

Sethe - A Gothic Heroine, Yet Different:  
A Character Study in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

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Ghostly and suggestive, Tony Morrison's novel *Beloved* belongs in the gothic genre. What is obvious is that Morrison unmask difficult themes: she accentuates the shapes of slavery and reveals morals and values within humanity without avoiding the ugly grotesque. The heroine, Sethe, is the one who lives, bears and mediates Morrison's gothic narrative. Thus, she is a well-suited character in the traditional gothic tale, running from the white man's haunting cruelty to a place full of imprisoned memories. Nevertheless, Morrison liberates Sethe, giving her qualities different from the traditional gothic heroine: Sethe is a heroine in an upside-down world in which she murders her own daughter in order to save her. In this essay I propose Sethe as a gothic heroine. Yet, her roles and actions also make her different from a conventional gothic heroine. In order to reveal Morrison's message in *Beloved*, my aim is to investigate in what ways Sethe is a traditional gothic heroine and how she deviates from the conventional characteristics. Therefore, I will relate her to a set of traditional gothic elements in the plot, occurring in all gothic fiction. These elements are: the gothic heroine herself, the villain, the gothic setting with its haunted house and the supernatural force.

For me it was interesting to see, first how the gothic genre applied on the novel. Further reading made me realize that the heroine was important, and I wanted to know more about how Morrison's female, black, slave protagonist was regarded in the novel and how she developed in the course of the reading. The more I read, the more I realized that Sethe was a very complex individual. By the end of the novel the difficulties in determining what was good and what was evil kept on haunting my mind. Eventually, these thoughts resulted in the thesis stated above.

A thesis like this naturally has its weaknesses. Even though Sethe will be shown to be a complex individual, there will still be aspects of her that cannot be revealed in this kind of essay. My thesis will not give any insight in other elements characteristic for the gothic than the ones I have chosen. Also, in this essay there is only room for a short description of these elements; of

course, they are all much more intricate. The different gothic elements are sometimes difficult to separate because they are inevitably linked to each other in gothic fiction. In this essay though, the chosen elements will be treated separately, seemingly without any connections than to the heroine herself. Moreover, some messages that are important in the novel will obviously be disregarded in an essay like this and my investigation elucidates some parts of the novel while neglecting other parts.

On the other hand, strengths with my thesis might be that it can give some glimpses of how the gothic genre works in *Beloved*. Also, it may reveal ideas about a person's complexity, not only as a one-dimensional heroine in a gothic novel. A thesis like this may reveal at least one aspect of the message in the novel and there might also be possible, in a wider perspective, to further develop gender aspects as well as cultural- and historical aspects.

There have been great disputes about what has been regarded as characteristic for gothic literature. In *The Gothic Tradition*, David Stevens discusses the difficulties in trying to outline specific gothic features. (5). Still, he is giving examples of the nature of gothic through out his book. I would suggest that despite different divisions in the gothic genre there are certain features that bring all gothic literature together. In most literary criticism it is evident that this is the case. Teresa Goddu, for example, describes in *Gothic America: Native, History, and Nation* the formula and the conventions of gothic literature to be "haunted houses, evil villains, ghosts, gloomy landscapes, madness, [etc]..." (5). Similarly, Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ed, maintains in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* that the gothic always involves "...an ivy-covered haunted ruin, a swooning heroine replete with sensibility, and a tyrannical villain, ..." (xvi). The gothic elements are very distinct in *Beloved*.

Hence, in the following I shall briefly retell the gothic story of *Beloved* in order to show the traditional gothic features in this novel. After that, I will discuss some features for the

traditional gothic heroine and see how Sethe fits into these. Under this topic I will also discuss how Sethe differs as a gothic heroine. Then I will continue by investigating the heroine's traditional relationship with the villain, Sethe's relation to the villain in *Beloved* and the differences in this affiliation. As a third topic my investigation will concern the heroine's traditional and different relation to the gothic setting and the haunted house. Finally I will discuss the supernatural force and how this element is related to a traditional gothic heroine and Sethe. I will also investigate in what ways the relation between Sethe and the supernatural in *Beloved* is different. Each one of these expositions will conclude in a discussion about Morrison's message.

The year is 1873 and Sethe lives with her daughter Denver in a haunted house in Cincinnati. Sethe's two sons, Howard and Buglar, have long ago left the house in fright, not being able to cope with the violent baby ghost that haunts the house. The only one that seems indifferent to the disturbing and disruptive presence of the ghost is Sethe. Firmly, she strives on with her life. Until one day, when Paul D comes along. Before Sethe ran away to Cincinnati, they were both slaves on the same estate – Sweet Home. Paul D, also stabbed by the dagger of slavery, is tormented by anguish and alienation and makes Sethe remember things from the past. He drives the ghost away and they start sharing memories and experiences from the era of slavery. When things seem to straighten up the ghost comes back, now in the shape of a young woman. Eventually, it becomes obvious that the young woman is Sethe's dead daughter Beloved, whom she murdered to save from slavery. Sethe deteriorates mentally and physically in overwhelming guilt and protection for Beloved and she will succumb to the submission of the ghost if she does not give up the ghost of the past. With help from Denver and the black community the ghost of Beloved eventually disappears. Thus, many years after slave abolition, the memories of the grotesque still linger on...and on and on. The notion of the violent slave era should not be forgotten.

The traditional gothic heroine is always good and pure in her actions and thoughts, and therefore very innocent. Neil Cornwell argues in his essay "European Gothic" in *A Companion to the Gothic*, Punter, ed, that "... defence, or usurpation, of an inheritance will threaten... violence upon hapless (usually female) victims amid a supernatural ambience." (29). Sethe's greatest purity is her maternal heart. With the greatest motherly love in the world she fights for her children's life in a chaotic society. Sethe's purity and innocence incarnates her as the great First Mother and in the novel her great maternal love becomes most evident in the crucial mother's milk:

It was not real yet...But when her sleepy boys and crawling-already? girl were brought in, it didn't matter whether it was real or not. Sethe lay in bed under, around, over among but especially with them all. The little girl dribbled clear spit into her face, and Sethe's laugh of delight was so loud the crawling-already? baby blinked. Buglar and Howard played with her ugly feet...She kept kissing them. She kissed the backs of their necks, the tops of their heads and the centers of their palms... Finally she lay back and cradled the crawling-already? girl in her arms. She enclosed her left nipple with two fingers of her right hand and the child opened her mouth. They hit home together. (Morrison, 93-94).

Sethe had managed to send the children in advance to Cincinnati in the north, and eventually escaped the slave estate herself. These acts were as good and pure as acts could be, but also extremely brave, since she adventured her own and her babies' lives.

As a traditional gothic heroine Sethe can be regarded a victim. From Gurleen Grewal in *Circles of Sorrows, Lines of Struggle*, we learn that most of the female slaves were not allowed to keep their babies since they were sold off as soon as they were old enough to be used in labour. This means that most slave women were denied their most fundamental role in society: the role of being a nurturer and a mother. Being both a black and a woman she finds herself in a quite

helpless situation. As a traditional victimized heroine Sethe is violated. Before she ran away, two white young men held her down and sucked her milk out. The image of stolen mother's milk implicates theft against motherhood, in the same way as slavery stands for theft against mankind as a social structure.

As an orphan, or at least with her parents unavailable, the traditional gothic heroine has to learn about life and put her trust in the world around her. Gradually she becomes aware of how the world works. Anne Williams says in *Art of Darkness* that "...the heroine's awareness opens up her world, opens up the possibilities of discovering good. She seeks love; marriage wealth and a secure place for her children." (145). Without parents Sethe's own history is a total mystery to her:

Of that place where she was born (Carolina maybe? Or was it Louisiana?) she remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother, who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones – pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field. Patiently Sethe waited for this particular back to gain the rows end and stand. What she saw was a cloth hat...(30).

When Sethe was a baby, another woman than her own mother nursed her. This woman first nursed the children of the white people on the slave estate. Subsequently, Sethe knows what it means to be starving for mother's milk. After some time, Sethe finds her mother dead after a hanging. With a childhood like this Sethe gradually comes to realize that in this world she has to do everything to save her children from the same fate. Therefore, both unloved and orphaned Sethe is able to stay pure in her heart, because she holds on to her motherhood no matter what.

Sethe however, differs from a traditional gothic heroine in several ways. Even if Sethe is victimized as a black, female slave she is shown to be physically powerful, which stands in a

strong contrast to the traditional gothic heroine. Her escape from the slave estate does not last for very long. When the inevitable sign of the schoolteacher's hat emerges one day just outside the gate at 124, she instinctively knows what to do: "Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them." (163). Methodically and with no hesitation she does what she can to end the life of her small children. A shovel, a saw and a swinging against the wall are all it takes to save her children from getting into the hands of the slave owners.

Paradoxically, Sethe's ability to nurture and give life in form of her milk stands in strong opposition to a mother's killing. Paul D. establishes: "This here Sethe talked about love...talked about baby clothes...but what she meant could cleave the bone. This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and the world began". (164). According to Paul D Sethe is claiming rather than loving and states that her love is too strong for being healthy. The claiming of her children becomes fearfully similar to the claiming of human beings in the slave society: "BELOVED, she my daughter. She mine." (200). Sethe's claiming becomes fearfully strong in the poem:

I waited for you

You are mine

You are mine

You are mine (217).

Consequently, her children fear her instead of feeling safe with her. Buglar and Howard are long gone and not only because of the ghost, but of fear of their mother. Gradually Sethe comes to see the true nature in her world and understands that this world does not belong to her and her

children. So she sends them to death - to freedom. Thus, Sethe can never become pure and innocent because of her terrible act.

Morrison questions the very notion of morality in different ways when she lets her heroine become a murderer. First, she questions Sethe's own morality as a mother and second, she mirrors Sethe's action against the chaotic slave society. She can never be completely free, because of her moral dilemma of killing her own baby. Morrison's heroine suggests that both good and evil are located in one person.

The relationship between the heroine and the villain in a traditional gothic plot is mysteriously ambiguous. In a gothic story his first appearance seems to be that he is concealing a large secret. The heroine suspects he has committed a criminal act, and everything actually points at this. Eventually it is evident that the presumed villain is not the true antagonist. There has been a misunderstanding, and the believed villain has been wrongly accused. Joanna Russ maintains in her essay that the heroine reveals the secret, forgives and understands the villain. (33-34). Therefore, in the course of the novel the villain undergoes a change in the eyes of the heroine. In *Beloved* the white slave owners are the most evident villains. When Schoolteacher takes over the estate Sweet Home, the villainy in this novel becomes fearfully illuminated. From the beginning, Sethe feels certain awe for him. She is also a little flattered by his request for ink:

“Talked soft and spit in handkerchiefs. Gentle in a lot of ways. You know, the kind who know Jesus by His first name, but out of politeness never use it even to his face...He liked the ink I made...he preferred how I mixed it and it was important to him because at night he sat down to write in his book.” (37).

From the beginning Sethe is proud of being able to help Schoolteacher in his demand for ink, in fact she believes she is rather important to him.



At a distance Sethe tries to figure out his secret. He often walks around among the slaves asking questions and this is a mystery to her. One day she happens to eavesdrop on a conversation between the Schoolteacher and his nephews: ““No, no that’s not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up.”” (193). Gradually the meaning of this conversation is exposed to her, and thus the relationship between the heroine and the villain changes. Sethe started to realize that there was something wrong with this dialogue.

That the villain seems to be both threatening and attractive to the heroine in the traditional gothic plot indicates a double nature in the villain. This duality within the villain can be shown in different ways, and Anne Williams argues that the ambivalent characteristic in the villain is apparent in his name. (168). In *Beloved* the villain’s name is Schoolteacher and this name is certainly ambivalent. A schoolteacher knows how the world works and therefore he is a person to rely on. Hence, a schoolteacher reveals true knowledge and is a person you can trust. He lists the black slave woman under the category “Animal” and values her as a breeder, not a mother. Since his knowledge is stated as the truth, his judging; his values justify the terrible slave system in society. The slave system becomes a rational order, a true order; an order that should be followed. In this patriarchal order, the laws of the white man reign and Schoolteacher knows that a slave must be beaten into submission to prescribe the order in society “to show him that definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined.” (190). In this transformation he becomes a monster.

There is a difference in the relationship between Sethe and the villain in *Beloved*. The tension between the heroine and the villain does not solve positively in the novel. The presumed awe for the villain transforms into a certainty that the villain is a monster: “Once, long ago, she [Sethe] was soft, trusting.” (188). Sethe realizes that she and her family will continue to be enslaved and that her children will be sold away from her: “...she thought she could discriminate

among them...whose touch at her elbow was gentle..." (188). Sethe learns that she is formally defined by white; that she is scientifically and naturally brute. She is nothing: "Unlike a snake and a bear, a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coin." (148). So, when Schoolteacher's nephews force her down and take her milk their violence is not only a racist dehumanization, but a logical action according to the laws of the white man. Sethe's world is a nightmare because she is in great conflict with the values of her society and her prescribed role. In *Beloved* Sethe fears the patriarchal society, being subdued to the margins and valued from a white man's point of view. She definitely cannot see the world as the schoolteacher, because she personifies the irrational disorder and represents a totally different world that the schoolteacher refuses to see: "...no one, nobody on this earth would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper." (251). As a black female she becomes a challenge to the violent patriarchal world. With her resistance towards the villain Sethe offers a story that questions the rational order.

Just as the traditional villain reveals an ambiguity in his name, Sethe's name also plays an ambiguous role. Sethe is named of the black man who was her father. That her name originally is male shows the strong link to the patriarchal values: she was not even given a female name; although being female she has something male within her. Investigating the name Sethe a little further one can see that it actually implies different things in different cultures. According to ancient Egypt mythology Seth (a male) was the greatest evil god, who murdered the good by cutting him to pieces. (Carpiceci, 14). Though, in the Bible Eve gave birth to Seth for the loss of Abel, who was killed by Kain. Hence, Seth was a great gift from God and his main purpose was to breed and rise generations. (Gen. 4:25, 5:1-8). In *Beloved* the main character has been made female as a resistance to the rational patriarchal world spoken in the Egypt mythology, the Bible and in society. In Christianity Seth (a male) is a bringer of life. In *Beloved* Sethe is the one with

the power to give birth and she desperately wants to become the true mother that breeds generations, though her terrible crime contradicts her goal of motherhood and a love bringer. Paradoxically, Sethe is a gift from God in order to breed generations. Though, she becomes the opposite as Sethe who cuts her daughter to pieces. She becomes the villain herself.

In the society definitions are male; the language is male. Therefore Sethe in *Beloved* speaks a female language. The double nature in Sethe's name implies, again, that she is imposed both good and evil. Therefore, the villainy in *Beloved* is different from the villainy in a traditional gothic story, because here the heroine herself is part of the evil. Sethe herself seems to recognise this fact, because in the end of the novel she blames herself: "I made the ink...He couldn't have done it if I hadn't made the ink". (271). Her statement implies that she has both contributed to her own villainy and become a victim of it.

Morrison offers an alternative to the patriarchal world and wants the readers to voyage a new way of viewing history. She lets her heroine rewrite the truth, saying that we might see the world in a multitude of ways, not only from the white man's point of view. She wants us to consider who has written history and why the history was written in certain ways. To use only one side of the story and oppress another may justify immoral and undemocratic values in society. But Morrison not only emphasizes the black female alternative and suggests that both good and evil are represented in every person. She also wants to say that the good or evil spring from people's methods of judging and understanding knowledge.

A traditional element in the gothic fiction is a large, lonely house filled with mysteries set out in a very isolated area, to which an unloved young woman comes. Neil Cornwell suggests: "What we may now see as 'classical Gothic', then, will normally involve dynastic disorders, set at some temporal and spatial distance and in a castle or manorial locale;" (29). In *Beloved* this isolated place is clearly shown:

Winter in Ohio was especially rough if you had an appetite for color. Sky provided the only drama, and counting on a Cincinnati horizon for life's principal joy was reckless indeed. So Sethe and the girl Denver did what they could, and what the house permitted... they waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of that place... (4).

This place is situated between the Ohio River and the black community of Cincinnati.

In traditional gothic fiction the setting as well as the haunted house shapes the heroine's own inner conflict. Barbara Bowman argues that characteristics and elements other than the heroine in gothic fiction "clarify the heroine's inner ambivalence..." (69). In *Beloved* we find out that being in the surroundings of 124 Bluestone Road evokes fear upon Sethe:

She [Sethe] might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be in her mind... Then something. The splash of water... and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes... It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too." (6).

No matter how hard Sethe tries to repress her inner conflicts about the Sweet Home estate the setting around Bluestone Road brings them into the open.

In a conventional haunted house the heroine confronts a threatening force. Kate Ferguson Ellis maintains: "The task of the classic Gothic heroine is to escape from the castle that has become her prison..." (263). The haunted house in *Beloved* is in many ways a threatening place. When Baby Suggs (Sethe's mother-in-law) took over the place from the Bodwins, it became a joyful and pleasant center for runaways. However joyful the atmosphere was, it all changed when Sethe arrived. Now, by the year 1873, Sethe and her daughter Denver are its only residents. The gray and white house on 124 Bluestone Road lies in an utter solitude at the end of the street. They seldom have any visitors. In fact, people fear and reject the house because they can feel that the

house was alive when they passed it on the street. Denver explains this mystified place and says that she shivers when approaching the house: "...regarding it as she always did, as a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits." (29). The house is frightening and driving Sethe close to madness. Sometimes when she woke up from bad dreams she could feel that:

...the house crowded in on her: there was the door where the soda crackers were lined up in a row; the white stairs her baby girl liked to climb; the corner where Baby Suggs mended shoes... the exact place on the stove where Denver burned her fingers. And of course the spite of the house itself. (39).

Sethe knows that the house is alive and personified, in fact each new part of the novel opens up with a statement about the house: "124 was spiteful." (3), "124 was loud." (169) and "124 was quiet." (239). The tormenting house made her consider an escape from it.

There is a different relationship between Sethe and 124 than between the traditional gothic heroine and the setting with the haunted house: Not only does Sethe confront the classical ghostly setting as her own inner fears, she also confronts the undead historical past through the context of the present gothic setting. The center of events in *Beloved* is situated between the Ohio River and the black community in Cincinnati. On the opposite bank of the river the evil of slavery still lingers on. Even though she thought she was going to die "on the bloody side of the Ohio River" (31), Sethe crossed this blessed water, that alludes to the biblical River Jordan, in order to get to the Promised Land in the North. Thus, when she fled from slavery she expected and depended on freedom in the North for herself and her children. What she got was a threatening surrounding and a tormenting house. Therefore, the area around 124 on Bluestone Road becomes a mystified place. This place makes the ordinary life awkward and turns ordinary life upside-down. It's hiding something from us that cannot be seen: it has become a place for

other forces than the traditional gothic ones. The life of the past; violent South, lives on though dead, just as Sethe's seemingly free present life in Cincinnati. Hence, this is a meeting place for both life and death in a double meaning.

Just as the relationship between the heroine and the setting is different in *Beloved* the house itself describes a different connection to the heroine than the traditional. The house at Bluestone road is not only there to frighten us, it is there to show us that this enclosure can act as a sort of escape; a shelter for things that are more dangerous. No matter how repressed and frustrated the house may be, Sethe seems to be very controlled and calm about it. Sethe was: "The one who never looked away, who when a man got stomped to death by a mare right in front of Sawyer's restaurant did not look away..." (12). As a different gothic heroine she seems to accept the strong external force; Sethe accepts the evil of the house as a punishment for her own severe crime, a crime she cannot talk about, not the least run from. When Denver wants to move and Paul D asks Sethe why she stays, she explains to them that it is impossible to leave: "No more running – from nothing. I will never run from anything on this earth. I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something... it cost too much!" (15). She explains that she cannot flee from her terrible memories of the past. Hence, she stays and silently suffers. As a non-conventional gothic place, the house thus, offers some kind of protection opposed to the outer world.

Morrison uses the haunted house to bring her heroine, not just into confrontation with the unexplained, but also into confrontation with the dimensions of people's own experience: Sethe must come to terms with her trauma in order to be truly free. Morrison's haunted house thus shows how human beings can be trapped in their own denial. Sethe's accepting is a denial. With the traditional gothic setting and the ghostly house, Morrison paradoxically explains a perfectly natural and true reality in which Sethe lives. Therefore, Morrison disrupts the traditional gothic

conventions by showing us the horror of, not the mysteries in the world, but the repressed and unspoken realities of the factual, historical past.

While the setting with the haunted house shapes Sethe's conflicts, the supernatural within it expresses them. The supernatural is a key element in the gothic tradition and most often the ghost evokes fear and threatens the heroine. In the gothic plot the threat from the supernatural gradually increases and eventually kills the heroine if no one saves her. In order to get a grip on the heroine the ghost can take on different forms. Anne Williams says: "Spirits that should be dead... return; the non-material, or the "disembodied" suddenly materializes. Or, conversely, the material but inanimate object suddenly takes on the characteristics of the living – it moves, bleeds or even speaks." (70-71). In *Beloved*, up until the day that Paul D. comes around, the ghost in the house at Bluestone Road is invisible and appears to be a baby. Sethe is certain that this is the spirit of her murdered girl Beloved, and with its supernatural power she stirs the house, and make life difficult for Sethe and her other daughter Denver: "...the baby's spirit picked up Here Boy [their dog] and slammed him into the wall hard enough to break two of his legs and dislocate his eye, so hard he went into convulsions and chewed up his tongue..." (12). It is evident that the spirit in the novel shares features of the conventional supernatural force.

Paul D. manages to get rid of the spirit for some time but eventually the ghost comes back, this time as the inanimate woman Beloved. Her ghostly appearance is unmistakable: "She had new skin, lineless and smooth, including the knuckles of her hands." (50), and "... all they saw was a black dress, two unlaced shoes below it, and Here Boy nowhere in sight." (51). The description of Beloved is not only spectral. Her smooth skin also indicates that this is the little baby expelled from 124, though Sethe is not aware of it at first. Through her emotional hold on Sethe, and visualized, she can draw her circle more tightly around herself and Sethe. By the end of the novel the sight of Beloved is shocking: "The devil-child was clever... And beautiful. It had

taken the shapes of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling... Jesus. Her smile was dazzling.” (261). While Beloved claims Sethe more and more and thus “eats” her way through Sethe and she, on the other hand, becomes more and more leached.

The supernatural element is held responsible for the oppression in the house. In the article “Surviving what haunts you...” in *Melus*, Naomi, R. Rand suggests: “Ghosts are reminders of the battle... they carry with them, the scars of the war in their versions of a spirit world that spawns unforgiving, ruthless predators who lay claim to what they believe is owed them.” (28). Sometimes when Beloved undress and lay down a tip of a thing can be seen on her throat. This is her physical scar that tells the sad story of her fate; it is the mark of the hand saw her mother used in the shed. Thus, Beloved is back to claim what is hers: The love she never experienced or remembers from her mother. Since Sethe’s guilt is so strong Beloved knows she will get that love.

Eventually, the heroine will learn that the supernatural element will be explained or abolished in the end of the traditional gothic novel. In *The Return of the Repressed* Valdine Clemens refers to Tzvetan Todorov’s chart when stating that the supernatural: “...either remain unresolved... or else are resolved by verifying the supernatural... or by revealing a natural cause...” (11). In *Beloved* the black community uses the good old conventional exorcism to chase the ghost away:

“Some brought what they could and what they believed would work. Stuffed in apron and pockets, strung around their necks, lying in the space between their breasts. Others brought Christian faith – as shield and sword. Most brought a little of both. They had no idea what they would do once they got there.” (257).

What they never counted on was the white man approaching 124. In the midst of all the turmoil, Sethe becomes confused and madness is creeping into her: “Guiding the mare, slowing down, his



black hat wide brimmed enough to hide his face but not his purpose. He is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing... And if she thinks anything, it is no. No, no. Nonono. The ice pick is not in her hand. It is her hand.” (262). Blinded by confusion Sethe tries to kill the innocent white man but fortunately, Denver and the rest of the community congest her. Beloved is gone.

Just as the traditional relationship between Sethe and the supernatural is evident in *Beloved* there is also a different relationship between the two of them. While the ghost in a traditional gothic story inhabits the house that the heroine comes to and can be expelled, the female ghost in this novel is a part of the heroine herself and will not go away unless the heroine comes to terms with her problems. The different relationship between Sethe and Beloved is clearly evident in the way Beloved comes back to the house: “... for some reason she [Sethe] could not immediately account for, the moment she got close enough to see the face, Sethe’s bladder filled to capacity. She said, “Oh, excuse me,“ and ran around to the back of 124.” (51). As a mother about to give birth to a child Sethe is in such need to pee that she cannot wait. There are no small amounts pouring from her – no – it is like the water coming when one is to give birth to a baby. Beloved’s arriving is therefore a deliverance of her mental trauma. She is symbolizing the power of Sethe’s unaccepted memories and keeps the grip on her as long as these memories remain unacknowledged. The rebirth of Beloved evokes strong emotional feelings on Sethe and naturally re-creates new strong, even deadly, bonds between them. Sethe cannot bear to live her life without her murdered baby: “Dearly Beloved... was the only word that mattered.” (5). As long as Beloved is around Sethe lives with the dead.

Also, even if Beloved is back to show her remorse for what happened and thus is the oppressive force, Beloved is there to offer salvation. She reveals the history and the stories in the novel, and makes people face their problems. In the course of the reading it is clear that other

people in the black community have committed severe crimes as a result of constant oppression. Therefore, she is not only a haunting memory for Sethe, but she is also a ghost of all in the black community. Therefore, the supernatural dimension is not only a symbol for Sethe's terrifying memories, but for all black memories. It is revealing the world and life itself for Sethe and the slaves. The scar in her throat is a symbol of the emotional scar of the whole black community.

Beloved's disappearance is due to the fact that Sethe this time does the "right" thing. Sethe's murderous hand goes for the white man instead for her loving child. The ghost might therefore be satisfied and disappears. Though, the ghost would most likely come back in another shape or in another house to evoke the important message.

Morrison uses the supernatural power, not to propose solutions or solve the problems in the novel but to say that we cannot escape from the content in *Beloved* since slavery is a historical reality. The supernatural explains things to be as true as rationalism. It creates metaphors for people like Sethe living under those conditions. The supernatural becomes a fact, a reality that can't be dismissed. Through the ghost Morrison gives the reader, not analytical explanations of the terrifying past. Instead we are left with a haunting sense of the pain people suffered in the slave era. Morrison thus offers another side of the historical truth.

In this essay I wanted to see how Sethe applied as a traditional gothic heroine in relation to a set of four traditional gothic features. The features are: The heroine, the villain, the setting with the haunted house and the supernatural force. I was also determined to discover some differences in Sethe's actions and roles as a gothic heroine. The purpose with this was to discover some of Morrison's messages with *Beloved*. I started with a short description of the gothic plot in order to show that there are obvious gothic features in this novel. I continued with a discussion about Sethe as a traditional gothic heroine and how Sethe is a different gothic heroine. She is pure as a traditional gothic heroine, because of her great mother's heart. For her, the greatest goal

in life is to be a mother, which of course is a difficult mission for her, since she has not had a mother of her own. The bond between her and her children is the precious mother's milk, hence the white man's theft of her milk becomes a symbol for disruption of the female, the mothers and the family. As a different heroine her mother's love is so extreme that it becomes similar to the claiming of human beings in a slave society.

Similar to the traditional gothic relationship between the heroine and the villain, Schoolteacher undergoes a change in Sethe's eyes. His name reveals his double nature as both trustworthy and fearful. Different though, from a traditional relationship between the heroine and the villain is that she soon realizes that Schoolteacher is a true villain. Also different in this relationship is that Sethe herself becomes the villain, since she killed her baby girl in order to save her.

Sethe's traditional relation to the setting and the house is evident in *Beloved*. The area around Bluestone Road is extremely lonely and the house is literally moving. Though, with its desolated surroundings the setting offers a description of her feelings towards the white man's world, and it becomes an intersection for life and death; freedom and slavery. Similarly the haunted house reveals both Sethe's inner conflicts as a conventional relationship and offers a shelter and protection from the outer world in a different way.

Just as a traditional relationship between the heroine and the ghost, *Beloved* torments Sethe as much as she can for being a baby ghost. She tightens her grip on her as an animate ghost and finally she is exorcised just as ghosts traditionally are barred. In this case though, *Beloved* is a creation of Sethe herself both to punish and to heal. Sethe is both dependent on the ghost and forced into submission by it.

Morrison's message is clear, I believe: Good and evil are both represented within a person and she suggests a twosome world where neither the patriarch nor the matriarch rules,

neither the white nor the black determine society values, but rather a multitude of orders exist. Therefore, a diversity of knowledge is important in order to see as much of the truth as possible. The supernatural force can thus be juxtaposed to the real and offer a true solution to problems.

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