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OUTLINE

Thesis: The cruelties of slavery were not over after emancipation, and in *Beloved*, to my particular liking, the deep psychological suffering of former slaves is told through flashbacks to past tragedies, memories, and nightmares.

Introduction: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) was her fifth novel, and consequently the most controversial work she had ever written. Morrison was working as a senior editor at the publishing firm Random House when she was editing a nineteenth century article which was in a historical book and found the basis of this story. A direct connection between Morrison and this novel is best demonstrated by Morrison's statement of "I deal with five years of terror in a pathological society, living in a bedlam where nothing makes sense". This novel is set during the mid-nineteenth century and reveals the pain and suffering of being a slave before and after emancipation through deeply symbolic delineation's of continued emotional and psychological suffering.

I. Stanley Crouch

- A) "For *Beloved*, above all else, is a black face holocaust novel" (pp. 38-43).
- B) "That Morrison chose to set the Afro-American experience in the framework of collective tragedy is fine...she lacks a true sense of the tragic" (pp. 38-43).
- C) Morrison has an ability to organize her novel in a musical structure, using images as motifs.
- D) Morrison wants her reader's not to experience the horrors of slavery, but rather realize the sins that were committed against them, and simply feel sorry for them.

II. Ann Snitow

- A) "...she harps so of the presence of *Beloved*, sometimes neglecting the mental life of her other characters" (pp. 25-6).
- B) "If *Beloved* fails in it's ambitions, it is still a novel by Toni Morrison...full of beautiful prose, dialogue as rhythmically satisfying as music...and scenes so clearly etched they're like hallucinations" (pp. 25-6).
- C) Morrison sets herself apart from other writers by rejecting irony.
- D) The novel revolves and searches for, but never gets any closer to the people that are numbed with overwhelming grief.

III. Rosellen Brown

- A) "The rhythm of black speech in Morrison's control is complex and versatile, and with it she makes third person narrative sound as intimate as a back porch conversation, and confidences in the first person sound like a dream" (pp. 418-21).
- B) "*Beloved* brings us into the mind of the haunter as well as the haunted" (pp. 420-21).

C) Morrison manages to bring about images and specific memories like stones, and these I images and memories disappear and resurface over and over.

D) The audacity and the energy in this novel lies within the pain and ambivalence of it's

characters toward their memories, and even more so, their forgetting.

IV. Kevin Pesnell

A) Beloved as a family saga.

B) Suffrage of slaves and the viewpoints of many.

C) Haunting memories of a murdered child.

D) Overall writing ability, summation.

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March 18, 1996

The Psychological Suffrage of Former Slaves

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) was her fifth novel, and consequently the most controversial work she had ever written. Morrison was working as a senior editor at the publishing firm Random House when she was editing a nineteenth century article which was in a historical book and found the basis for this story. A direct connection between Morrison and this novel is best demonstrated by Morrison's statement of " I deal with five years of terror in a pathological society, living in a bedlam where nothing makes sense". This novel is set during the mid-nineteenth century and reveals the pain and suffrage of being a slave before and after emancipation through deeply symbolic delineations of continued emotional and psychological suffrage.

Stanley Crouch stated " For *Beloved*, above all else, is a blackface holocaust novel" (38-43). He believed that by including sadistic guards, murder, separation of family members, a big war, failed and successful escapes, and losses of loved ones to the violence of the mad order, Morrison was attempting to enter American slavery into the martyr ranks of the Nazi's abuse of the Jews (Crouch 38-43). Also, Crouch stated, " ...she lacks a true sense of the tragic" (38-43). He supported this by stating " ...it shows no sense of the timeless and unpredictable manifestations of evil that preceded and followed American slavery" (Crouch 38-43).

However, Crouch realizes that Morrison has real talent, in that he believes she has the ability to organize her novel in a musical structure by using images as motifs. He also felt that the characters in the novel served no purpose other than to deliver a message. Crouch believed that Morrison did not want her readers to experience the horrors of slavery that others did, but rather just to tally up the sins that were committed against the darker people and feel sorry for them. Furthermore, he presumed that this novel was designed to make sure that the view of the black woman being the most scorned and rebuked of the victims of society, doesn't weaken.

According to Ann Snitow, " ...she harps so on the presence of *Beloved*, sometimes neglecting the mental life of her other characters" (pp. 25-26). She believed that by sacrificing the other character's vitality until the very end, the novel is left hollow in the middle. However, Snitow did state " If *Beloved* fails in it's ambitions, it is still a novel by Toni Morrison, still therefore full of beautiful prose, dialogue as rhythmically satisfying as music...and scenes so clearly etched they're like hallucinations" (25-26). Snitow compares Morrison's writing style to Dickens, in that she believes that each of them are great, serious writers.

Also, Snitow believes that Morrison sets herself apart from other writers by rejecting irony. She sees the novel as mixing the grotesque with passion and romance; not just irony or zaniness, which is what is normally mixed in contemporary fiction. Furthermore, Snitow believes that the novel revolves and searches for, but never gets any closer to the people that are numbed with

overwhelming grief. Overall, Snitow's critique of this novel can be best illustrated by her statement " This novel deserves to be read as much for what it cannot say as for what it can" (25-26).

Rosellen Brown stated " The rhythm of black speech in Morrison's control is complex and versatile, and with it she makes third person narrative sound as intimate as a back porch conversation, and confidences in the first person sound like a dream..." (420-21). Brown believed that this novel may be Morrison's most visualizable of all her novels. Also, Brown stated that " Beloved brings us into the mind of the haunter as well as the haunted" (420-21). Brown believes that this is an invitation that no other American writers has offered.

According to Brown, Morrison manages to continually bring about images and specific memories like stones, and these images and memories disappear and resurface over and over. She believes that Morrison places these memories within the novel until the entire novel is like a tight verbal net from which no feeling can escape attention. Furthermore, Brown believed that the audacity and the energy within this novel lies within the pain and ambivalence of its characters toward their memories, and more so, their forgetting. Overall, Brown thought that *Beloved* was an extraordinary novel with language that is at the same time loose and tight, colloquial and elevated, which makes this novel stunning.

I believe that *Beloved* was a vividly irregular family saga that is set in the mid-1880's in Ohio. By that time, slavery had been diminished by the Civil War, but the horrors of slavery lied within the memories of those that were subjected to it. Morrison has the ability to describe the physical horrors and torments that the slaves endured in a kind of delicate way that still made my nerves twitch at the thought of such cruelties. The story does not simply tell us how one slave felt, but rather it reveals the ways in which individuals, families, strangers, slaves, and even the caregivers viewed slavery.

The story is somewhat of a ghost tale because it revolves around the spirit of a mother's baby daughter's ghost, whom she murdered in order to save her from what she thought was going to be a life of inhumane cruelty. This supernatural entity is what makes the story so intriguing and interesting. This entity, named *Beloved*, is haunting and frightful at times, but Morrison manages to write in such a way that the reader is not frightened at the mere appearance of the ghost, but rather is nervous and intrigued by what message the ghost will bring forth.

Overall, I believe that Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is one of the most thrilling novels that I have read. Morrison has the ability to write about unthinkable atrocities without making the readers sick to their stomachs. Furthermore, I enjoyed the story being presented in the form of flashbacks to past tragedies, memories, and nightmares. The only negative thing that I can say about this book is that after finishing the book, there are a couple of unanswered questions: What will happen to Denver, who is starting a new life at the end of the novel, and more importantly, what has happened to Sethe's, the mother, sons. Whether or not the reader is interested in slavery, this novel will captivate almost anyone because it is not only a tale of slavery, but it is also a tale of human beings' mistakes and their consequences that we must pay for them.

WORKS CITED

- Brown, Rosellen. "The Pleasure of Enchantment." *The Nation* October 1987: 418-421.
Crouch, Stanley. "Aunt Medea." *The News Republic*, October 1987: 38-43.
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