

The Haunted History: Psychological Predicaments of Morrison in Penning Down Beloved

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Toni Morrison is a common name in the realm of racist literature. She gained instant success and fame through her novel, **Song of Solomon** and continued to hold her eminence as a prolific writer until her death in August last year. She is one of the very few women writers who won the Nobel prize for her seminal literary contributions. The novel *Beloved* draws inspirations and incidents of life of a slaved who was entrapped in Kentucky. His escape to the Free State by crossing the river Ohio has formed the foreground to the novel. Margaret Garner, the slave enslaved killed her child as a refuting testimony to her slave subservience. She wanted her child to die a death of freedom rather than enslaved in chains and untoward bondage.

Beloved has a confounding combination. It blends historical fiction and magical realism that made the novel acquire the Pulitzer Prize. It is fifth novel and an eyebrow riser set during the time frame of , Reconstruction, the time when gruesome violence was unleashed upon the Black Americans after the closure of civil war and social unrest. The period was ambivalent. On the one hand, it gave freedom and emancipation to the slaves. On the other hand, racism as a discriminatory practice still remained under cover. The voices of the silenced, the slave victims

are unearthed through the voice of a ghost in the novel. In a nut shell, it's the story of slavery told from a supernatural standpoint not only structurally but also thematically. Cathy Lowne in her article titled Beloved observes

Beloved, novel by Toni Morrison, published in 1987, and the winner of 1988 Pulitzer Prize, for fiction. The work examines the destructive legacy of slavery, as it chronicles the life of a black woman named Sethe, from her pre civil war days as a slave in Kentucky to her time in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1853. Although Sethe lives there as a free woman, she is held by memories of trauma of her life as a slave (Britannica.com).

Toni Morrison chanced to write before being a senior editor at a publishing house called Random House. Writing for never her forte until, she chose to raise her voice for the unvoiced slave pockets of America. One of the essential elements of her writing is the essence of aestheticism that it holds. Although, she speaks for the under trodden and the undermined rights of the blacks, her readings are universal and can be understood by anyone around the world, by all and sundry. She coined the word, “National Amnesia” to label the negligence and ignorance that the nation holds to the problems of racism. The novel therefore is the voice of sixty million slaves, as envisioned by Morrison herself.

The narrative structure alters between the past and the present. The novel highlights the escape of the slaves and their longings to in a world of freedom unquestioned and unperturbed. The novel is an exquisite example of the oral African tradition brought to words and thoughts, in the minds of the readers and the writer as well. The way of the story progression is not only

complex but also throws open many questions to pose and interpretations to infer. The idea of the child coming back to life cannot be seen as a sort of ghostly re-existence but as an idea of rebirth and reincarnation. The relationship between Sethe and her daughter is the one between the author and her conscience. The struggles and tantrums of commotion caused through the notion of racism haunts like the ghost of the child not only in the past but also in the present.

The novel therefore is an attempt to exhume the black feminist approach that discusses marginalization in the level of being a woman and also in the level of being a slave in the United States. The novel extrapolates the events presented in the nineteenth century in the life of Margaret Garner in the twentieth century to make the plot more intense and horrific. She indirectly hints her readers that the turn of the century has not seen a sea change in the lives of the slaves. They still remain uncared of and alienated.

Zita Rarestesa quotes Carl Marlmgreen in her work, *Love and Motherhood in Toni Morrison's Beloved*, as

At the first reading, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* strikes as an unusually hybridized text—part ghost story, part historical text, part slave narrative, part love story, indeed some of the genre seems to rub against another, to coexist unusually in a state of tension. If not antagonism, the relation between ghost story and a historical novel is a case in the point.....*Beloved* can be seen both as a tragedy involving a mother's moment of choice and as a love story exploring what it means to be loved (2).

Beloved was a benediction to the enslavement as it was written to heal the raw wounds that slavery could ever give an innocent African for having been born of a color that he could have no control to justify. Morrison magnanimously decided to bear the brunt of the loss by writing a novel that would serve as a form of purgation of the painful emotions. The novel was the resultant writing of a situation that was much worse than the physical death in itself. Morrison had no reason to justify the killing of a child in terms of morality. To her, the killing of the infant was a form of emotional escape from the continuous suffering and pain. One of the most difficult things that Morrison confronted in the writing of the novel was the ability to paint the character of a ghost. She did know that the notion of ghosts existed and people believed in the theory of ghosts but to her, making the ghost as a character and an individual was a tough nut to crack. She herself records the writer's block she felt in making the character of the ghost come into life in the novel as quoted in the work, Toni Morrison's *Beloved : A Casebook* as

For *Beloved*.... I could take nothing I knew that seemed sure of, nothing I could really use. All of my books have been different for me but *Beloved* was like I'd never written a book before..... I knew that I was in the company of the people whom I much adored, in a situation which I absolutely abhorred. To stay in their company, to listen, to imagine, to invent and not to write was exhausting (9).

The second problem she faced in writing the *Beloved* was, the inability to portray the sense of sadness that was experienced after the child was killed. Morrison herself acknowledges that she have had to take longer walking exercises to mull over the meditated murder. She aimed

at showing the pangs of an infanticide that surfaced in a slave narrative. Morrison wanted the character to get glued from the pages of the novel to the minds of her readers which again she felt was an arduous task. She is a novelist with an eye for much detail . Her strength lies in portraying the past , the historical past and by blending it with the mythical layers of African culture. She has therefore yoked myth with history taking cues from a real time incident to depict the trials of the slave.

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