

Example by StudyDriver

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Depiction of Slavery in Beloved Example

The novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison is full of ambiguity. This ambiguity can lead readers to believe that *Beloved* could represent various things, such as Sethe's deceased daughter, or slavery as a whole. Either way, the bigger picture is that *Beloved* represents the past returning to the present. The characters' engagement with *Beloved* and, as a result, their pasts, is strange and individualized for each character whom *Beloved* is bestowed upon. Much of the story revolves around Sethe and her exclusive relationship with *Beloved*. The longer Sethe is around *Beloved*, the more parasitic and possessive their relationship becomes. When Sethe is with *Beloved*, she is suddenly brought back and stuck in the past as she recalls it. Though the nature of their relationship seems destructive on the surface, it paradoxically inspires Sethe to tell the stories that she has never told before, and subsequently face her harsh past so she can begin to hone her ability to live in the present. For Denver and Paul D, *Beloved*'s strange and unconventional presence also leads them to overcome their own personal battles with the past as well. In the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Beloved* serves as an allegory of the slave trade and the unavoidable past of slavery, and this device utilized by Morrison shows that to overcome past traumas and begin the process of reconciliation, it is necessary to face the past.

Beloved is an allegorical character that represents the slave trade and the unavoidable past of slavery. Because of this, Beloved is able to help characters such as Sethe, Denver, and Paul D reclaim and face their past traumas. The first instance within the novel that clues to the reader that Beloved might represent something larger such as the slave trade, comes when Denver asks Beloved how she received her name. Beloved then utters and strange and cryptic responses, first claiming that In the dark my name is Beloved. (Morrison 32). As Beloved describes where she came from, Denver gets the impression that Beloved is speaking of some sort of afterlife, asking if she has seen Jesus or Baby Suggs. It can be claimed that Beloved's recollection of her origins in the dark place could be associated with that of the baby who was killed at the hands of Sethe. However, Beloved's description of where she came from is very reminiscent of a slave ship on the Middle Passage. She describes her conditions as Dark, said Beloved. I'm small in that place. I'm like this here. She raised her head off the bed, lay down on her side curled up Were you cold?... Hot. Nothing to breath down their and no room to move in. You see anybody? Heaps. A lot of people is down there. Some is dead. (Morrison 44). Historically, the conditions aboard a slave ship are uncannily similar to the description that Beloved provided; dark, and lots of people crowded together with dead among them. Conditions on the ship during the Middle Passage were oppressive. The slaves were packed so tightly together that there was barely any room, if any, to move. With extreme heat and lack of sanitation, diseases were able to flourish and contributed to the death toll of the passengers. Further, from this passage, it can be deduced that Beloved represents something larger at the very least. The way Beloved is depicted in the novel presents her as more of a symbolic device rather than a solid character. Her actions and words have meaning that go beyond the surface and add to the broader context of the story.

Beloved is able to evoke Sethe's past memories by always asking her to tell stories about her past and pressing Sethe to tell her more and more. It is made apparent from the beginning of the novel that Sethe does not want to think about the past because To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay. (Morrison 25). In one instance, however, Beloved asks Sethe about her diamonds. The diamonds Beloved is referring to are the crystal earrings Sethe once had. Sethe resolves to telling Beloved the origins of her earrings. Sethe's stories of her past became a way to feed her Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost.

(Morrison 34). As said, the past was hard to mention for Sethe, and whenever Denver inquired about it, her questions were met with short replies or incomplete ramblings. On the other hand, as Sethe begins to tell the stories associated with the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it. Perhaps it was Beloved's distance from the events itself, or her thirst for hearing it--in any case it was an unexpected pleasure. (Morrison 34). With Beloved, Sethe is able to take a different stance on past events that previously caused her great emotional pain. Beloved's symbolism of the he slave trade and the unavoidable past of slavery goes to show that it is necessary to face your past to overcome it, no matter how devastating the memories are. By being able to recollect and tell her stories, she is able to face the past and come to terms with it.

In another instance, Sethe begins telling a story about her mother at Beloved's request. As Sethe is remembering the events that transpired, she remembers something that had been locked away in her mind about the horrific hanging of her mother, to which she exclaims

Oh, my Jesus," she said and stood up so suddenly the comb she had parked in Denver's hair fell to the floor Sethe walked over to a chair, lifted a sheet and stretched it as wide as her arms would go. Then she folded, refolded and double folded it She had to do something with her hands because she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind (Morrison 36).

Sethe's response to this newly recovered memory was not peculiar. Those who experience traumatic events can sometimes unconsciously repress these memories. These memories, however, can emerge later on down the line just as did for Sethe. Additionally, Denver had never heard these stories about Sethe's mother. In fact, it was the first time ever that Denver had heard anything about her mother's mother. This is partly because Sethe has never brought up the subject of her mother, but also because Denver hated the stories her mother told that did not concern herself, which is why Amy was all she ever asked about. The rest was a gleaming, powerful world made more so by Denver's absence from it. Not being in it, she hated it and wanted Beloved to hate it too, although there was no chance of that at all. (Morrison 37)

Early on, it becomes apparent that Denver seeks out and longs for the attention of Sethe and Beloved. She rarely

leaves the house and had lived in near isolation because of the incident of Sethe killing her daughter. She loves to hear about the remarkable story of her birth, and hopes that Beloved will join her in this hate for a past that does not involve her. On the other hand, Beloved is so entranced and inquisitive about Sethe's past. Because of Beloved's deep interest of Sethe and her past, Sethe revisits the painful memories that she has tried to repress.

Sethe, up until the arrival of Beloved, has lived a life in fear of a past that she believes can never truly be eliminated or dealt with. However, the relationship between Sethe and Beloved quickly becomes parasitic as Sethe concludes that Beloved is her daughter reincarnate. For Beloved, Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire. (Morrison 135). As Sethe grew frail and thin from giving her portion of food to Beloved, Beloved slept wherever she happened to be, and whined for sweets although she was getting bigger, plumper by the day. (Morrison 134). Sethe remains a slave to her past as she continues to let Beloved take over her life. Beloved disappears only when Sethe has stood her ground and attempted to attack Mr. Bodwin, whom she mistakes for the schoolteacher who had previously tried to return Sethe and her children to a life of slavery. Soon everyone forgets about Beloved, and they realized they couldn't remember or repeat a single thing she said, and began to believe that, other than what they themselves were thinking, she hadn't said anything at all. So, in the end, they forgot her too (Morrison 155). Sethe had been a slave to the past, and continued to be a slave to the past under the presence of Beloved. Beloved as a representation of the past horrors of slavery shines through in how Sethe withered away and succumbed to Beloved's demands. Sethe's time with Beloved displayed the importance of facing your past in order to be at peace with the present.

In the novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison utilizes Beloved as an allegorical device to represent the past traumas of slavery to show that it is necessary to face the past in order to Bits and pieces of Sethe's traumatic past are joined together as Sethe willingly takes a look back into her own personal history with slavery. The guilt that Sethe feels for killing her daughter in attempt to spare her a life of slavery is made apparent in her effort to appease Beloved, the alleged reincarnate of Sethe's dead daughter. Through this mysterious and allusive novel, Toni Morrison illustrates the devastating effects of slavery and how it can destroy one's ability to live in peacefully in the present. Looking at this idea in a broader context, the bigger takeaway is that it is important to keep moving forward in

light of traumatic and horrific historical events. Acknowledging the brutality of slavery and the vicious treatment the slaves received aids in making sure that society does not revert back to a mindset where treating others as subhuman is acceptable.