Toni morrison's "beloved" essay sample

Toni Morrison's " Beloved" Essay Sample

Toni Morrison's unique and distinctive style helps control how the reader will respond to the characters and events within the novel. Morrison uses several different devices to control how the reader reacts to everything that is happening. Some examples of these devices are syntax (as tied with the stream of consciousness method of narration), point of view, and the use of flashback technique.

The first device that Morrison uses within the novel is syntax with stream of consciousness narration. In the second part of the book, one of the chapters contains no punctuation. This method of writing is better known as stream of consciousness. In this chapter Sethe is the narrator and the reader is reading her thoughts. Personally, I found this method very effective because I could follow Sethe's thought patterns and understand what she was thinking. Another example of effective syntax is in the third part of the book, the last chapter, " This (It) is (was) not a story to pass on." (pg 274-5) This particular quote was separated into its own paragraph which brought out the importance of this statement. It showed how Morrison wanted to stress that the people who came into contact with Beloved could not remember her, and even the people who loved her eventually forgot her too. " They forgot her like a bad dream… those that saw her on the porch deliberately forgot her… It took longer for those who had … fallen in love with her… in the end, they forgot her too." (pg 274) Morrison effectively shows the reader with that single sentence in its own paragraph that Beloved seemed almost like a bad dream, and nobody could or wanted to remember anything about her.

The next device used within the novel is point of view. Morrison effectively changes the narrator in certain chapters to help control how the reader feels and responds. In the first part of the book the narrator basically seems to be someone not involved in the story. This is effective there because it helps the reader get to know the characters separately and develop ideas and opinions about them. However, in the second part there are places where the narrator changes. For example, in one of the beginning chapters of part two, Sethe is the narrator. This helps the reader understand Sethe as a character, mother, and how she interacts with the other characters (ie: Beloved, Denver, Paul D...). For example, " 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." (pg 200)

This quote shows Sethe's rationalization for killing her own daughter, and trying to explain to her why she did it. This helps the reader understand why Sethe killed her child and learn more about her as a character. A few chapters later (in part two) Beloved is the narrator. Beloved describes how she lost Sethe three different times. " Three times I lost her: once with the flowers because of the noisy clouds of smoke; once when she went into the sea instead of smiling at me; once under the bridge when I went in to join her and she came toward me but did not smile." (pg 214) Sethe is very important to Beloved and Beloved is important to Sethe. Neither one wants to lose the other. The above quote shows that explicitly.

The last device is the use of the flashback technique. I believe, Morrison uses this device most effectively. It allows the reader to see what events helped

build up to the present events, and shows the reader what happened to the characters in the past. When the author flashes to the past it gives the reader a better idea of what is going on. As well as informing the reader why the characters act the way they do and react to certain situations in a specific manner. "…a …woman holding a blood – soaked child to her chest with one hand…" (pg 149) This describes the scene when he killed Beloved because she loved her and didn't want her to go through the horrors of slavery. Another example is when Sethe reminisced about Sweet Home with Paul D, which usually upset Denver because those stories did not involve her.

" Sethe was thirteen when she came to Sweet Home… the five Sweet Home men… let the iron-eyed girl be, so she could choose… It took her a year to choose — a long, tough year… The restraint they had exercised possible only because they were Sweet Home men… She chose Halle and for their first bedding she sewed herself a dress on the sly." (pg 10, 11) " Denver sat down … there was nowhere else to gracefully go. They were a twosome, saying ' Your daddy' and ' Sweet Home' in a way that made it clear both belonged to them and not to her. That her own father's absence was not hers." (pg 13) In the first quote, Sethe and Paul D are recalling when Sethe first arrived at Sweet Home, and finally, after a year, she chose Halle as her husband. The second quote, Denver is jealous of the relationship between Paul D and Sethe because nobody ever came to the house to visit; it had always been just the two of them. Also, most of the stories involving Sweet Home, except her birth, had nothing to do with her, so she didn't like to hear about them.

In conclusion, Toni Morrison uses many different devices to control how her reader responds to the characters and events surrounding them, such as, syntax which is linked to stream of consciousness narration), point of view, and the flashback technique. All of these devices help the reader form and justify opinions about the characters and the events they go through. Morrison's most effective device was the flashback technique, and the chapter without punctuation. The flashback technique gave the reader an idea of what happened to the characters in the past so they could formulate ideas as to why the character acts a certain way. The chapter without punctuation allows the reader to actually read the characters thoughts, even though they don't make very much sense at first. It allows the reader to identify with the characters thoughts by making the character's thoughts their own.