

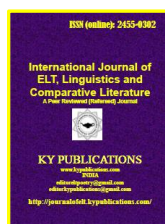


THE SACRIFICE FOR LIBERATION FROM RESTRICTIONS OF SLAVERY IN *BELOVED*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate novel of Toni Morrison, *Beloved* which displays that the Black women who search for liberalness from the inhumanities of the American slavery system. In *Beloved*, Toni shed the light on the physical and psychological impact of slavery had on an African-American woman. In this novel, Morrison took a real life happening of African American history and provides superior importance to the fears and torments of slavery to remind the reader about the oppression in the past. Morrison thinks that the horrific issues connected to slavery. In *Beloved* Morrison focuses on the cruel and brutalizing aspects of slavery in order to influence on the readers and the society in such a way that slavery history mustn't be forgotten.

Key Words: Morrison, Slavery System, *Beloved*, Inhumanities, Liberalize

1. Introduction

Slavery may be the biggest spot in the history of America. But the system of slavery provided a lush ground for a new sort of literature in America, rich in oral and folk tradition. Black literature gained momentum in the nineteenth century and most printed black literature consisted of slave narratives. These narratives showed true stories of slaves' escapes to Free states or countries. These stories were mainly published by white abolitionists to educate whites about the evils of slavery. The birth of African-American literature is an evidence of the irresistible human bestirs for freedom. It is a literature of pain and survival, of the struggle for liberty and equality and of the search for identity. It is a literature that records the collective victories and defeats, fears and dreams of the African Americans oppressed by a brutal system. Toni Morrison is a black African American novelist of 20th century whose novels show and record the history of African American going back to the early time of 19th century. *Beloved* is a twentieth century novel fashioned as a historical slave narrative that is set in the era after the Civil War in Cincinnati. Its story is told from the perspective of former slaves, and the novel depicts their resilience and incredible will to survive in a peculiarly harsh world. *Beloved* also attempts to augment slave narratives in order to fill in the missing pieces of information on slaves' lives. This was because most slave narratives were characterized by self-masking in order to make them acceptable to the white reading public of earlier times. As Morrison states of her work, her task was one of "how to rip the veil drawn over proceedings too terrible to relate and to fill in the blanks that the narratives have left" (Henderson, 63). *Beloved* is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, a slave woman who kills her baby daughter, rather than let her grow up a slave. Even though, it seems to be Garner's story, it is also very much the story of male characters such as Paul D, Sixo and Halle. As Morrison show, "*Beloved* was about those anonymous people called slaves . . ." (Solomon, p.190).



The advantages of studying

The present article is to examine the way identity was destructed by slavery which was one of the society's major issues of that period, and how slaves resisted under such harsh and severe way of living with reference to Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*.

2. Discussion

Henderson resumes that Toni Morrison is one of the writers who tried to illustration what occurred to African Americans in the past and tries to demonstration what has being silenced:

... these writers were limited in their efforts to fully depict the physical and psychological suffering of African American people...Toni Morrison seeks to signify on those silences imposed by publishers and editors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries(Henderson, p.12).

Morrison in her novel *Beloved* shows to the readers what occurred to slaves of working in an institutionalized slave system. In this, the slaves working on Sweet Home experience violence, cruelty, and are treated like animals. The character who is commonly affected by slavery's severe conditions is Sethe. Sethe gets tortured, raped and victimized. As a result, Sethe tries to escape from Sweet Home and later she is driven to kill her two-year-old baby. Morrison shows us what it means to live as a slave and what annihilations have been brought to lives of slaves in this work. Morrison concerned on the painful past of African Americans and tells the buried experiences for a better understanding of African American history. Morrison state in her conversation "I wanted to show the reader what slavery *felt* like, rather than how it looked"(Morrison, 2008, p.76).

Beloved is conveyed a real-life story, a happening from African-American history where special importance has been given to the fears and tortures of slavery has been given in order to remind the reader about the past. In *Beloved*, Morrison re link the past and wants the reader never to forget what happened in African American history, according to her :

Morrison's critically acclaimed novel *Beloved* probes the most painful part of the African American heritage, slavery, by way of what she has called "rememory" – deliberately reconstructing what has been forgotten(Kubitschek, p.115).

Morrison tries to represent the history of African-Americans from her own viewpoint drawing attention to what slavery can do to individuals and their families:

Beloved represents a working out of subjectivity through the representation of history, a history so brutal and dehumanizing that it is unrepresentable, a depiction of community, which is often torn apart by the circumstances of slavery, and a construction of identity (Fuston-White, 2002).

Morrison argued the desire of the American nation to repress the memory of slavery. She think of the enslavement of Africans and African Americans in the United States is something that the characters in *Beloved* don't want to remember. Morrison notes that "I [Morrison] don't want to remember, black people, don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember"(qtd.In Middleton, p.228). The reason for not returning to the past is the great injustice and suffering caused by the enslavement system. Morrison's novels target to make the reader to remember the conditions of slavery in a nation preferring to forget that a crime like slavery was ever committed. The *Beloved* novel was set 12 years after the ending of the American Civil War. There are nine slaves that work on Sweet Home: Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs and her grown son Halle, and other five slaves. However, whole the slaves on Sweet Home are influenced by slavery. As the first place, it is Sethe has to bear and suffer the most pain. Sethe was raped and flogged by her schoolmates and treated harshly until she was eventually driven to kill her two-year-old daughter. Sethe's story is represented the real life gotten from the slave *Margaret Garner*. On Jan.28, 1856, *Margaret Garner* murdered her two-year-old daughter instead than have her sent back to slavery due to the runaway slave law. Garner was later found guilty and sent back to the colony she fled in Mississippi. Since the happening is a real-life incident, it



offers good evidence and a good occasion for Morrison to base her novel on. During the era of slavery many hard decisions were taken by the slaves themselves in order to escape the life dreaded living. After Morrison heard the tough story of Margaret Garner, a former slave that took her children's life, Morrison was inspired to write her first book in 1987. In *Beloved*, Sethe is created to resemble Garner. Sethe similarly also escapes to Ohio and kills her children to keep them away from slavery. Although Sethe is not exactly the same as Garner, she is definitely inspired by Garner and her actions. When Sethe escaped to Ohio she did it alone and pregnant with Denver, her daughter. Garner on the other hand, escaped with her family and a group of other slaves. In fact when Garner was caught directly sent back to slavery, whereas Sethe constant to be free on Ohio. Either Sethe is haunted by her dead baby she killed, *Beloved*. *Beloved* and Denver form a relationship before eventually *Beloved* leaves for good at the end of the book. As far as history goes, Garner wasn't haunted by her dead baby, and this was Morrison's idea to include in the story. The story of the novel begins when Paul D, a former slave in Sweet Home, comes to appointment Sethe after many years. Sethe and Paul D have not seen each other for eighteen years during which they have attempted to hide and suppress their memories of enslavement and its influence. The past events particularly when Paul D and Sethe talk about their commonly shared past on Sweet Home. This repression and taking apart, from the past causes a shatter of the self and loss esteem and of true identity. Sethe, Paul D and Denver all experience and tried it this loss of self, which could only be remedied by the acceptance of the past and the memory of their original identities. According to John Edgar insists that "Past lives in us, through us. Each of us harbors the spirits of people who walked the earth before we did, and those spirits depend on us for continuing existence, just as we depend on their presence to live our live fullest" (qtd.in Kennedy, p.80).

In addition to that Morrison state that "actually if we don't keep in touch with the ancestor... we are, in fact, lost" ("Rootedness", 344). Nellie McKay states that: For Morrison, this publication was a conscious act toward healing a painful wound: a studied memorial to the great social wrong of the enslavement of African. Her powerful words, on behalf of millions, give voice to a profound lament: the absence of historical maker to remind us never to let this atrocity happen again. In *Beloved* schoolteacher is a representative of white supremacy. Changes on Sweet Home started with schoolteacher's disapproval of the way the slaves ate and the way they rested: "He complained they ate too much, rested too much, talked too much, which was certainly true compared to him, because schoolteacher ate little, spoke less and rested not at all" (*Beloved*, 259). Schoolteacher's attitude on the slaves is going to have infinite effects on Sethe as the story in the novel unfolds. His violence in Sweet Home leads to rebellion, madness, and to death of slaves:

In *Beloved*, Schoolteacher is clearly the primary representative and agent of the system of white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy in the era of slavery. His interpellations of Sethe, Paul D, Sixo, and Halle lead to rebellion, madness, and death (Keizer, p.25).

As the result of schoolteacher's cruel attitude, the slaves on Sweet Home decide to run away. Sethe is pregnant and she had sent her two-year-old daughter and her two older sons ahead with some of the other slaves, when her husband Halle does not arrive to meet them at the place where they decided to meet. Sethe decides to stay behind to look for Halle, but she was caught by schoolteacher's nephews who held her down and raped her and sucked milk from her breasts. Later schoolteacher discovers that Sethe told Mrs. Garner about this incident. He orders his nephews to whip Sethe. The whipping of Sethe opens the skin of her back. Schoolteacher's nephew represents a dismissal by whites of the dehumanizing qualities of slavery. When Sethe is raped, schoolteacher observed how her body is exploited. His misuse of slaves will lead to the tragedy of Sethe and her family. Suero Elliott notes that the abuse and the cruel treatment of Sethe's body is definitely used not only to show the cruelty of schoolteacher, but also his pervasive inclinations:

For Sethe, the felicitation of her body by the white schoolteacher and his nephews causes psychic fragmentation that continues to thwart the development of her subjectivity after she leaves slavery.



. . Sethe's personhood, as it has been allowed to exist under slavery, is reduced further to animality (Elliott, p.185).

In the novel, mostly affected Sethe was not the pain and dehumanization she had to feel, but for her the stolen milk was important. At the time, Sethe got whipped she was pregnant and that is why she had milk in her breasts. In the novel, Sethe did not mention or talk about the pain she had to endure, but she mainly focused on the milk that had been taken from her which is vital to feed her baby:

They used cowhide on you?

And they took my milk.

They beat you and you were pregnant?

And they took my milk!(*Beloved*,20)

She expresses her deep grief, as follows:

Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children. In ever had to give it to nobody else—and the one time I did it was took from me—they held me down and took it. Milk that belonged to my baby (Saltzman and Eric M.P, 163).

The effect of taking Sethe's milk is mentioned by Sethe many times. Bonnet notes that taking Sethe's milk from her is the violation of the bond between mother and child. The effect of slavery of slavery does not only cause physical pain to Sethe but also violates the feelings to her children:

The robbing of Sethe's milk, which is so often evoked in the narrative and referred to as what she owns and as her children's very life, is thus the materialization of the fundamental perversity of the institution which kills the slaves' selves by severing the bonds between mother and child(Bonnet, p.49).

Sethe's milk has become a symbol of love and devotion she has for her children. Then, sacrificing one of her children signifies a tragic twist in her disposition, so much so that she loses her ties with her natural self and becomes emptied of her vitality, like the tree shape on her back she will be drained off her life-force. The following description of Sethe show that because of her mistreatment Sethe has physically and spiritually come on the brink of exhaustion. Sethe's vitality as a result of rape and wiping has gradually disappeared:

The schoolteacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke three more Sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe's eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight(*Beloved*, 11).

After Sethe is mistreated, she runs away from Sweet Home. On the way, she gives birth to her daughter Denver. Sethe reached her mother in law's home with her newborn infant and is relieved to be reunited with her other three children. After a short period, Schoolteacher, one of his nephews, the sheriff, and a slave catcher arrive to bring Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home. When schoolteacher arrives to take Sethe back, Sethe takes her children quickly into a shed and attempts to murder them, rather than allowing them to live their lives in slavery like her. Both her mother in law and Stamp Paid stood in the yard behind the house, frozen in terror. She killed her two-year-old daughter. She would have cut her daughter's throat, and also attempted to kill Denver, if Stamp Paid had not caught the baby as Sethe swung her against the wall. The two boys were also severely beaten on their heads with a shovel. The last scene of this horrible incident is depicted as follows: "Two were lying open-eyed in saw dust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one . . . "(Tally, Justine, p.13).

The act of killing her own child is at first not easy to understand and to be justified; however, the situations in which Sethe had to live and the brutality that she had endured as a slave on Sweet Home have driven her to commit infanticide which is perhaps one of the worst things a mother can do to her child. However, Sethe's fear of slavery and its effect was so terrible that she did not want her children to experience the same difficulties. Fuston-White stated that it was not Sethe that killed her child, but it was the influence



and result of slavery that caused Sethe to commit the crime. According to Jeanna Fuston White stated that: "it was not madness, but the reality of slavery, that drove Sethe to kill her child, fully aware of the act and its brutality, as well as its compassion". After this horrible event, Howard and Buglar were nursed back to health by their grandmother. Sethe was sent to jail to await her trial for the murder. Since Denver was still a suckling infant, she went to jail with her mother. The Bodwins, a family in the novel who support the abolition of slavery, used their influence they had in Cincinnati to ensure Sethe's imprisonment, rather than the death sentence and they were successful.

A great part of Sethe's main problems after escape from Sweet are related to her past memories. Sethe's past greatly influence her daily life. Her conversation with Paul D indicates that she has suffered much and that she is still suffering from the pain that is caused by her past. It is clear that Sethe's present is full of suffering and struggle because of her past and memories at Sweet Home were too painful for her to recall consciously. Now Sethe's life merely consists of, *keeping the past at bay*. "To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (*Beloved*, 41). Sethe constantly struggles to forget her past and the pain it causes her. She gradually gets exhausted from living in the present and life becomes unbearable for her. She mentions this at the beginning of the novel when she is talking with Paul D. "I will never run from another thing on this earth ... No more running—from nothing" (11).

Sethe feels guilty of killing her daughter. She constantly feels the desire to tell *Beloved* about the reason she has killed her and her feeling of regret. Sethe knows that she has had to pay a very high price to protect her child, "I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something. Paul D Garner: It cost too much! Do you hear me?..." (*Beloved*, 18). Sethe intends to explain her reason of her horrible act to *Beloved*, "How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her. When I explain it she'll understand, because she understands everything already" (236). Her feelings as a mother are so intense that she even desired to get together with her daughter into the grave, but she mentions that she could not do this, because she had to look after her remaining children Buglar and Howard and also because of her husband Halle. In the following excerpt show how hard it was for Sethe to be separated by her only daughter:

When I put that headstone up I wanted to lay in there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you warm, and I would have if Buglar and Howard and Denver didn't need me, because my mind was homeless then. I couldn't lay down with you then (qtd.in. Ali, p.99).

Sethe states also that to live in peace is impossible after killing her daughter. Note that the regret and disappointment and the memories of killing her daughter have ever since haunted her: "my mind was homeless then. No matter how much I wanted to. I couldn't lay down nowhere in peace, back then" (*Beloved*, 241).

However, by taking the life of her daughter, she intended to save her daughter from slavery's horrors and brutalities. She says that by killing her daughter she has put her in a safe and secure place. "I stopped him, she said, staring at the place where the fence used to be. I took and put my babies where they'd be safe" (Mandel, 164).

In *Beloved*, Morrison intends to show the reader what happens to individuals in an institutionalized slave system in which African Americans had to live in the past. Narrating the story of Sethe, Morrison focuses on the dehumanizing effect of slavery by emphasizing sufferings of slaves. The novel shows us what happened to Sethe, her family and other slaves working on the plantation. Clearly on Sethe's face mistreated and raped. After she tried to escape from the plantation, she killed her baby and attempted to kill the rest of her children. Her husband went mad and other slaves had unfortunate lives. After killing her baby, Sethe continued to suffer. She self-regretful and pain had to live an isolated life for a long time in the black community. At the end of the novel, Sethe became mentally and spiritually exhausted and had no energy left



to live a meaningful life. As a conclusion, it is very obvious in the novel that slavery threatens the psychology and spiritual world of individuals and causes horrific and brutal consequences.

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