

The Consequences of Slavery on the Former Slave Community in Toni Morrison's Beloved

Benaković, Luka

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Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

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Luka Benaković

Posljedice ropstva na zajednicu bivših robova u romanu *Voljena*

Toni Morrison

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

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Toni Morrison's *Beloved***

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki, Assistant Professor

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ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

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Abstract

This paper analyses Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* on the basis of slavery and the consequences that it had on the former slaves in the novel. The first part of the paper deals with the history of slavery and the methods with which the slaves were controlled by the slave owners, and with the significance this history had in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The analysis introduces Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D, and Stamp, respectively. Each paragraph focuses only on one character from the novel and is divided into three parts and explains the characters' past and the atrocities they suffered from slavery. The analysis also focuses on the way these characters dealt with the suffered trauma in order to suggest that no matter how appalling or atrocious a trauma of a person is, there is always a way for them to heal from it.

Keyword: slavery, *Beloved*, Toni Morrison, trauma, consequences, history

Introduction

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* deals with a variety of themes and topics, such as slavery, motherhood, and mental and physical trauma. This paper analyses the characters' pasts as slaves and explores how it affects them in the present, and ultimately, how they deal with their past traumas. All characters have gone through immense trauma during their past as slaves. They are looking for ways that will help them ease the pain of having experienced such traumatic events. When the characters are first introduced in the novel, most of them are portrayed at a point in their life that no longer allows them to run away from their past, and instead makes them face their past. By facing their past, they allow themselves to heal from the events they had experienced, and to finally live without the burden of the past. The paper opens with a condensed overview of the history of slavery in the United States of America, and deals with the atrocities that slaves were subjected to. This leads into Toni Morrison's inspiration for the novel and the story of Margaret Garner. The second, third, fourth, and fifth paragraphs of the paper introduce Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D, and Stamp Paid respectively. Each paragraph focuses only on one character from the novel and is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the characters' past and the atrocities they endured during slavery. The second part focuses on the aftermath that slavery left on the characters, and the third part focuses on the way each character dealt with the consequences of their past traumas. The paper concludes with a summary of the characters' traumas and shows how they find hope for the future.

1. A Short Introduction to African American Slavery

1.1 The History

“Slavery is nothing but deprivation of the very basic human rights and degradation of life to that of an animal. It is the worst kind of exploitation a human being can perpetuate on another human being” (Lakshmi and Abdulaziz al Suhaibani 211). According to Rodriguez and his extensive study *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political and Historical Encyclopedia*, the first African slave, Estevancio, was brought to America in 1528 aboard the ship of the Spanish explorer Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (1). Only thirty-five years after Estevancio, did the first use of slaves as labor occur in Fort Caroline, in what is today known as Florida. The use of slaves quickly escalated after Fort Caroline, which happened in 1563, and it took until 1808 for the slave importation to be truly forbidden by law (Rodriguez 31).

At the time, the United States were politically divided into northern and southern states. The southern states that were practicing slavery were: Delaware, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, Missouri, Texas, Georgia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Florida. The northern states that opposed slavery were: Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, California, Maine, Oregon, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and New Jersey. Despite the northern states not being slave states, slaves were not safe in them either. People were not allowed to help and harbor runaway slaves, because of the Fugitive Slave Law that was first passed in 1793. In 1850, the harshest Fugitive Slave Law was passed and drove the slaves to feel further north, to Canada (Rodriguez 53). The principal reason for the escape was the extreme brutality of the owners and extreme punishments they were subjected to. However, there were other important reasons for this.

According to Rodriguez, the most common and perhaps the least severe method the slave owners used to control the slaves, was denying them education (1). They knew that slaves who are illiterate are easier to control and thus would follow orders, because they did not know better. Slaves were also whipped in front of the entire slave community, a common, yet effective punishment that exhibited immediate domination over the slave. Next to being whipped, female slaves were also raped. If pregnant, the mother and her children could almost never establish a close personal connection since the children were legally not theirs and were treated as such. Furthermore, slave owners would also use different devices to torture and to control slaves. The most common torture device was the iron bit; a form of a gag or an iron muzzle that was used on slaves to prevent them from talking. This kind of device made the slaves feel less than human

and that contributed to even more control over them by the slave owners. Slaves were also sold into chain gangs – groups of people chained up one to another and forced to do work with limited mobility. All the things slaves were subjected to had not only left long lasting physical but also psychological difficulties for them, even after they were freed.

The slaves were legally freed from their owners on the 1 January 1863, during the Civil War (1861-1865) by the Emancipation Proclamation (Rodriguez 67). Even though slaves were free from that point, they still could not act as freely as they wanted. For the next one hundred years, African Americans remained segregated, they did not have the same rights as white Americans, and they still to this day have to endure systemic racism that is deeply embedded in the law.

1.2 Inspiration for the Novel

Toni Morrison, as an African American woman, was adamant to show to the world the wide array of suffering and trauma of African Americans during slavery. Morrison was keen on portraying slavery as it truly happened and relied on the documented experiences of slaves with the agenda to make the readers aware of all the atrocities. Though many Americans still denied slavery, many have simply started to neglect it, which is something that Morrison found extremely dangerous and unfair:

I began thinking about *Beloved* in 1983. As it had been since the beginning of my writing years, I was drawn to it by my complicated relationship with history. A relationship that was wary, alert, but ready to be persuaded away from doubt. It was a caution based on my early years as a student, during which time I was keenly aware of erasures and absences and silences in the written history available to me - silences that I took for censure. History, it seemed, was about them. And if I or someone representative of myself ever were mentioned in fiction, it was usually something I wished I had skipped. (Morrison, “On *Beloved*” 292)

Beloved takes place in two neighbouring states, Kentucky, a slave state, and Ohio, a free state. The main character of the story is Sethe. Sethe’s fictional story was based on a real person - Margaret Garner (Bloom 12) a runaway slave who, while running away from her masters, killed her own daughter (and attempted to kill her other three children) because she did not want her to experience the same destiny (Rodriguez 346). Morrison showcases what

slaves had to endure, and explores their life after being freed. Even though the slaves from Morrison's novel were free, they were still bound to their masters by having to carry their past with them.

2. The Consequences of Slavery on Slaves in the Novel *Beloved*

2.1 Sethe

The first and also the main character of the novel is, Sethe an African American woman who was, like most of the other characters in the book, a slave at Sweet Home. The essential point that follows Sethe throughout the novel is her relationship with her mother and how this relationship influenced her past, her present, and ultimately how it helped her recover.

Even though Sethe had a mother, she never had the opportunity to bond with her because the slave owners kept them apart to show who was in control and in the end to make them even more miserable. The only clear thing Sethe remembers about her mother is when she pulled her behind the smokehouse and showed her the mark on her rib. She wanted for Sethe to be able to distinguish her body from the other women slaves if something ever happened to her:

I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. . . . One thing she did do. She picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, 'This is your ma'am. This,' and she pointed. 'I am the only one who got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark. (Morrison, *Beloved* 60-61)

Soon after this, Sethe lost her mother and was left without the only family she ever knew. The loss of a mother is in itself a major trauma for a child to have, but this was just the beginning of everything. When Sethe was fourteen years old, she was sold to the Garners, who owned the plantation Sweet Home. When Sethe came to Sweet Home she was the only woman slave there. Other slaves, that were already at Sweet Home when Sethe arrived, were Halle, Sixo, Paul A, Paul D, Paul F and others not mentioned by name. Sethe fell in love with Halle and the Garners saw this and they gave her the freedom to be with Halle, since they were not ruthless like other

slave owners. Sethe and Halle had three children Buglar, Howard, and a baby girl. While Sethe was pregnant with her fourth child, Denver, Ms. Garner died. His death led to the next slaveowner, nicknamed the Schoolteacher, who was a cruel and ruthless man, taking over the plantation. He considered and treated his slaves like animals. A clear example of just how cruel the Schoolteacher was, is exemplified in the whipping scene, when he tore Sethe's back open. This left a scar in the shape of a chokecherry tree on her back and became the burden that Sethe always had to carry with her. Moreover, the scar served as a constant reminder of the physical trauma she went through.

Since the slaves were not subjected to this kind of treatment under Ms. Garner, this led to them having to worry about their life all the time. The Schoolteacher was so cruel to the slaves that they made a plan to escape from Sweet Home. The plan had failed, but Sethe managed to send her children onto a fugitive slave train. She came back to Sweet Home for Halle but was beaten by schoolteacher and raped by his two boys. This left Sethe with a trauma that few other characters could understand. Sethe escaped and was reunited with her kids again, but after twenty-eight days Schoolteacher found her: "Sethe flies to the shed to demonstrate her claim to herself and her children, the property that schoolteacher seeks as his own" (Khaleghi 475). Scared that her kids might endure the same things she had, she decided to kill them, since in her eyes it seemed to be the better alternative to slavery. She killed the baby girl, and right before her attempt to kill the newborn, Stamp Paid managed to stop her. This made the Schoolteacher change his mind and leave Sethe alone.

Sethe resented these atrocities and considered them a punishment worse than death that would haunt her in the years to come.

2.1.1 The Consequences of Slavery on Sethe

Sethe's source of problems comes from the fact that she as a slave, never got to know motherly love. According to Forter, slavery works in part by coercing black women into being mothers while blocking their efforts to "realize" a mother's affection (79). Sethe had even been nursed by another woman which could also be the reason why she was so fixated on nursing her own kids: "Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none" (Morrison, *Beloved* 200). According to Oberhausen, this fixation is also connected to Sethe's wish to have been closer with her mother in her youth (8). Sethe's "madness" lies in the fact that she killed her child to keep her from being taken away and having to experience the same things she was subjected

to. Sethe justified this by saying that she wanted to protect her child. As stated by Oberhausen in her paper:

Her position as a slave has created for her a childhood of false hopes and unreasonable expectations of her mother that any daughter might feel. The longing one feels for a deep connection with one's mother can transform, as it did for Sethe, into a perversity of maternal obligation. Sethe's experiences with a weak mother figure lead her to formulate for herself the ultimate mother, who will go to any lengths to protect her child. (9)

She expresses how important it is for a mother to love her child but Sethe actually never experienced something like that from her own mother and therefore lacks the capacity of expressing such complex emotions with her own children. Sethe tried her hardest to be there for her children and to show them motherly love but in the end, she essentially behaved like her mother. By being so overprotective of her children, she made it feel like almost a punishment, and her children not truly feeling her motherly love. This leads to a cognitive dissonance in Sethe, which causes Sethe to suffer from a destroyed identity. The guilt that Sethe experienced for murdering her two-year old daughter, made her take a drastic turn when Beloved appeared at her doorstep. From the moment that Beloved materializes, it became clear that Sethe would treat her differently her other children. She tries to be a different kind of mother to Beloved, because of the guilt she feels. Instead of being trustworthy and responsible she is lenient and indulgent. A mother should never be only one thing, a mother should be able to assess the situation her children are in and then react according to the situation and Sethe does not realize this.

The consequences slavery had on Sethe are the most severe of all the characters, because of just how much effort it takes for her to deal with them. The fact that Sethe never experienced motherly love and was never given a chance to be a daughter, immensely scarred her identity and her parenting capabilities. A problem like this is virtually unsolvable and is also the reason why Sethe is the character that suffered the most. Those parts of Sethe's identity could never be restored because only one person can restore them and that is Sethe's mother, but she was killed by slave owners: "The horror of that event was always at the back of Sethe's mind, and... for Sethe, the mother was associated with death" (Mayfield 1) and never with motherly love.

2.1.2 Dealing with the Consequences

Sethe's past haunts her in a different way than what is considered ordinary. Her past is manifested in *Beloved*. Everything that happened to her while she was a slave and the killing of her own child, it all came back in the form of *Beloved*. According to Rahmani, "*Beloved* symbolizes the emotional, and spiritual devastation of slavery" (4). *Beloved* is the cumulation of every bad thing Sethe had experienced during slavery. While *Beloved* was in her house there was nothing she could do. She felt the guilt of killing her child, which led to her treating *Beloved* better than her other children. This is a clear metaphor that being constantly concentrated on your past, could lead to neglect of the present and the future. Sethe did not care about anything other than *Beloved*, she was her main focus. It becomes clear that by doing this, Sethe was hurting herself and the people she loved. She does not deal with *Beloved* by herself, instead the community sees what is happening and helps her. By the end of the novel, they perform an exorcism that drove *Beloved* away forever. "*Beloved* disappears without a trace; by exorcising *Beloved*, the community exorcises the past, opening the way for the old harmony" (Winsbro 153). This is a metaphor for the fact that sometimes a person cannot deal with trauma and that they need help from people close to them. After Sethe was freed from *Beloved*, she and Paul D got back together: "The process of dealing with the long repressed past embodied in the revenant/ghost has eventually brought Sethe and Paul D back to life and given them a chance to try to build a future for themselves" (Panajotović 13).

2.2 Baby Suggs

Baby Suggs was a sixty-year-old woman, whose son had paid off her debt and enabled her to spend her final years as a free slave. As a mother, she had eight children who, all but her son Halle, were taken from her. All the other children were sold to other plantations or owners before she ever got the opportunity to fully be with them:

The last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own—fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads

when they walked. What would be the point of looking too hard at the youngest one? But for some reason they let her keep him. He was with her— everywhere. (Morrison, *Beloved* 139)

The fact that Baby Suggs was allowed to keep Halle and take care of him, is what in the end brought her freedom. Baby Suggs had true freedom, unlike other characters in the story, because for her the danger of being hunted by slave owners did not exist. This true freedom can also be connected with her name. Baby Suggs was the name she chose by herself and on her own accord, it was not the name the slave owners gave to her. This choice of one's own name is, for Baby Suggs, the ultimate mark of freedom. The reason she chose Baby Suggs was to show who she truly belonged to, her husband. Everything of hers, that was connected with slavery and the atrocities she had to go through, she had erased from herself and became a truly free person.

2.2.1 The Consequences of Slavery on Baby Suggs

Baby Suggs, when mentioned for the first time in the story, already moved on from her past life. With her past behind her, Baby Suggs became a spiritual leader for the community. She was the joy of the community; her house was a place to be for all the people:

124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised, and soothed. Where not one but two pots simmered on the stove; where the lamp burned all night long. Strangers rested there while children tried on their shoes. Messages were left there, for whoever needed them was sure to stop in one day soon. (Morrison, *Beloved* 86-87)

Baby Suggs was clearly a person that moved on and overcame her past and by being this spiritual leader she acted as therapist for other people in the community. The guidance and advice she gave with her sermons helped the other members of the community deal with their own problems:

It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart. (Morrison, *Beloved* 88)

This all changed when Sethe murdered her baby in Baby Suggs' shed. This event brought back not only her past, but it also led to Baby Suggs losing her faith which represented a final blow. The combination of these events made Baby Suggs a very miserable and unhappy person, who only craved for color to be in her life again. Stamp Paid gave a perfect explanation of why he thinks Baby Suggs became such:

He thought she was ashamed and too shamed to say so. Her authority in the pulpit, her dance in the Clearing, her powerful Call (she didn't deliver sermons or preach—insisting she was too ignorant for that—she called and the hearing heard)—all that had been mocked and rebuked by the bloodspill in her backyard. God puzzled her and she was too ashamed of him to say so. (Morrison, *Beloved* 176-177)

Since Baby Suggs was an old woman when these events happened, she did not have time to recover from them and because of her age the consequences had a bigger impact on her. The depression she had when she was a slave came back and she could not cure it with her faith anymore. Her past came back haunting her, and this time it led to death, she died in her bed, depressed and wanting color.

2.2.2 Dealing with the Consequences

When Baby Suggs was freed and moved to Cincinnati, she tried to build an identity for herself. At that time, she had already chosen her name. This was the first step in building her identity after being a slave. The next step she took was connected with 124 Bluestone Road. She needed a place to call home, and 124 Bluestone Road was just that. Thanks to the Bodwins, Baby Suggs was renting the house. This was enough for Baby Suggs to direct her sight to the future, and leave her past behind her. While living at 124 Bluestone Road she became an important part of her community and their spiritual leader. The most important thing for her as a spiritual leader was The Clearing:

When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing—a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place. In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees. (Morrison, *Beloved* 87)

Becoming the spiritual guide of the community, helped Baby Suggs fully move on and accept her past. This was the last step in her recovery and also the most important one. She fully dealt with the consequences that slavery had on her and just lived her life normally. However, Sethe's murder attempt had an unsurmountable impact on Baby Suggs that drove her to death. Everything that Baby Suggs did after being freed from slavery helped her move on and accept her past but Sethe killing her own child brought back the memories she had. These memories corrupted Baby Suggs and reverted her to the person she was before being freed. She remembered all the atrocities that happened to her and became depressed which ultimately made her give up on life.

2.3 Paul D

Paul D was, just like Sethe, a slave on the Sweet Home plantation. He was bought along with his two half-brothers Paul A and Paul F by Mr. Garner and brought to Sweet Home. He spent his childhood there and it was the closest thing to home that he had.

Mr. Garner was a benevolent owner and he would treat his male slaves as men, but Paul D always doubted his manhood and masculinity: "Garner called and announced them men--but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not?" (Morrison, *Beloved* 220). Clune connects Garner's words with feeling of power over the men, because as a slave master he feels a lot more powerful controlling men than animals (1). This led to Paul D never being sure of his masculinity which will haunt him throughout the novel. After the death of Mr. Garner, life on the plantation became unbearable. Paul D and all the other slaves, were treated as if they were something lesser than an animal. During the escape, Paul D was caught and schoolteacher sold him to a new owner, Brandywine. After trying to kill Brandywine and failing, Paul D is then sold into a chain gang. The chain gang became one of the worst slave experiences for him. The men in the gang were being abused by the men keeping them prisoner. Some of the slaves were being molested sexually and they had no other choice but to follow every command given to them. The worst thing Paul D and the other men in the chain gang had to endure were the cages in which they were held in during the nights:

By the time they unhitched him from the wagon and he saw nothing but dogs and two shacks in the world of sizzling grass, the roiling blood was shaking him to and fro. But no one could tell. The wrists he held out for the bracelets that

evening were steady as were the legs he stood on when chains were attached to the leg irons. But when they shoved him into the box and dropped the cage door down, his hands quit taking instruction. On their own, they traveled. Nothing could stop them or get their attention. . . The miracle of their obedience came with the hammer at dawn. (Morrison, *Beloved* 107)

One day when there was heavy rainfall, the men keeping them prisoner left Paul D and the other prisoners in their cages. Rain was not stopping, this meant that they would all drown at some point. Paul D and the other realized that and worked together to free themselves from the cages. He had freedom after this event, but he was not a free man. He was an escaped slave and just like Sethe, his past would follow him all through his life.

2.3.1 The Consequences of Slavery on Paul D

Paul D, while he was on the Sweet Home plantation, never had intercourse with a real woman and that could be the reason that he did not consider himself a man. He considered Halle and Sixo real men, not because Mr. Garner said so, but because he himself believed them to be that: “That was the wonder of Sixo, and even Halle; it was always clear to Paul D that those two were men whether Garner said so or not” (Morrison, *Beloved* 220). This feeling of not being a man was made clearer when he escaped. Even though he was free and could do whatever he wanted to, he was still haunted by this dilemma that Mr. Garner put into his mind.

All the things he did were because of the fact that he was unsure of his own masculinity. When he met a weaver lady from Delaware after escaping the chain gang, they do have sex but she told people that he was her nephew from Syracuse. This only made the matters worse for Paul D. He became emotionally unavailable and put all his feelings into the “tobacco tin”. His past and all the atrocities he had to experience were sealed in that “tobacco tin” where no one else could open them and set them free: “It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest” (Morrison, *Beloved* 94). The consequences slavery had on Paul D are obvious, he became emotionally unstable never sure of his identity because he was never sure if he even was a man.

2.3.2 Dealing with the Consequences

Paul D, like all slaves in the novel, had a horrible past that haunted him. He never felt like a man and had suffered emotionally to the point where he had to close all of his feelings in a “tobacco tin”. Opening of this “tobacco tin” was the first step in Paul D’s path to accepting his past and moving on. The tobacco tin opens when Paul D and Beloved had sex:

She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, "Red heart. Red heart," over and over again. (Morrison, *Beloved* 117)

The opening of the “tobacco tin” helped Paul D confront his past and his fears, which helped him strengthen his love for Sethe. He saved his masculinity and became happy all because of Sethe: “Paul D’s manhood, unlike its characterization by white men or ghosts of the past, resides in the tenderness offered by Sethe when she looks past the shackles that bind him like an animal, seeing him for who he truly is” (Clune 1). Sethe was the missing part that Paul D needed in his life to heal. This is perfectly encompassed in what Paul D said to Sethe: "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (Morrison, *Beloved* 273).

2.4. Stamp Paid

Stamp Paid was a former slave, but instead of running away from the plantations as far as possible, he instead chose to do good. He helped runaway slaves escape to Free states and away from their masters and he did this by ferrying the slaves across the Ohio River to safety.

Not much is known about Stamp Paid and his past as a slave, except for one focal point, the story of how he got his name:

Born Joshua, he renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master's son. Handed her over in the sense that he did not kill anybody, thereby himself, because his wife demanded he stay alive. Otherwise, she reasoned, where and to whom could she return when the boy was through? With that gift, he decided that he didn't owe anybody anything. Whatever his obligations were, that act paid them off. (Morrison, *Beloved* 184-185)

The fact that he had to give his wife to his master's son left an enormous mark on him. He had the only thing he loved in his life taken away from him. He did not want to accept that his wife was taken from him so he convinced himself that he gave her away. By doing this Stamp Paid eased his pain but also at the same time he shows signs that he was perhaps not aware that he never had anything to say in this matter. This manifested into a real belief that Stamp Paid had and it obviously affected his life after escaping.

2.4.1. The Consequences of Slavery on Stamp Paid

Giving his wife away was probably the biggest event that follows Stamp Paid throughout his life. Only this information is known from his past, but it is given with a reason. This even left a mark on Stamp Paid and actually shaped him to the man he is in the story.

Stamp Paid believed in a world that he created for himself. In this world, Stamp Paid was the one who owned his wife and he convinced himself that by doing this he paid of his obligations to his master. This illusion that he was not a slave but that he worked because he had obligations to his master is obviously a way for Stamp Paid to lessen the impact slavery had on him. This is of course very problematic because no matter how much he lied to himself he will always deep in his heart know that he was a slave and that he had no choice. It is clearly portrayed that Stamp Paid will do anything to preserve this illusion. His wife, Vashti, came back to him, but instead of being happy he said that he had the urge to snap her neck: "She sat by the window looking out of it. 'I'm back,' she said. 'I'm back, Josh.' I looked at the back of her neck. She had a real small neck. I decided to break it. You know, like a twig--just snap it" (Morrison, *Beloved* 233).

He was willing to kill the one person he loved just to be able to continue living in this world he created. By choosing to not accept his past, and living in an illusion, Stamp Paid never got over the things that have happened to him. These consequences, if ignored, stayed with him until the end of his life.

2.4.2. Dealing with the Consequences

Stamp Paid is the only one of the characters that did not overcome his problems in the literal sense. His way of dealing with his problems can be considered unhealthy, since he never really dealt with his past. He chose to live a lie he told himself and forget the real past. This is a type

of a defense mechanism. By suppressing his real past and fabricating a whole new story on top of the real one he is actively rejecting the truth. By living in his illusion, Stamp Paid created a sense of security and control. It could be that even though he chose to not accept the real past he is still subconsciously aware that it happened and perhaps this feeling led him to be the ferryman for all the slaves that need help crossing the river. Every good deed he does in the novel could be because of his illusion. The clearest example of this is when he decides to pick blackberries for Sethe and Denver:

Twenty days after Sethe got to 124 he came by and looked at the baby he had tied up in his nephew's jacket, looked at the mother he had handed a piece of fried eel to and, for some private reason of his own, went off with two buckets to a place near the river's edge that only he knew about where blackberries grew.
(Morrison, *Beloved* 135-136)

The most important phrase in this quote is “for some private reason of his own”, this reason is the fact that he feels the guilt of not having been able to do anything to stop the slave master from taking his wife from him. This was a heavy burden for him to carry and it probably harmed him mentally having to think of that. Stamp Paid alleviated this burden by fully believing in his illusion and by helping other slaves, which, in his mind, lessens the impact of him not being able to help his wife.

Conclusion

Paul D, Sethe, Baby Suggs, and Stamp Paid had all escaped slavery in one way or another, but the things that happened to them were haunting them even when they were free. Every character was troubled by a different thing from their past. The consequences that the characters suffered from this are extremely severe. Not only are the characters left with mental problems that hinder them to have normal lives but they also lack a sense of personal identity. Paul D and Sethe have suffered the most and also have the biggest problem with their identities. Both Sethe and Paul D show some kind of a “hole” in their identity. Sethe never experienced real motherly love and is missing the daughter part of her identity, because of that she has shown signs of “madness” by thinking that the only way to save her children is to murder them. Paul D has emotional depression and never really had the feeling that he is a man, because of that he put all his feelings in a “tobacco tin.” Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid did not have a clear example of problems with identity but the consequences of slave life can still be seen in their actions and behavior. Toni Morrison showed through her characters the real nature of slavery, she made it clear just how awful and atrocious the consequences of slavery can be and she depicted them in that manner. However, the author is optimistic; Sethe’s and Paul D’s relationship suggests that there is always hope for “some kind of tomorrow” (Morrison, *Beloved* 273).

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