BELOVED

Key Points

1. *Beloved* is a novel of fragments, and fragmented narratives, which makes it difficult to offer one cohesive reading of the novel.
2. It is easy to overlook the murder of the child, in spite of the fact it is present from the outset.
3. The novel is a different book for different people: there is such a richness of narrative, relationship, and history, that each reader can take a different reading of *Beloved* from the text.
4. *Beloved* engages with memory and a sense of loss. It asks what was lost in slavery, including: history, language, memory, family, culture, homeland and selfhood.
5. The novel is also concerned with melancholic heritage. For Morrison, it is integral that her community remembers the legacy of slavery.

Quotations

• 'I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing' *Beloved*, p. 248.
• 'It was not a story to pass on' *Beloved*, p. 323.
• 'By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss.' *Beloved*, p. 275.
• 'She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, just to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be in her mind ... Nothing. Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed towards water' *Beloved*, p. 6.
• 'Every day she saw the dawn, but never acknowledged or remarked its colour. There was something wrong with that. It was as though one day she saw red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips, and that was the last of it' *Beloved*, p. 39.
• 'She will forego the most violent sunsets, stars as fat as dinner plates, and all the blood of autumn and settle for the palest yellow if it comes from her Beloved' *Beloved*, p. 143.

Suggestions for Further Reading


In Beloved, Toni Morrison expresses the dislocations and violence of slavery through disruptions in language. The novel tells the 'unspeakable' story of Sethe, a slave mother whose act of infanticide leaves a gap in family narrative; bars her surviving daughter, Denver, from language use; and hinders her own ability to speak. Morrison's inclusion of voices previously left out of historical and literary narratives disturbs the language of the novel itself. The Africans piled on the slave ships, the preverbal child who comes back in the shape of the ghost Beloved, and a nursing mother who insists on the primacy of bodily connection: the expression of these subjects' heretofore unspoken experiences and desires distorts discursive structures, especially the demarcations that support normative language. Morrison's textual practice challenges Lacan's assumptions about language and language users, and her depiction of a social order that performs some of the functions of mothering challenges his vision of a paternal symbolic order based on a repudiation of maternal connection.

Web Links

• Toni Morrison's [Nobel Prize page](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/morrison-facts.html)