in order to retrieve cultural memories, thus allowing them to piece together a present self that is not only distinct from the oppressive memories within the gothic, but also intentionally sought after rather than being remembered by way of a lingering and ghostly reminder in the background. Thus, rememory is revisiting a painful past to recall what happened and what is missing from the present that has prevented individuals from assembling a solid identity. In the gothic, characters fail to consciously confront their pasts or remember. Therefore, the past is manifested in the genre’s use of the supernatural, as the unspeakable ghosts and horrors represent a haunting of past memories and their persisting effects on society and individuals. In magical realism, rememory exists in a more conscious form, as characters who are linked to the presence of magic also often have identities that are deeply rooted in a cultural past. Unlike the gothic, characters in magical realist texts remember through their own will, and not by the haunting of ghostly presences that force a rememory of a painful past. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison incorporates rememory as it is used in both genres as a way for characters to recall their pasts, specifically the past of slavery in America, and examine its effects on the present and the need for rememory in reconstructing black identity in a white America.

In defining the gothic, it is essential to analyze how the genre has been used to further the oppression of black people, as well as how it has been reclaimed and subverted by black authors themselves. Maisha Lakaye Wester defines the American gothic as an examination of “how the past comes to bear upon the present”; she further discusses how its “tropes of haunted landscapes and people, mistaken identities and family secrets, pursued/tormented heroines and ‘dark,’ raping villains in a diseased and decaying world refers to fears of racial transgression and contamination” (1). Supernatural elements in the gothic are often dark and foreboding “things” that the reader and the characters cannot completely define. They take the form of uncanny and unnatural beings or objects, and represent the unspeakable; the repressed desires, anxieties, or as in *Song of Solomon*, painful memories of the past that have yet to be consciously remembered or confronted.

The rise of the gothic’s popularity in America occurred during the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, coinciding with the increasingly debated subject of abolition. During this time period, questions arose regarding the racial “other” and their place within American society, and literature became a means to explore such questions (Wester 5). Thus, the genre of the gothic existed as a discourse for white authors to consider the aftermath of colonization, slavery, and subjugation, and to express anxieties that arose from the notion of the possible integration of a free racial “other” into society. As Wester writes, “white male writers figuratively and literally represented the enslaved black body in their texts as a manner of mediating upon black monstrosity, civility, and threat” (9). The supernatural and ghostly evils of the gothic became representations of racial anxieties and of the black body itself. While part of a white dominant discourse, the gothic and its tropes were used to associate blackness with evil and the uncanny, thus further demonizing and oppressing a racial “other.”

However, as the popularity of the gothic rose, black authors began to write in the genre, thus reclaiming it, and subverting its inherently racist and oppressive traditions. What once represented white fears and anxieties of a racial “other,” and associated blackness with evil, was re-invented to symbolize the historical transgressions of slavery and America’s history of racial oppression. Black authors were able to assert a much-needed voice in the genre and correct its racist associations. As Morrison writes, “The kind of work I have always wanted to do requires me to learn how to maneuver ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains” (Morrison, xi). Accordingly, African American authors do not directly mimic the tropes of the white American gothic, but use variations or parodies of such tropes in their gothic texts. Therefore, by incorporating the Africanist presence into the gothic, African American authors re-signify the traditional elements of the genre. Morrison defines the Africanist presence as the “overwhelming presence of black people in the United States,” and their influence on the country’s history that is “central to any understanding of our [America’s] national literature” (Morrison 5). In the African American gothic, authors represent the black body not as a demonic evil that will inevitably be conquered by a white hero, but as a disembodied wanderer, or ghost that is haunted by memories of an oppressive past and the persisting fears of residing in a racially biased America that has left black people silenced despite the abolition of slavery (Wester 20). The African American writer subverts the literary tradition of the gothic by imagining it as a form “where the voice of the dead slave can act out as a means of insisting on the presence of history” (Martin 130). In this re-writing, black authors are able to re-claim a literary tradition and use it to force America to re-visit its harmful past, highlighting the importance of remembering

the history of slavery and racism that America was founded on, and examine their ever-present effects on current society.

Magical realism is similar to the genre of the gothic in that it requires the presence of unexplained phenomena or supernatural occurrences that are both present and accepted in the world of the text. Though magical realism arose in South America, it acts as a useful style for the subjugated African American to impart a voice and identity. As Gabrielle P. Foreman writes of magical realist Isabel Allende, “Allende has asserted that magical realism ‘relies on a South American reality: the confluence of races and cultures of the whole world superimposed on the indigenous cultures, in a violent climate.’ These, too, are the dynamics of the Africans in the Americas” (370). Magical realism, much like the gothic, is dependent on a marginalized culture attempting to resist an oppressive force. Accordingly, the genre becomes a space in which the African American writer can construct an identity that exists separately from such silencing power structures. However, where magical realism diverges from the gothic is in its ability to consciously perform a remembering of the past so as to break free of its constraints. Both the genres of the gothic and magical realism in the hands of African American authors exist as subversions of white dominance. However, while the gothic writes within the genre of the very discourse it attempts to destabilize, magical realism exists independently, thus re-positioning power centers altogether by bringing them to the margins. Theo L. D’haen writes:

To write ex-centrally, then, or from the margin, implies dis-placing this [dominant and predominantly white, literary] discourse. My argument is that magical realist writing achieves this end by first appropriating the techniques of the ‘centr’-al line and then using these, not as in the case of these central movements, ‘realistically,’ that is, to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical tenets underlying said movements, but

rather to create an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this 'reality' depends upon. Magical realism thus reveals itself as a *ruse* to invade and take over dominant discourse(s). (195)

This "centr-al line" refers to the literary techniques of a dominant discourse, or privileged centre, that are re-defined within the genre of magical realism. In "writing from the margins" or a place that is separate from the dominant and oppressive power centres, marginalized authors are able to "de-centre" privileged powers, re-asserting their own cultural voice and identity within a new discourse (D'haen 195).

Furthermore, as its name suggests, magical realism is defined by contrast. It introduces two different fictional modes that exist in the same realm: the magical and the real. Though the dissimilarity between the two modes suggests an incompatibility, they come together to form one cohesive world in the genre of magical realism. The real and the magical each break the barriers that separate one from the other, representing an effort to formulate a unity between two opposing forces. Thus, magical realism presents a space in which all possible notions of reality are able to exist not only together, but as one. Through the use of magical realism in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison is able to portray a world where multiple identities can exist harmoniously, offering a freedom from oppression and the less conscious rememory within the gothic.

II. The Gothic in *Song of Solomon*

In *Song of Solomon*, the gothic functions as a ghostly remembering of a colonial past and the important role memory plays within the African American identity. Morrison immediately places *Song of Solomon* in the genre of the gothic. The novel begins with the birth of Milkman occurring simultaneously with the death of Mr. Smith, an insurance agent who commits suicide

by jumping off the roof of the Mercy Hospital in an attempt to re-live the myths of his ancestors and fly back to Africa. While on the roof of the hospital, synthetic flowers spill from the baskets of Milkman's sisters, symbolizing death and stagnancy that engulfs the mood of the scene.

Additionally, frequent references to a dead doctor who is yet to be defined as a character position the scene in the realms of life and death. The contrast between life and death parallels the position of the historically marginalized African in America attempting to live harmoniously in a country that was built on the oppression of black people. Furthermore, Mr. Smith is illustrated as having wings attached to his back as Morrison writes, "the sight of Mr. Smith and his wide blue wings transfixed them for a few seconds..." (6). However, the notion of wings contradicts the logic within the reality of the reader, and the reader is never given textual hints to determine if Mr. Smith's wings are a scientifically valid contraption or a supernatural element that is meant to simply be accepted. Thus, Mr. Smith's futile attempt of flight is surrounded by images of death and supernatural elements that invite a questioning of the reality of the story, placing the novel's beginning within the genre of the gothic.

Additionally, as Donald J. Reilly writes, "one of the most elemental features of a gothic text is the haunted house," and Morrison introduces the family of Milkman and the Deads by describing their home as haunted by the ghost-like characters that maintain secrets, dispossessed identities, and dwell under the rule of a tyrannical father (244). Morrison writes, "The quiet that suffused the doctor's house then, broken only by the murmur of the women eating sunshine cake, was only that: quiet. It was not peaceful, for it was preceded by and would soon be terminated by the presence of Macon Dead" (11). The house is depicted as an uncomfortable environment for both the reader and the characters. It is full of secrets, lost identities, and decay that Westerman associates with tropes of the gothic. Ruth's strange ritual of breastfeeding Milkman well past an

accepted age in the quiet room of her home is only one of the many uncanny events that occur in the Deads' house, further associating it with discomfort and unease. Additionally, the conflict of establishing his identity increases when Milkman is branded with the unshakable nickname that forever associates him with his Mother's perverse act. Furthermore, Macon's sisters pass their days in the house weaving blood red synthetic flowers symbolizing the lack of nature within the home and overtly associating the house with an imagery of death. In its uncanniness, its association with secrets, perversions, and death, the house represents the repressed fears and anxieties of the Dead family, and their disjointed existence within a present day America.

The conflicted identity of the Dead family is emphasized in the character of Macon Dead Jr. and his position of power within his family. As identified by Elizabeth Anne Beaulieu, another common trope of the gothic is "the protagonist's need to free himself from a tyrannical father" (146). In *Song of Solomon*, this trope manifests itself both figuratively in the tyrannical forefathers of America's colonial past, and literally through the character of Macon, Jr. and his dominance over and abuse of his wife and children. Macon Dead Jr., as his name suggests, is dead and disconnected from his past. The name Dead was assigned to Macon, Sr. upon his emancipation from slavery through a failed communication between him and a drunk white Yankee officer. Nevertheless, Macon, Sr. accepted the renaming as his wife believed it would "wipe out the past" and provide a clean slate for the family in the new world (Morrison 54). However, the new name only separates Macon, Sr. and his family from a link to an ancestral heritage, and cultural identity that is crucial to establishing a strong black identity in a country that oppresses its minorities by overlooking cultural memories. Without the ancestral name of their past, the Dead family exists as disconnected from their cultural heritage and memory, yet still haunted by the racially ignorant mistake of the Yankee and the result of America's systemic

oppression. Accordingly, Macon, Jr.'s lack of ancestral connection has suppressed any understanding of his cultural self; therefore, he restructures his identity in a post-bellum America as a white man. His lust for property, greed, and unnecessary material goods parallels the principles of individualization and personal gain inherent in many ideologies of white-dominated post-bellum society. Macon's obsession for material wealth prevents him from valuing his family and ancestry, and he exists as an overbearing and oppressive presence for his wife, daughters, and son. The Dead family fears Macon, and the driving narrative of the story inevitably becomes Milkman's attempt to rid himself of his father's tyrannical reign, and re-establish an identity separate from that of his immediate family.

The beginning of *Song of Solomon* is littered with tropes of the gothic, symbolizing past oppressions that still haunt the present lives of the characters. Melanie Anderson defines haunting to be "an obsession, a constant fear, a fixed idea, a nagging memory" (9). Mr. Smith attempts to re-live the folklore of his ancestors through his fixed idea of flying, a notion that developed in response to a white hegemony and the cultural myth that allowed oppressed slaves some concept of freedom from a tyrannical power. Yet, Mr. Smith's failed attempt at flight leads not only to his immediate death, but the conclusion that these haunting memories of slavery have not yet afforded racialized people an actual escape from old world prejudices. Macon Dead and his family retain little conscious memory of the past, yet it somehow continues to haunt them, manifesting its terrors in their strange household, their unnerving secrets, and dislocated identities. The characters are depicted as misplaced in this present society and the haunting past is the reason for it. Morrison most clearly depicts the displacement of the Dead family during a scene in the novel when Macon, Jr. literally wanders through white America looking at the houses he owns, yet is not able to conceptualize and justify his existence in the new world.

Morrison writes, “Scattered here and there the houses stretched up beyond him like squat ghosts with hooded eyes. He didn’t like to look at them in this light...Now they did not seem to belong to him at all– in fact he felt as though the houses were in league with one another to make him feel like the outsider, the property-less, landless wanderer” (27). Unable to navigate their world and formulate their identities the characters in *Song of Solomon* exist as ghosts, haunted by their inability to integrate fully into a society that was never created to include them. Avery F. Gordon defines how ghosts and haunting work in literature:

haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one from by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. (8)

Thus, in their dispossession and disjointedness, their uncanny and supernatural nature, the characters introduced in the beginning of *Song of Solomon* mimic ghosts. They have each lost their identities to a shadowed past, and exist as signifiers of historical trauma still affected by the offenses of an American past.

In *Song of Solomon*, the gothic forces America to revisit its past. Memories of slavery, oppression, and racism of antebellum times revisit in the form of the supernatural. The presence

of these memories and the supernatural linger in the story and haunt the characters in an attempt to force a rememory of the past in order to examine racial biases that still affect the lives of African Americans in the present. In her subversion of the gothic form, Morrison turns the racial object of the white gothic discourse into racial subject (Morrison 90). However, what is the exact purpose of re-visiting a dark and harmful past, especially in the form of a literary tradition that originally sought to further oppress the racial other through its prejudiced narratives? As, Morrison examines herself, the simple act of remembering is crucial to the notion of progress.

Why should a young country, repelled by Europe's moral and social disorder, swooning in a fit of desire and rejection, devote its talents to reproducing in its own literature the typology of diabolism it wanted to leave behind? An answer to that seems fairly obvious: one way to benefit from the lessons of earlier mistakes and past misfortune is to record them so as to prevent their repetition through exposure and inoculation. (Morrison 36)

Therefore, memory becomes important to prevent future wrongdoings. As well, the notion of remembering connects one to the past, and Morrison highlights the importance of memory not only in regards to historical oppression and slavery, but also to black identity itself. In order to solidify their identity in the present state, African Americans must remember where they came from, and revisit the painful memories of slavery that began their life in America.

III. *Song of Solomon* and Magic Realism

However, rememory in the gothic exists in the form of haunting, and thus fails to transcend its own intentions. Though ghosts and hauntings serve as a reminder to remember the past in the gothic, these memories only linger in the background and are therefore not consciously retrieved

by the characters. While it is important to remember to not repeat past mistakes and to prevent America from forgetting its past offenses, a simple remembering or reminder that is not consciously sought after does not offer any sort of freedom from the past, or any platform from which the African American can reclaim an identity that is distinct from oppressive memory. The characters in *Song of Solomon* remain as ghosts haunted by the past. Their identities become transfixed in the notion of previous transgressions of America's forefathers, and the identity-loss that stemmed from cultural oppression. But how are the characters able to reclaim their past and their identity when it is only presented in the form of haunting? In order to answer this, we must look to the magical realism present within the novel, and the ways in which Morrison uses its tropes to overcome the oppressive memories of the gothic and allow a space for freedom and identity revival within African Americans.

Though magical realism contains elements of the supernatural as well, it does not unsettle the reader in the same way the gothic does. In the novel, magical realism is introduced through the character of Pilate. Her life is both extremely different and separate from her brother. Living on the literal margins between the city and the forest, Pilate dwells in her house of spectrality. However, unlike the Dead house, it is not disturbed by a haunting presence. Her house represents all that is natural. It smells of apples and other fruit, symbolizing life itself. Additionally, the initial description of Pilate reveals that she possesses no navel, suggesting a comparison between Pilate and Eve. Morrison presents Pilate as separate from the ghosts of the Dead family because, much like Eve, she was created rather than born. Her lack of navel does not haunt the narrative of the text in its uncanniness because, unlike the ghosts of oppression, it is symbolic of rebirth, portraying Pilate as her own giver of life that is separate from the intergenerational trauma of her ancestors and the dispossession of identity that has been passed down in the Dead family.

Furthermore, the supernatural elements Pilate is capable of are used for good, as she mixes a strange substance that increases her brother's lust for his wife and allows for the birth of Milkman, whom Pilate later keeps alive through her spectral remedies. Therefore, the supernatural within the genre of magical realism in the text exists not as a haunting memory but as a figurative, and very literal, passage for birth and life.

Magical realism differs from the gothic in its conscious remembering and the ability for the multiple realities of the real and the supernatural to exist harmoniously. The accepted presence of both the real and the magical within magical realism, and the possible transitioning between the two worlds by the characters, allows for a "writing back" against a white discourse. (Reilly 243). In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate is able to exist separately in her world of magic, yet also cross the bridge between the world of the real that the other characters inhabit, suggesting a level of mobility that is not inherent in the gothic. Never are the characters in gothic able to transcend their supernatural haunting without doing away with ghosts all together, and as the characters of *Song of Solomon* themselves function as ghosts, to rid the text of the supernatural would be to rid the text of characters and the history and memory needed to solidify their identity. This is how magical realism is able to exceed the oppressive memory of the gothic. It takes memory and dispossessed identity, and places it within an interplay between real and magical, a world of contradicting elements that exist harmoniously in both the temporal and physical boundaries of the novel. As Vega-Gonzalez writes, "The very term 'magical realism' demonstrates a synthesis of opposites; as Enrique Anderson Imbert suggests, magical realism is the synthesis between the real (thesis) and the supernatural (antithesis)" (6). This juxtaposition between real and magic creates a space in which multiple dimensions of reality are able to exist. This space becomes a site where two separate identities can co-inhabit one world, and the ability for characters to

seamlessly transition between two juxtaposing realities symbolizes a level of equality and sameness, one that suggests a new relation between the African American identity and its presence within a white society.

Furthermore, in addition to moving between real and magical, characters within magical realism move between the past and present more consciously than the ghosts of gothic texts, who are inadvertently entangled in the past as it exists as haunting memory and not conscious retrieval. As Gabrielle P. Foreman suggests, “‘Magical realism,’ unlike the fantastic or the surreal, presumes that the individual requires a bond with the traditions and the faith of the community that s/he is historically constructed and connected” (370). Once again, this is presented within the character of Pilate. What separates her from the rest of her family is her own conscious connection and link to the past that the Dead family lacks. Pilate is never referred to as a “Dead” in the novel, and the personal name her father chose for her is forever by her side, strung to her ear in a tin box. She knows the songs of her ancestors, the stories of her past, and the traditions they followed. Pilate maintains the strongest link to her cultural history. Her connection to the past means she is not dead, she is not a ghost, but rather a shaman that can transition through temporal space between the world of her ancestors and the present “in search of a special power” that will formulate not only her own cultural identity, but allow for a solidification of self and freedom from an oppressive past in present day America (Faris 155).

Thus, magical realism presents a forward mobility, and a space where two opposing identities can exist, affording characters with a possible freedom from oppressive memory. In the beginning, Milkman is depicted as dispossessed through the tropes of the gothic, much like the rest of his family. He remains haunted by the past and misplaced identity, and is unable to move forward in search for a sense of self; as Morrison writes, “It was becoming a habit— this

concentration on things behind him. Almost as though there was no future to be had”

(35). However, it is soon revealed that there is a possibility for Milkman to transcend the oppressive memories of his past, and allow himself to freely move into a new realm of being in which a reformation of identity is possible. Subsequently, Morrison juxtaposes Milkman’s initial inability to look to the future when he finally encounters Pilate and the magical realist tropes she embodies, as he is taken “to the woman who had as much to do with his future as she had his past” (Morrison 36). Through his relationship to Pilate, and her revival of ancestral rather than oppressive memory, Milkman ultimately ventures on both a temporal and physical border crossing back to the homeland of his ancestors, to the story of his origin, in search for a cultural identity and freedom from his ghostly self. In this crossing between space and time, Milkman exists in a new reality made possible by magical realism, one that posits seamless travel between worlds as a freedom from the weight of haunting reality and historical trauma. In the end, Milkman is able to remember a past that is rooted in ancestry rather than oppression, re-claim a familial identity that had been silenced, and literally fly free from the weight of historical oppression and dispossession. As Susana Vega-González writes, “Milkman’s plunging into the air with his newly found ability to “ride” it brings about the spiritual salvation of the protagonist and, by extension, that of the whole black community, as long as it does not ignore its ethnic cultural heritage” (Vega- González 6). Thus, Morrison juxtaposes the novel’s gothic beginning and the failed flight of Mr. Smith to Milkman’s successful leap. No longer weighed down by the memories of oppression, Milkman is able to “surrende[r] to the air” and the identity of his past (Morrison 337). Through the existence of the magical within reality, and a newly reclaimed black cultural identity within a white America, Milkman is able to fly free into a realm of

multiplicity where memory exists as a site of freedom rather than a haunting and stagnant reminder of oppression.

The presence of haunted houses, ghostly characters, shamans, temporal and physical border crossing, and magical remedies places *Song of Solomon* within both the genres of the gothic and magical realism. Though these genres maintain many similarities such as the presence of the supernatural and rememory, each one conveys them differently. The supernatural in the gothic is used to haunt by representing memories and past oppressions in ghostly forms. Milkman initially exists in the world of the gothic; his haunted house, secretive family, tyrannical father and dispossessed identity, all common tropes of the genre, are symbolic of a painful past that continues to affect the present. However, Milkman never consciously confronts his past until he meets Pilate. Through her connection to the past, supernatural powers, and uncanny physical form, Pilate is the embodiment of magical realism. She represents the temporal and physical border crossing and conscious retrieval of cultural memory and identity that allows for the opposing realms of the magic and the real to exist as one. Through Pilate, and Morrison's use of magical realism, Milkman is able to find his cultural past and fly towards a world where two realities can exist harmoniously; a world where, despite the silencing attempts of a white society, an African American can both free themselves from the only partial conscious effects of oppressive memory in the gothic and reclaim a cultural and personal identity.

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