Trauma and Identity in African American Slave and Neo-slave Narratives

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Trauma and Identity in African American Slave- and Neo-Slave Narratives

Završni rad

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Abstract

The system of slavery had been present in the New World for many years and it left horrible consequences on people who managed to survive it. People needed to be extremely strong both physically and psychically to endure all the pain and pressure that white people put them through. White people could not accept that there existed people who were different from them and, because they were in majority, they gave themselves the right to abuse their power and to decide the fate and life of other people.

Many great literary works have explored the issue of slavery, and every one of them is very realistic and disturbing. In his autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) Frederick Douglass presents us with a brutal and remorseless picture of the life of African American slaves. He gives us a realistic picture which can shock or upset even the most insensitive of us. We can see how hard it was for the slaves to live the kind of life where you are not completely sure what you can or cannot do, and where you cannot know whether you are going to be sold or even survive to see the next day. In her novel *Beloved* (1987) Toni Morrison introduces a family consisting of a mother and a child who escaped slavery. We can see the life they live as free people, but it is not the one filled with happiness of their escape. We see that they are wrecked by the slavery and its aftermath and how they are divided between two identities, especially the mother who survived being a slave. She tries to leave painful memories behind her, thus depriving herself of a normal life in the present because she is unable to deal with her past life and actions.

This paper attempts to demonstrate that people who survived slavery have endured an enormous amount of physical and psychic pain. They endured working as animals, whipping and even watching their friends or family being killed. All of that left a deep impact on them so that even when they became free, they could not live as normal people. They were

constantly afraid, which sometimes made them do horrible acts that left them unable to live a normal and happy life. There were different types of people. Some, like Frederick Douglass, were decisive and knew what they really wanted and went for their goal. Although he had and a very difficult life, he did not give up and eventually he managed to escape and build a real and stable life. On the other side are people like Sethe, the protagonist of Morrison's novel, who were not strong enough to deal with their problems so that they allowed their problems to overpower them. For Sethe it was so hard to deal with the killing of her baby that she pushed the people who loved her away and allowed her guilt to take over. Luckily, she realized that with the help of the right people, people with similar experience, she could deal with her pain and her problems.

Keywords: slavery, slave owners, Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave*, Toni Morisson, *Beloved*

Introduction

Slavery is a system in which people are being treated as property. In August 1619 twenty Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, probably as slaves but were listed as indentured servants, meaning that they offered voluntary labor for a free passage to the New World. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century a vast number of people were imported from Africa as slaves. Large cotton or tobacco plantations needed people to work on, and owners realized that it was cheaper to hold slaves than indentured servants. Slave owners took the right to buy or to sell black people and to force them to hard work. They tried to strip them of their identities by depriving them of their heritage and family identity. The suffering of people who had been enslaved and the aftermath of it can be seen in many literary works such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) by Frederick Douglass and *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison. These are the texts that are different and yet similar. What binds them together is the theme of slavery and the brutality of it. While Douglass provides a harsh, realistic look on slavery and an insight into a man's will to become free, in *Beloved* we can see how much damage slavery can cause to a person and to his or her family, and to what extent a person is willing to go just to protect his or her family.

Because of different skin color, black people were constantly molested, punished, and forced to slavery. Nowadays it is very traumatic and incredible for us to think that those times happened, but they really did. What is hard to believe are those extremely painful experiences and traumatic events that white people put black people through. It was not until the Constitution and the Thirteenth Amendment came that white people finally let up their terror.

There are plenty literary works which show us the image of slavery and its influence on people. One of those works is Frederick Douglass' autobiography in which he presents us with a very realistic picture of slavery and he describes events the way they occurred, without

euphemisms. On the other hand, there are novels like *Beloved* which show how black people's past, tragic events, and actions affect their present life.

I. Slavery in General

Slavery is a system that dates back to the beginnings of civilization and it is even mentioned in the Bible:

> However, you may purchase male or female slaves from among the foreigners who live among you. You may also purchase the children of such resident foreigners, including those who have been born in your land. You may treat them as your property, passing them on to your children as a permanent inheritance. You may treat your slaves like this, but the people of Israel, your relatives, must never be treated this way. (Leviticus 25:44-46 NLT)

While people were nomads, they did not have to work on the crops as they did not have them, but as soon as cultivation began so did the slavery because people needed work force. In Ancient Greece women and children were used as slaves for domestic work while rebellious men were slaughtered; in Rome emperors had their slaves for almost everything – for gladiator fighting as public entertainment, secretaries, working in gold and silver mines, etc. Slavery came to Europe in the Middle Ages when the Church started to condone slavery. As it began to develop, the transatlantic trade emerged. It took place from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. It began with the Portuguese and was soon followed by Spain and other European countries. They began colonizing the Americas, and when the number of Indians in America became smaller, people needed to find new work force so they began to import African slaves. Thus the Middle Passage began. It was a triangular trade route which began with European ships departing to Africa where they would trade their goods for African slaves. Then these slaves would be further transported to the colonies in the New World. On these ships they were crammed and endured horrible conditions, so a great deal of them died before they even reached the shore.

When transported to the American colonies, African slaves had to do everything their masters told them to, and they were mainly used as a work force in tobacco, sugar or cotton plantations. Some of them who were fortunate enough would work as domestic servants, which was regarded as luck. Slaves were inferior beings to the owners so they treated them like animals. Even if they did not do anything wrong, they could get punished just because the owner was nervous or he or she disliked a particular slave: "When everything they did was wrong, even something as innocuous as breathing could be cause for harassment or death" (Asim 12).

However, African slaves were also people who had their own will, identity and nature and because of that slave owners had to ensure that they would not show any sign of rebellion or mutiny. They needed to deprive them of their rights and instill the belief in them that they were slaves and that they did not have the right or possibility to be anything else:

> Therefore, for the slaveholder, the perpetuation and maintenance of slavery required developing "slave mentalities," i.e., controllable personalities and submissive traits in Africans. These methods, though many and varied, and applied differently throughout the upper, border, and deep regions in the South, institutionalized the psychological enslavement of Africans. (Mitchell 80)

When you break someone, break their will or determination, he or she is completely subordinated to you. He or she surrenders and simply gives up on life and resistance. That is exactly what slave holders tried to accomplish with their slaves – as little resistance and as much obedience as they could:

> A person is a slave, then, not when his body is held captive but when his psyche is not his own, when his self does not belong to him, when he does not

> exert resistance against those who would define him. Being a slave "in fact" has to do with one's attitude toward one's condition. (Gibson 556)

People realized that with weakening of the power of the slaves' will they would make them more submissive. This process of weakening of the power and will of Africans began in the American South where the slave owners did their best to deprive their slaves of their culture and customs and make them more susceptible to the influence of the dominant culture because in that way they would lose their identity:

> In the South, the planter's seasoning methods eventually reduced most Africans into a maligned "slave/negroe" people. For instance, after the first and second generations of African captives were denied practice of their traditional culture, their descendants became more vulnerable to European methods of cultural domination. (Mitchell 80)

In that way "American slavery provided Europeans, regardless of rank or social class, with the absolute power to physically and psychologically control Africans" (Mitchell 80).

When a child is born, he or she is raised within the boundaries and limits that his/her parents have, and that world is the only one he/she knows. People who were brought as slaves from Africa know what they had and what they lost. They feel the sadness of the loss of their culture or customs. Contrary to them, people who were born on farms and within the confines of slavery accepted their life as servants – because they did not know of any other life and did not have the courage to try and find a better way of living. As Kevin Bales in his *Understanding Global Slavery* explains:

> For some slaves, the first step out of bondage is to learn to see their lives with new eyes. Their reality is a social world where they have their place and some

> assurance of a subsistence diet. Born into slavery, they cannot easily redefine their lives outside the frame of enslavement. (4)

Every action has a reaction, so does the slavery. The reaction to slavery came from the U.S. North. A group of people called the abolitionists formed a movement to end slavery. They created the *Underground Railroad* – a network of secret routes and safe houses used by slaves to escape to the free states and Canada with the help of good people who risked imprisonment to help them. A slave would go from one hiding place to another and along the way he or she would travel with different persons. Each of those "guides" would only know his or her own route. Routes were often intentionally indirect so they would confuse pursuers if there were any. Slaves usually travelled individually or in a group of two or three people. In 1850 Fugitive Slave Act was passed, which gave power to people to abduct runaway slaves and return them to their masters, although their jurisdiction was to the border with Canada. In that way many runaway slaves found themselves in confusion and experienced tremendous fear of being returned to their masters. For them that was the worst punishment.

Finally in the year 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, abolishing slavery and involuntary servitude:

> Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. (US Const, sec. 1)

With it, black people could finally be more peaceful and could feel more secure. Yet, even though the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, there were still legislations such as Black Codes, a series of laws passed by the Southern states after the Civil War, which restricted African Americans' freedom and, made their life hard (Black Codes, n.pag.). Their struggle for full rights continued for a long time after that. Although the Civil Rights

Movement helped end legalized segregation, racism, discrimination, and inequality are still visible in U.S. society today.

II. Trauma and Identity in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery around 1818 in "Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot County, Maryland" (Douglass 21). He was a son of a black woman slave and a white man who, somebody says, was his mother's master. As many other newborn children slaves, Douglass was also separated from his mother in order not to develop any attachments to her. His mother was sent far away from him although she tried to visit him during the night when she could manage to sneak out from her home. Because of this separation from his mother, Douglass needed to learn how to live and manage on his own. In his early age he decided to run away and he became interested in reading and writing, which helped him with his plan. Although he wanted to run away, he could not escape slavery that easily, so he too experienced horrific actions which, fortunately, did not prevent him from carrying out his plan.

In Chapter II, Douglass gives us a detailed description of slave life and their conditions in terms of allowances, which they received monthly, and yearly in food – eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of corn meal, and clothing – two coarse linen shirts, one jacket, one pair of linen trousers for the winter, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes. Children unable to work received only two coarse linen shirts per year. The slaves had no real beds and they got little sleep because when they got back from work there was still work to be done with the children or cooking, and by the time they had done that it was already very late (28-29).

During his life as a slave, by witnessing and experiencing numerous brutal series of events, Douglass developed his identity through several stages. Born into slavery, he was

aware of the fact that his life would be subordinate to someone else but he did not realize to what extent. One of the first ruthless episodes that he witnessed was one with his own aunt Hester when she was whipped by the overseer named Plummer. The remorseless whipping of his aunt "introduced Douglass to a consciousness of his slave status, a social fact of which he was previously unaware" (Brewton 707):

> It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it. (Douglass 25)

Slaves were constantly whipped – they were whipped when they did something bad, something that masters did not want and even when the masters were feeling angry and wanted to take their anger on someone. For them black people were nothing more than property, mere objects and they treated them in that way. They were constantly punished and "whipping was not only a method of punishment. It was a conscious device to impress upon the slaves that they were slaves" (Rawick, qtd. in Brewton 707). Masters needed to show to their slaves that they were subordinate and that there was not any other future for them than to be slaves. They needed to break their spirit in order to fully own them. With this knowledge Douglass lived and grew day after day. At one point, when he came to master Auld's plantation he realized something which marked the beginning of his struggle for freedom:

> I may be deemed superstitious, and even egotistical, in regarding this event as a special interposition of divine Providence in my favor. . . . From my earliest recollections, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace. (Douglass 47)

Life at Auld's property was a great turnover in Douglass' life which he did not understand then. The turnover was initiated by Mrs. Sophia Auld, a wife of his master. In the beginning she was a "woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings (48). She never had a slave so she did not know how other people treated theirs. Very soon after he came to their home, Mrs. Auld started to teach him how to read. Unfortunately, his luck was of short duration, because when Mr. Auld found out what she was doing, he ordered her to stop, claiming that it was "unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read" (49), because in that way she would have a learned slave who would then no longer be suitable for field work. After Mr. Auld's home, Douglass came to live with Master Hugh. There he became determined to learn how to write, repeating his old Master's words, thinking to himself: "Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*" (53).

After seven mostly comfortable years living in Baltimore, Douglass is sent to work for Edward Covey:

> Covey is a poor man, despicable enough for a slave owner, but more to be despised in his practice of breaking recalcitrant slaves for other masters. Douglass depicts Covey as a deceptive, cunning man, "the snake," who works his slaves relentlessly day and night and, worst of all, typifies the sexual hypocrisy of the slave owner and the slave system as a whole. (Brewton 710)

Covey has a reputation of a "nigger breaker" (Douglass 70) and Douglass does not feel very comfortable with the change, but the fact that he would get enough to eat is more than satisfactory. This part of his life is described the most in the book and it is because it represents the most important part of the development of his identity. Although he needs to live there only for a year, it is a very significant experience. During his first six months

"scarce a week passed without his whipping. [I] was seldom free from a sore back" (Douglass 72). Although he is a strong man, both physically and psychologically, and not one of the ruthless slave experiences that he has witnessed or experienced has managed to break him, Howard Covey manages to do it:

> I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of his discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute! (Douglass 74)

When someone breaks the will of a man that means that he/she owns him/her and that is why a master's ultimate success is achieved when he breaks the will of a slave. Thus he can control him the way he wants and the slave will obey because he realizes that there is no other life for him or her. They simply give up on their life. After some time Douglass gets worse and he collapses while he is at work. As a result, Mr. Covey gives him a severe whiplash causing his head to bleed. Because of that Douglass decides to go to his Master Thomas for help, but he does not get any. Almost lost for hope, he comes by with a slave named Sandy who gives him a root and says that it will help him and that he will not be whipped any more. The next day Douglass and Mr. Covey confront. It is not Douglass' will, but he cannot escape it because Mr. Covey is angry at him for going to Master Thomas. They have a fight in which Mr. Covey's pride and reputation is damaged. Even though Douglass does not come as a physical winner, his spirit is uplifted:

> This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense

> of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. (82-83)

This indicates that Douglass' spirit is not completely broken and that he is again determined to break free. Although he remains a slave there for four more years, he is never whipped again. He does not fully understand why Mr. Covey avoided whipping him but he says that in order for his reputation to be saved he needed to let Douglass go unpunished (83). Now, with his new decision that he would get free he can easily deal with his problems: "It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom" (83). It is a very significant moment in his life because "The point is that once he is psychologically free the escape itself is a matter of course" (Gibson 555). After that, Douglass attempts to escape two times. He escapes from Mr. Freeland's property but gets caught and ends up in prison. However, his second escape attempt is successful. He escapes from Baltimore "on the third day of September, 1838" (111) and arrives in New York on the same day.

Although he mentions his escape in this work, Douglass does not give away all the details of the escape, explaining that he cannot do that because of all the people who are involved in that attempt, because they would be in danger if he did (105). He also mentions the *Underground Railroad* and gives his thanks to all the people who risked their lives in order to save slaves, although he states that he cannot see much resulting from such a course because they unintentionally help the masters to become more watchful for their slaves (106). Even though he manages to escape, he feels lonely because he is alone and without friends in a big city. Furthermore, he is in fear of people whose job is to catch runaway slaves and return them to their masters. He is afraid to speak to anyone out of fear that they would give him away (111). Finally, he meets Mr. David Ruggles who helps him a great deal and who eventually sends him to New Bedford where he starts a new life.

Frederick Douglass' work testifies not only to the horrible treatment the slaves received but also to the strength they had to have in order to endure and survive their traumatic and painful experiences. It is a testimony that gives us a pretty ruthless image of slavery that leaves no one indifferent.

III. Identity and Impact of Slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Beloved is a powerful and compelling novel written by Toni Morrison. It is based on a true story of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave, who killed her two-year old daughter and tried to kill the other three children and herself because she did not want them to experience the horror of slavery. In *Beloved*, the story of Margaret Garner serves as a base although the other events described are not the same as in the original story. There is no introduction to the story. Instead, it starts in medias res, and the readers are "thrown" right into the plot that revolves around the idea that there is something wrong with the house on 124 Bluestone Road. We feel the presence of something, something that bothers all the residents of the house, Sethe and Denver, because of which they cannot function normally. We do not find out the whole story at the beginning, but we become familiar with it as we read the novel.

Sethe, an African American slave, lived on a farm called Sweet Home. There she was the only female slave, and because other male slaves were "gentlemen," they allowed her to choose a partner among them. She chooses Halle and has four children with him. Until the schoolteacher arrives, slaves are treated better than those on other farms. Yet, after Mr. Garner dies, Mrs. Garner invites the schoolteacher to come and help her run the place. After his arrival, things become more complicated, which culminates in an incident between Sethe and the schoolteacher's nephews. After that incident she tells her mistress, Mrs. Garner, what happened and for that she gets whipped:

> After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Then boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one

> open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still. (Morrison 17)

The whipping incident is the crucial one; because of it she decides to escape although she is already pregnant with her second daughter Denver. She decides that she does not want to take the humiliation any more so she takes her destiny into her own hands. She sees that Mr. Garner is dead, and Mrs. Garner is very sick, and realizes that if both of them died, the farm would become a terrible place. When she comes to Baby Suggs' house she thinks that she is safe. Yet, after about a month of living in the house 124, the schoolteacher finds her and as a result she kills her daughter, and tries to kill Denver, her two sons, and herself. She does not think that she did something wrong because she experienced the ruthless actions of slavery, and does not want her children to experience the same:

> That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. (Morrison 251)

Sethe, as well as Paul D, one of the male slaves on Sweet Home, is shattered by this ruthless act of slavery in a way that she loses her "self". She becomes confused and does not know who she is because slavery took everything from her; it completely deprived her of her identity and self-confidence.

Even before the killing, Sethe and other runaway slaves were in a state of "double-consciousness," experiencing a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (DuBois 1687-1688). Every slave that comes to freedom has the need to put things that

had happened to him or her behind. They all feel the "twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois 1688). When Sethe comes to the house 124, she leaves her past behind and starts to enjoy her new life. Although she tries to leave things in the past and forget them, Morrison's non-chronological narrative technique leads us to believe that past has a great importance. According to Bowers, "The constant circling of the narrative in *Beloved* form present to past and back again enacts the West African perspective and reinforces the importance of the past for both the individual and collective psyche" (212). However, Sethe's luck is of short duration. What she did was an act that haunts her from that day on, and influences everyone around her – Baby Suggs, Denver, her two sons, and even Paul D., even though all of them try to forget things which happened to them during slavery. This begs the question: can they really forget and put these experiences behind? Is it possible to forget and leave behind the trauma caused by slavery?

Beloved, the killed daughter of Sethe, represents a response to these questions. At one point in the novel Sethe states:

> If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world.… Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on…. And you think it's you thinking it up.… But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. (Morrison 43)

This statement reveals that horrible things done in the past are always here and that we cannot run from them even though we want to. Even if we try to ignore them, they will always be present in one way or another.

Trauma is something that stays with people until the time they deal with it. According to Jeskova, "The vivid images and fragments of memory which recur have 'a life of their own' because they invade the survivor's present, and they overpower the survivor's will" (20). Because of that, the trauma of killing her own baby follows Sethe and leaves her unable to establish her own identity – her own "self". In the beginning of the novel we can see how the characters are traumatized by something and that they are repressing it. From the start we are introduced to the presence of a ghost – something from the past. Before Paul D comes, Sethe's trauma is only in her head – she does not talk about it. However, when Paul D comes, he, who also has his own suffering and traumas, invites her to talk about her misery and pain, and because of that, the ghost, Beloved, finally takes form. The ghost of Beloved is not something that is being avoided but, on the contrary, becomes apparent and vividly present in Sethe's home. As Jeskova explains, "because Beloved straddles both categories of real and unreal, it is difficult to pinpoint who she is and what she represents" (19).

One of the interpretations of Beloved can be that she is Sethe's consciousness, or even a symbol of a past event which Sethe and Paul D try to repress but it lingers there: "The baby girl, who has come again eighteen years later, is the actual characterization of Sethe's psychological torments. She embodies Sethe's "quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness" (Bell, qtd. in Khaleghi 478). Beloved personifies Sethe's struggle for identity. In one part Sethe says how Beloved is hers and "if the dissociated trauma is 'her' face, but her face is also 'mine', it means that Sethe is trying to 'join' her severed parts back into her consciousness" (Jeskova 24). We see how Sethe and Beloved are actually one and the same – Beloved is Sethe's trauma with which Sethe has to find peace with in order to create her identity and her "self". It is also evident in parts where we can see how the mood in the house changes. When Beloved seems happy, Sethe is also happy. Yet, later, when Beloved becomes angrier, we see how Sethe is more depressed and how she feels worse. Beloved, or her past,

drains her out and because of that she cannot recuperate. To become whole and to build one's own identity one must become one with one's past. On the contrary, Sethe does not deal with her past, because of which it is still very much present in her life and mind.

According to Khalehi, "[a]t the heart of *Beloved* are Denver's and Sethe's journeys toward self-definition and a newly constructed sense of self. Beloved does act as a catalyst for the liberation of Sethe and Denver from their years of isolation and of incomplete or distorted identity" (477). At one point Sethe becomes so involved with Beloved that she completely ignores her present life: "Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day" (Morrison 70). This shows that our past and traumas can occupy us so severely that if we do not notice that on time we could lose our connection to reality and become pulled into our internal abyss so severely that we cannot go back. That is the case with Sethe. She and Beloved form a unity and, at one point, even exclude Denver from it. Where there were three girls, now there are two: "But once Sethe had seen the scar . . . once Sethe saw it, fingered it and closed her eyes for a long time, the two of them cut Denver out of the games" (Morrison 239). There were always only two of them: "I am Beloved and she is mine" (Morrison 210), "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine" (Morrison 200). That event brings Denver to consciousness and forces her to break her boundaries and go outside her yard. Denver comes out and asks for help, something which Sethe is too proud to do. Because of that act, Sethe also is saved, because the community recognizes how severe the situation is and they help to banish the ghost. They re-accept Sethe into the community, which gives her the strength to start letting go of the past and to make peace with it.

Beloved, as a character who forces people to deal with the past, also influences Paul D. Although he is the one who, we think, drives the ghost away and has the control over the situation, we see how he too has his own problems and traumas. When Beloved forces him to sleep with her, she opens his tobacco tin: "With his tobacco tin open, he is forced to face his

past, finally able to free himself and move on towards the future" (Baynar 3). Before that event occurs, we know only that he is one of the men from Sweet Home, but later we become acquainted with his own traumas and his struggle for identity. He does not stay long at any place because, as he says, the slave could not afford himself/herself to have feelings toward someone or something because it could easily be taken from them. However, after he faces his problems, he becomes able to make peace with himself, and he proves strong enough to go back to Sethe and help her deal with her trauma and loss. As Amy Denver explains: "Can't nothing heal without pain" (Morrison 78).

Beloved serves as a tool to remind both Sethe and Paul D of their past deeds and events with which they have to confront. According to Barnett, "Despite the characters' efforts to diffuse the power of the past, the ghost baby, like the traumatic nightmare, intrudes on the present, forcing Sethe and Paul D to remember what they have tried unsuccessfully to forget" (qtd. in Khaleghi 478). Beloved is there to remind them that they have to confront the traumatic experiences from their past and not to run from them. In order to create their "self," they need to embrace the past and learn to live with it because it is a part of their lives. As Khaleghi confirms, "Their history haunts them until they finally reconstruct the pieces of themselves and, in the process, embrace love" (473).

That is why Baby Suggs held her sermons. She tried to help people to deal with their past: "The Clearing was a place in which the community could go and work through past experiences with the help of everyone, a place to deal with the past in order to love in the present and plan for the future" (Baynar 3). Baby Suggs believed that even though white people had tried to ruin black people, now that black people were free, they needed to learn how to accept themselves and others. She believed that in order to love another human being they first had to learn how to love themselves:

> What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavings instead. No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. (Morrison 88)

It is only with our respect, love, and acceptance of ourselves that we can surpass traumas that happen in our life. Slavery is no different. It has been a problem for centuries, where black people were treated as different and inferior human beings. They were dehumanized and treated like animals. That left a very negative impact on their psyche. In order to bridge this trauma it was very important to accept it and learn to live with it, but not to lose one's "self" along the way.

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U.S. Constitution. Art. / Amend. XIII, Sec. 1.