

The Genesis of Pain and Horrors in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Abstract

Toni Morrison called her novel, *Beloved* as a text that would tell the future, their history, the pain and anguish of her own people to the people of the future. This is because there had been nothing that the African Americans were allowed to possess except fear and trauma. The work of the abolitionists, the need to become one with the social function, to forget the annals of the past were all the ideal recommendations which the years of reconstruction could do it as a lip service but the entity of race, segregation and seclusion have always been in the minds of these slaves, indelible and inevitable. The paper looks at how *Beloved* came to existence from beginning to conceive as a thought in the author's mind until how it tries to make over such pain and horrors of being enslaved.

Key Words: Slavery, Identity, Segregation, Horrors

Beloved as a novel is ambivalent in tone and temperament as seen in the eyes of critics and scholars. Some call it a piece of supermarket literature while others see it as serious literature. Even Morrison did not believe that the novel, though her fifth in production and composition would have multitudes of readers because she had written about how atrocious slavery as an institution has been. More than that, except for a few white characters, the rest of them are shown in darkest lights. The novel never even served the novelist a beacon of hope due to the graphic and killing content written with an outrageous fervor. The novel connects three important threads, history, memory and storytelling. The number sixty million and more, which is an odious approximation is the first sign to show how close to

holocaust the deaths of slaves had been, is a clear sign that Morrison had been juggling with the exact figures but invariably history did not aid her to come to consensus about the exact deaths that had been recorded.

The novel's structure is not even or uniform, there is no proper construction or coherence of the broken parts. This could be a conscious attempt by the novelist because she wants the readers to fill the gaps with their own interpretations and insights. In a way Denver and Beloved have the same sense of feeling isolated and rebuked when Paul D and Sethe share an equal place in the novel's plotline without having to discuss anything with their children. The closeness which Denver shared had been interrupted after Paul D's arrival home and the same instinct is shared by Beloved when she sees Denver. To her, everyone is an intruder in the love bonding which she shares with her mother. She is too possessive and makes sure that the childhood which had been lost with time and her sudden killing by Sethe must be made good after her coming back as a ghost or even as a daughter. Beloved in a way has come back to claim her lost space and she does not want anyone to intervene or come to Sethe as much she wants to be with her.

Every incident of the novel is a memory, a kind of taunting past, a series of events which remind Sethe that life has been cruel to her. All that she longed for is the need to be free and that too was ephemeral because the four men on horse backs did not allow her to live with her children or with the house which they had been gifted by Sister Ella and Brother John in return for the work which she has agreed for at their farmlands. The Chokecherry tree or the caged life of Paul D, the bit which was tied to his tongue making him mute and many others instances are either incidental or accidental making the character seek his memory to speak out the unspeakable sufferings they had undergone after they had been enslaved at the plantation or transported from one master to another with no solid purpose and no change in their lives or their future. The quote below gives an insight into the very idea of memory. Amy Sickels in her work *Beloved* gives an overview of how memory could be tormenting and at the same time nostalgic with regard to slaves.

The memories of the Sweet Home include not only the Garners but also the school teacher, the cruel overseer who replaced Mr. Garner, after his death. Mr. Garner, the original owner of the Sweet Home referred to his slaves as men as opposed to most slave holders, who were referred to as boys. He also allowed his male slaves to carry guns, goading his neighbors with the freedom he gave them. (12)

The Nobel Prize which she won for the novel gained her acclaim because the committee awarded her with the honor because they felt that she had taken time to bring out

the realities which the U.S had not tried to reveal. In a way, Morrison wanted to write not because she wanted to take the bull by the horns and confront the white majority but rather was more obsessed being a black and that she knew only about her color culture indisputably and irrevocably. More than that she knew that the novel's writing would not make much effect on the readers as much as she expected with her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* because she was aware of the syndrome called national amnesia, a dart which she wanted to make it to all and sundry in the U.S because no one has spoken, reacted or even felt apologetic even till date for having been so cruel and torturous. In a way, all the essence, the historical and economical testimony of sailing slaves to the U.S was met with no sense of remorse or resentment.

Morrison wanted to write only about this amnesia of the people who were callous and apathetic to all these happenings. To her, the color abject was made sociological although the entire stigma was biological. The physical traits, attributes, the color completion determinant all depended on the geographical and topographical ambiance of the place where they belong to and not any other external or internal factor.

Morrison has had her muse from the Hudson river and the idea of writing a novel from the black book which she happened to edit, one of the rarest pieces of recorded history about the entity called slaves. She wanted to take the main idea about the life of Margaret Garner alone and then develop her tale because she did not want Sethe to cloud the influence of Garner for she wanted to write a novel on how the infant who died might have felt and what it would have communicated had it been given a chance to relive its life. That is one of the reasons as to why *Beloved* is shown as a ghost, a baby, a woman and all these do not end up clearing the mysterious identity of the spirit.

The opening lines of the novel, reflect and deflect the combination of the past and the present. The mere mention the year 1873 in the second line of the novel makes one understand that the happenings reflect the years of reconstruction. The nine year period where the house earlier had no identity but then given 124 as the number at the Blue Stone Road gives one about how these changes have been gradually taking place over time. Cincinatti, the fictional town where the family of five lived gets reduced to two when the Sons had run away, supposedly to join the army and Baby Suggs has passed away. The two little hands on the cake, the noise, the premonition are all signs to show from the very beginning that the novel is taking its readers to a more gothic and horrific set up. There are three colors that linger over in the story line, the first is the color pink, which Baby Suggs finally decides to settle down with after she gets bed ridden. The second is red, the color of blood which spreads all over the walls when Sethe slits the throat of *Beloved* and third green,

the one at the back of Sethe that reminds her of how she was beaten hard with the tree to the extent that she has had the mark replete on her back reminding her of the escape and a warning to not do it again.

Paul D gets introduced in from page seven of the novel and one can say that the first part of the work, (although the author has not segmented it into parts) begins with his arrival until his leaving the house with his belongings to sleep in a church. The next section is when hunger and poverty loom over the house and there is none but Sethe to bear the brunt of all the hardships, both economical and emotional. The third and the last part begins with the exorcism of Beloved and continues until the efforts the author takes to keep the spirit alive and give the readers a juddering justification of what made Beloved get into such ominous trouble with the members of her family and the ones around in the locality. Be it the languages, the voices, the narration, the techniques of flashback get fragmented as one sits to read the novel. This is done on purpose because Morrison wants to make the novel a reminiscence or the only surviving proof piece of history and memory left to the readers because most of the slaves were neither allowed to read or write, or they were not given much exposure to English so that they could rewrite the history or tell the world as to what had happened during these rough years from the day they were sailed to the day they were jailed. The Forward to the novel gives an overview of how the artistic creations and narrations of the novel have set the ball rolling and how the novelist wanted to remind the national amnesia which had been known but never discussed or repented, the system of taking people off their homes, off their roots without concern and making them work like animals with no food or water, stripping them from the qualities that make them human and bring the akin to animals.

It was important to name this house but not the way, Sweet Home or other plantations were named. There would be no adjectives suggesting coziness or grandeur or laying claim to an instant, artistic past. ...In trying to make the slave experience intimate, I hoped the sense of things being both under control and out of control would be persuasive throughout that the order and quietude of everyday life would be violently disrupted by the chaos of the needy dead. (XIII)

The novelist was categorical in understanding a factual phenomenon. None of these characters had an identity, except the slave identity which had been deeply ingrained in their psyche. Even Paul D was named along Paul F and others because the white masters did not wish to call them by their names or bothered to re-Christian them with one. Paul D had been a wanderer, living in the caves, hunting owls, sleeping during the day and walking around at

the nights to finally find Sethe. All that he wanted was to make a family with Sethe and settle there as one of the members. Sethe on the other hand, was living a hand to mouth life, making dough at a nearby restaurant and wanted to make sure that she survived the threat at 124 with Denver, the only surviving daughter. Denver wanted to be with her mother all through and had no idea about her future. In fact, she is the only character in the novel who does not know what slavery would be and how cruel its consequences would haunt the slaves even after their escape from the clutches of the masters. Mister, the rooster is shown as a means to exhibit the feeling of freedom which it enjoys compared to the slaves of the sweet home. To Paul D, the rooster has a name, a sense of identity and freedom but he enjoys nothing except pain being at the Sweet Home. Beloved, the victim of the large institution gets to become free and enjoy whatever she had not been rejoicing for she was a spirit at the gates of hell. She had escaped the horrors of being in a secluded place among the dead. All these characters are loosely tied to one another with no sense of bonding. In a way, Sethe cannot exhibit sense of motherhood because she had been a violent mother who had been jailed for infanticide. The past would bring her only such memory. Paul D on the other wanted to be in the house because he had thought that he would be with Sethe, make a family so that he would not be sent out of the house. All characters were together not because of the love and affection they shared, or should have shared but because they were tied to a need, the need to be together and the need would be labeled as a collective identity which they did not dare to express or expose with one another.

Works Cited

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