

Beloved: a book report book review

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Beloved is a historical fiction that tells of the horrific burden of slavery that the characters had to endure. From a kind master, the slaves of Sweet Home plantation were turned over to the management of the cruel and abusive schoolteacher. All hopes of a better life crumbled for the small family of slaves that lived in the plantation and were replaced by various forms of punishment for the slightest oversight. With the different experiences of the characters, the tone of the story changes from character to character and is reflective of the varying often explicit attitude that they felt toward the events. The anonymous narrator, speaking in third person, illustrates each character's actions and attitudes with a mixture of regret, fear, mournfulness, and awe. The story moves from the immediate to the distant past, telling events from the present time of 1873 in Cincinnati, Ohio while citing flashback scenes from Sweet Home plantation in 1850s.

Sethe, the primary protagonist of the story, suffered a great deal in her attempt to save her children from enduring the same fate that she had to go through from the hands of the schoolteacher and his nephews. Although fear was dominant, Sethe executed her and her children's escape despite being heavy with child. This shows how far a mother is willing to go for the sake of her children. Her husband, Halle, who was supposed to be there to aide their escape, has gone missing and was presumed to be dead after not being seen for years. Perhaps this is not so in all situation, but the story highlighted how parents differ in showing love for their children. For some fathers like Halle, taking the easy way out when confronted with problems seems to be the best decision that will benefit him. This is despite knowing that his children are bound to suffer and that his wife is pregnant. Fear has different

effects on people, and with Halle, escaping from the whole situation that seemed grim and hopeless was wise. Although this was not explored and stated in the story, the fact that he just disappeared without a word to his wife explained more the kind of father and husband that he was. In the end, Paul D revealed that Halle had a breakdown after witnessing what the schoolteacher and his nephews did to Sethe the time before she escaped. Sethe was furious as her husband did not interfere and instead gave in to his emotions which caused his breakdown. Halle's failure to protect his wife smacks of cowardness, which explains his actions when it comes to his family's escape. It is safe to say based on this situation that perhaps women are emotionally stronger than men. Sethe refused to give up her hope that her children will be safe from the cruelties that pervaded Sweet Home, and despite having just experienced torture that broke Halle, Sethe's resolve was strengthened instead. Her heavy body and the pain in her breasts that she was feeling did not weaken her, even when she was giving birth in the woods with just a white woman to help her.

Halle might be a failure as a husband and father, but he was certainly a good son. He hired himself out in order to buy her mother's freedom, which he succeeded in doing. Although Baby Suggs thought that she was too old to be saved from slavery, she later on discovered that being free is the sweetest thing to be experienced.

Beloved is a unified novel that discussing it without referring to the plot is difficult. The tone, setting and voice that characterised each character contributed to the unity of the story. In Sethe's voice, she tells of how the lasting effects of slavery crippled her whole life. Once an epitome of strength

and positivity, Sethe in the present day has given in to the guilt of what most people condemned her of committing, and the hardship that life has dealt her with. She is living at apartment 124 in Cincinnati, Ohio with her daughter Denver. Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law, died some four years ago, while her two sons ran away in the middle of the night after the mystery of an angry ghost, believed to be her eldest daughter Beloved, started haunting them. After successfully escaping from Sweet Home plantation and giving birth to her youngest daughter in the process, Sethe was reunited with her children in Ohio. Together they lived in bliss, but only for a few days. Sethe experienced yet again a horrifying experience in her life, when her former slave was able to trace them and demanded that they be sent back to the plantation. Sethe avoided having her children live under the bonds of slavery at all costs, even though it threatened her life. Confronted with the situation, Sethe made an extremely difficult choice between handing back her children or killing them. She chose the latter, and to the horror of everyone watching, she slit the throats of all her four children. However, only the eldest child Beloved died. People in the whole neighborhood ostracized the whole family, even Baby Suggs who was called an inspiring holy woman for her preaching activities. Her choice may be considered wrong by everyone, but as a mother who was confronted and pushed back against the corner, she felt that her decision was right. People were unable to forgive them as Sethe chose to stand by her pride and refused to show remorse for her actions. This added to the negative feeling of the people towards Sethe and her whole family.

When I think about it, no one should be allowed to question Sethe's decision.

There was no doubt as to how much she loved her children. She risked her life in order to save them from slavery even without her husband to help her. I am certain that slitting her children's throats was not an easy decision for Sethe. Perhaps after all the difficulties she had to go through in order to save them, she felt that there was no other way to save them. When she buried Beloved, she was so poor and was even unable to purchase a tombstone for her. Wanting to give her the best that she could, she engaged in a 10-minute sexual act with the cemetery caretaker just for her to have a tombstone delicately engraved with her name. She wept for the loss of her first daughter, and this shows that it was not easy for her to accept what she did as well. This is why I feel like the people were a bit harsh with what they did to Sethe and her family. Baby Suggs lost her zest in life and just spent her remaining days in bed, where she eventually died. Perhaps Sethe's show of pride after what she did was her way of telling the people that it took a great amount of strength to do something like that, and that it was not an easy decision to make. After all, Sethe just wanted the best for her children, and she has proven it countless of times. Saving them from the physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma that she had to deal with while being a slave was

In the end, however, Sethe succumbed to guilt. She felt horrible after doing what she did to her children, and actually killing one of them while the other survived could have been the hardest thing to accept. Everyday of her life she carried that burden, which perhaps explains why their household never really seemed at peace, apart from the cold shoulders that the neighborhood gave them. Sethe and Baby Suggs were defeated by different enemies, Baby

Suggs of her pride lost, and Sethe of her guilt. The three children who needed their guidance most ended up being victims of their passivity in life. As if by will of power, a benevolent ghost came to the house and started haunting them. Mysterious breaking of windows and glasses became a constant happening in the house. They started living in fear, especially the children. Sethe, on the other hand, welcomed the intrusion despite the violence it brought. Sethe's two children, however, were of different mind. Refusing to live with the fear that has pervaded the household, they chose to escape in the middle of the night while Baby Suggs listened to them in her bed. Looking at the situation, the sons' attitude was reminiscent of their father's attitude. Instead of sticking it with their mother and supporting her in her decision, they chose to leave the house and left Sethe deal with the problem on her own. Granted that Sethe was stubborn about leaving the house and transferring somewhere else, she was also practical in her decision. She was not earning enough to support the household, and she knew that she would not be able to find a house as large as the one that they were living in. Again, my previous conclusion about males being more responsible and braver than women was further reinforced.

With the arrival of Paul D, one of the men from Sweet Home plantation, Sethe's other characteristics were emphasised. It was through her conversations with Paul D that her scars from being a slave were revealed. She tried to hide them for a long time while attempting to live a normal life, but with Paul D, she confessed that perhaps the past trauma of slavery can never really be eradicated. She tried her best to avoid encounters with her past, but welcomed Paul D, thinking that she finally had someone to talk to

about her worries in life. Because of their shared history, they understood each other. Paul D, even from his past encounters with other women, was said to be naturally warm and understanding of women's plight. He was able to identify with Sethe's problems, and even got mad at one point after realizing that Sethe was able to accomplish escaping without his help or anyone else. Here, Sethe's courage and strength was again brought to the surface, which makes strong, capable men like Paul D feel inadequate. Nonetheless, in that situation, Sethe was at her weakness, exposing albeit reluctantly, her worries and problems after their lives in Sweet Home. Sethe exhibited that she is still a woman who has weaknesses, and that like everyone else, she also needs to be someone who can understand her thoughts. This she found in Paul D, who in return, was also able to understand her needs while also giving in to one of his. Paul D has always been attracted to Sethe even before when they were still in the plantation, but was too much of a gentleman to force his way. In their short yet honest encounter, both of them acknowledged their needs and gave in to them. Together they found recognition and acceptance of their past and with concerted effort, they have decided to move on with their lives. It would seem that Sethe's scars will never truly heal for they were too great to forget. Paul D may be worthy, but his presence and force was not enough to chase away the demons of her past. When a woman named Beloved came to live in their house, Sethe was adamant in her refusal, despite the overwhelming proof, that it was not the reincarnation of her daughter Beloved. However, she succumbed to Beloved's whims and wishes and eventually ended up being consumed by her. This is when Paul D realized

just how much fear and scar Sethe carried with her. Although she was capable of doing the things she did in the past, she failed to let go of those and accept that she was not at fault. She may be able to isolate herself from the negative feelings that she got from the people but perhaps deep inside, she was not really indifferent to them. I don't think anyone would be able to really detach one's self from society, because everyone of us live in one. We are in constant encounter with people, and being ignored by all of them will in some way result to a feeling of inferiority. After all, no man is an island. Denver, on the other hand, the only child of Sethe who was left living with her, grew up to be clumsy and immature. Her isolation from the society has made her such and with the arrival of Paul D, and later on of Beloved, she felt more and more isolated even from her mother's love and attention. She treated Paul D with belligerence the first time they met, and this was not her character. Denver for Sethe was intelligent, introspective and extremely charmed as she was able to survive her birth which happened in the most difficult of situations. Despite the unhappiness that she felt in the house and about herself, she did not leave Sethe, not until she felt that she was being excluded from her family's attention. She then stepped outside 124 and found herself outside her " emerald closet." A daughter with a genuine love for her mother, Denver came back and enlisted the help of the community when she learned how Sethe has allowed herself to be a prisoner of Beloved's malevolence. She became Sethe's pillar at that time of her life and it was gratifying to know that Sethe's sacrifices for her children paid off. Despite losing three of her children, she still had one who cared for her and looked after her being. In doing so, Denver was also able to come out of her

shell and found new interests in life. She showed interests in studying and was even considering attending college. Her maturity also became apparent when she last talked to Paul D, where she showed civility and sincerity and that she is a woman with her own opinions. All is not lost for Sethe after all. The story moved from past to present then back again through the memories of the characters. This illustrated a continuity between the past and the present, despite Sethe trying to bury her past. It was this desire to forget that made Sethe's life complicated, as she showed unwillingness to confront them and deal with them the way she should have. Looking at the small details indicated in the story, everything bore significance to the totality of the story. Sethe's dead daughter continued to intrude to the present, despite Sethe's attempt to forget her as part of her past. The child haunted them as a baby ghost and came back again in the form of the woman Beloved. Her absence was never felt, even in the number of the house which was presented in quotations. " 124" signified the absence of the third child, Beloved, whom Sethe killed to prevent her from becoming a slave.

Slavery played a huge role in the lives of the characters, influencing them in more ways than one which also translated to the younger ones. Baby Suggs, like Sethe, also strived to forget and lived without forming emotional attachment to anyone. This stemmed from her fear of having them taken away from her and experiencing the same feeling of loss that she felt from having her children taken away from her because of slavery. Sethe, on the other hand, chose to forget and avoided her past at all costs because of fear. She had too much baggage to carry, and although she acknowledged them,

she left it at that. When the time came that her past has come to haunt her, she became powerless and was once again left with no choice but to succumb to it. Her fears and guilt overruled her strength and courage until it consumed all of her. In the end, she was left alone while trying to just waste away in Baby Suggs deathbed. Both Sethe's and Baby Suggs's actions translated to Sethe's children, causing the family's breakdown and separation from each other. Although Denver opted to stay until she finally couldn't take any of it anymore, she was not at peace with her mother. It was only after she left and tried living on her own that she was able to successfully move away from the shadows of slavery that consumed Sethe and her grandmother.

Every detail of the story, no matter how small it was, played an important role in building up the complex world of the people who were products of slavery. Nothing was wasted as everything contributed to the formation of each character and the situation that they formed after they came to life. The message was clear, in that the presence of slavery has debilitating and lasting effects to the victims and their offsprings. As such, freedom should be treasured. From this general idea, other ideas were generated. For one, responsibility should not be taken lightly. In Sethe's case, she wouldn't have felt that fear and weakness in the years after her slavery if she had her husband to help her shoulder the burden that she had to endure. No matter how strong a person is, there will always be a time when s/he will need someone's help. Also, there is nothing more satisfying in knowing that one will always have someone to lean on should one fail. In the maritime industry, being responsible presents similar importance as everyone has

their own task to fulfill. When one fails to perform, the whole operation might come to a halt. Similarly, when one is forced to shoulder more than what s/he can handle, its consequences on the person and the whole operation will eventually materialize.

On one side, help should also be asked if it is needed. There is no need to carry the whole weight of a responsibility if it proves to be too much for a person to fulfill. Pushing one's self to do something that is beyond his/her capability is sure to bear negative consequences to a group, as in Sethe's family. Paul D was angered in knowing that Sethe had to do everything in order to save her children when the men of Sweet Home were there to help her if she only asked. In the end, she was the one who suffered the consequences which unfortunately extended to her present life.

Unity is also a factor that is being highlighted. More than blood, a family must be bound by love and concern for each other's welfare. Halle shouldn't have deserted Sethe and his children, or gave in to his emotional breakdown despite knowing that Sethe was the victim and that she could have needed him to help her in that difficult situation. This is also true in the case of her two sons who opted to leave their mother and sister to deal with the ghost that has been haunting them. In the absence of their father, they should have protected the women in the family. When applied to the maritime industry, this concern for each other will "keep the boat from sinking." In Sethe's family, the family ceased to exist the time Halle forsook his family. Every member of the ship should look after one another and offer help when needed. Although everyone has their tasks to fulfill, everyone should also be ready to lend a helping hand when it is needed. When one in need is

forsaken, it will have an effect to the overall operation of the ship which may push everyone else into a bad position. Perhaps it is safe to say that in a situation such as this, prevention is better than cure.

The book was a satisfying read and was able to make me see important things in life that help in developing a person's behavior and perspective in life. Although the setting was during the period of slavery, the learnings that one can get from it can be applied to the present life. There are many life lessons that can prove to be beneficial for everyone if interpreted and used in life the right way. Since it helped me tremendously in seeing things in a different perspective, I would gladly recommend this book to the people that I care about.