

Vally O'Connor

*Beloved- A Synopsis*

I am awed and overwhelmed by the brevity, surrealism and creativity held in this story. From its structure, to its characters and messaging, *Beloved* was hard to digest on various levels.

Initially, I was apprehensive about this story being a part of our curriculum this semester. Isolating the film alone, *Beloved* is a timeless classic. It is held by the hands of the black community in a way that doesn't check off some collegiate agenda. It isn't a juicy intellectualized conversation that Auntie's and Nieces gather together and discuss over cake after church. Growing up, I have only heard whispers and casual mentions of the movie and in no way has it ever been deemed by those around me as a mainstream creative project up for grabs by people who need to discuss and debate in controversy. *Beloved* is not something to showcase but in my experience has lived with an unspoken "for us by us" tag. No need to speak about it. Just take it in. Watch it when you want to and when you need to... *Beloved* is a historical treasure that is understood on a level that cannot be explained. You'll find the film amongst the stack of DVD's that Grandma collects. You don't touch it, for fear of scratching it up or worse, losing it. *Beloved* is one of those black stories akin to *The Color Purple*; visceral, hard to swallow and evocative. Get out of the room and close your eyes on the parts when they have sex or show the woman's breasts. "This movie is not for kids"! I can hear my sister's voice now, shooing me out. She somehow convinced herself that her curious child-like eyes were the exception.

All this to say, I did not take this book lightly. I moved forward cautiously keeping in mind its sacredness and how it has subsisted in various black families through hand to hand passing. It took me days to finally accept that this is a part of the curriculum and I'd need to absorb it. Admittedly, throughout my life, I've avoided having to cross paths with the story, sensing it'd be triggering to say the least. But. Hear we are. I had difficulty reading and listening to the book and after days of continued procrastination, I decided to start with the movie instead.

According to an article published by Cathy Lowne, "Beloved is a work that 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 1873. Although Sethe lives there as a free woman, she is held prisoner by memories of the trauma of her life as a slave."

In addition to Lowne's words, I take note of how *Beloved* breathes structurally. Thoroughly intense and hand-dipped in a thick puddle of surrealism, I'd argue that this piece falls in line with Afrosurrealistic composition and style. Afrosurrealism in short can be surmised as a type of storytelling with the intent to expose the African experience through the lens of uncanny, poignant and bizarre visuals. When utilized thoughtfully, this "too real" experience can capture meaning in ways that stories solely grounded in reality cannot. I see this surrealism encircling a couple of characters, one being the elusive unsettling character that is "Beloved". She seems to take on many forms, despite her presentation as a human. Morrison leaves room for doubt and questioning as she continues to express *Beloved* with a mysterious instability. After giving the character much thought, I conclude that she is a representation of the pain body that Sethe has carried and subsequently manifested through guilt, yearning and suffering. It's important to take note of how *Beloved* appears just before Sethe finally breaks mentally. We also see the same surrealistic configuration with Baby ghost. The way the ghost inhabits the home with Sethe and Denver, is unusual to say the least, therefore making it surreal.

If I were to create a time capsule, *Beloved* would certainly have a respective placing. Words alone do not and cannot capture the unspeakable horrors and vile evils that progressed on during the time period of the enslavement of black people. A past replayed will eventually exhaust to a diluted normalcy. As people of the present who experience the past of slavery in tenth and twelfth degrees, we find ourselves desensitized, when in truth, the most excellent art fails to capture the horror of that time. After four hundred plus years, we still won't be able to fully capture and grasp just how heinous and diabolic those times were. There are millions of stories that have yet to be told—stories of incomparable loss, trauma, pain, and death. *Beloved*, seemingly carries the weight of this truth closer than any narrative that I have come across in relation to this time period in history.

*Beloved* peers into the world of what it was like for a black women pre and post freedom. The aftermath and the debilitating trauma suffered. It reminds me why I obsess over understanding from a biological perspective, trauma and how epigenetics play a role in a person's present life. While I found myself having to step away from the story, and at times, breathe deeply, I did find enjoyment or passion at best while experiencing some parts of the book.

I have no critique and I am happy to have finally made acquaintances with Toni Morrison's, *Beloved*".