

The Reconstruction of African American History in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), her fifth novel, is well known as her very first novel focusing on slavery and its aftermath. While a former slave woman, Sethe, the protagonist of *Beloved*, attempts to conceal her past in her mind, she is deprived of her capacity to imagine, which prevents her from taking the next step. On the other hand, through her relationship with the other characters, we can see Sethe's change in *Beloved*. In this thesis, I shall investigate the relationship between Sethe and three remarkable characters in *Beloved*, and the ways in which Sethe talks about her past. From Sethe's different processes of facing her past, I analyze Morrison's attempt to reconsider African American history.

Chapter one examines the relationship between Sethe and Paul D, her colleague in slavery, in order to reveal how Sethe comes to be able to share her past with him. Since Sethe gains a new partner, Paul D, as her listener, and she can be a listener to him too, she recognizes the importance of sympathy with one's past experiences. By considering their communication, I argue that Morrison represents the importance of being able to move on from the past as Sethe and Paul D do, and the way in which this will eventually allow for a better future.

Chapter two presents a historical perspective on Sethe through her interaction with Beloved, who is described as Sethe's dead daughter. After considering the ambiguity of Beloved by dividing previous studies into three types, I observe Beloved's historical significance for Sethe. Beloved attempts to make Sethe a narrator of her past. Beloved's history involves Sethe's history, and overlaps with the general history of African Americans.

Chapter three concentrates on Sethe's interaction with Denver, her only living daughter, who is depicted as an independent woman. Denver can change by facing Sethe's past, and takes over the past of Sethe and reconstructs her relationship with the community. Also seeking the way to confront Sethe's past and move on, Denver represents the need to maintain a line of narrative by being a new form of mediator between the past and the present.

In conclusion, we have to focus on a great number of voices which have been hidden in forgotten African American history. Reconsidering the history in terms of individual pasts, Morrison tries to change the attitude that the painful past should be “disremembered” by means of a different process, and shows an approach to African American history including slavery.