

APPENDIX

A. Short Summary of *Beloved*

In 1873, Sethe and her daughter Denver live in 124, a house in a rural area close to Cincinnati. They are ostracized from the community for Sethe's past and her pride. Eighteen years have passed since she escaped from slavery at a farm called Sweet Home. Sweet Home was run by a cruel man known as schoolteacher, who allowed his nephews to brutalize Sethe while he took notes for his scientific studies of blacks. Sethe fled, although she was pregnant, delivering the child along the way with help from a white woman named Amy. Sethe's husband, who was supposed to accompany her, disappeared. After her escape to Cincinnati with her four children, Sethe enjoyed only twenty-eight days of freedom before she was tracked down by her old master. Rather than allow her children to be returned to slavery, she attempted to kill all of them, succeeding only in killing the baby girl. Rejected then by her master, who saw she was no longer fit to serve, Sethe was also saved from hanging and was released to raise her remaining three children at 124. The ghost of the dead baby began to haunt the house. The two sons, Howard and Buglar, left after having particularly frightening encounters with the ghost. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, died a broken woman. Baby Suggs had been a great positive force in Cincinnati's black community, regarded by many as an inspiring holy woman. After what happened to Sethe, she gave up her preaching and retired to bed, asking only for scraps of color. Years after her death, Denver and Sethe continue to live in the house alone. Sethe works as a cook, and

Denver spends her days alone. Denver is terribly lonely but is also afraid to leave the yard even though she is eighteen years old.

In 1873, two visitors come to 124. The first is Paul D, a man who was a slave with Sethe back at Sweet Home. Paul D, like Sethe, is haunted by the pain of the past. He witnessed and suffered unspeakable atrocities before the end of the Civil War brought him his freedom, and he has survived by not allowing himself to have strong feelings for anything or anyone. He has particularly dark memories of time spent in a prison for blacks, where he worked in a chain gang by day and was kept in a box in the ground at night.

The second visitor is a girl named Beloved. It gradually becomes clear that she is the ghost of the dead baby come back to life, at the age that the baby would have been had it lived. Awkward, unable to speak like an adult, and dressed in strange clothes, Beloved seems vulnerable at first but proves to be powerful and malicious. Her purposes initially seem benign and are never fully understood, but by the end of the novel her presence is deeply destructive for the living people of 124.

Paul D becomes Sethe's lover, staying for a time despite friction between him and the two young girls. Beloved despises him, and she tries to divide Sethe from Paul D. Paul D eventually leaves when he learns that Sethe murdered her own child. Sethe, on discovering Beloved's identity, believes she has been given a second chance. She tries to make amends for the past, but the girl's needs are devouring. The ghost does not forgive Sethe for her actions. Beloved settles into

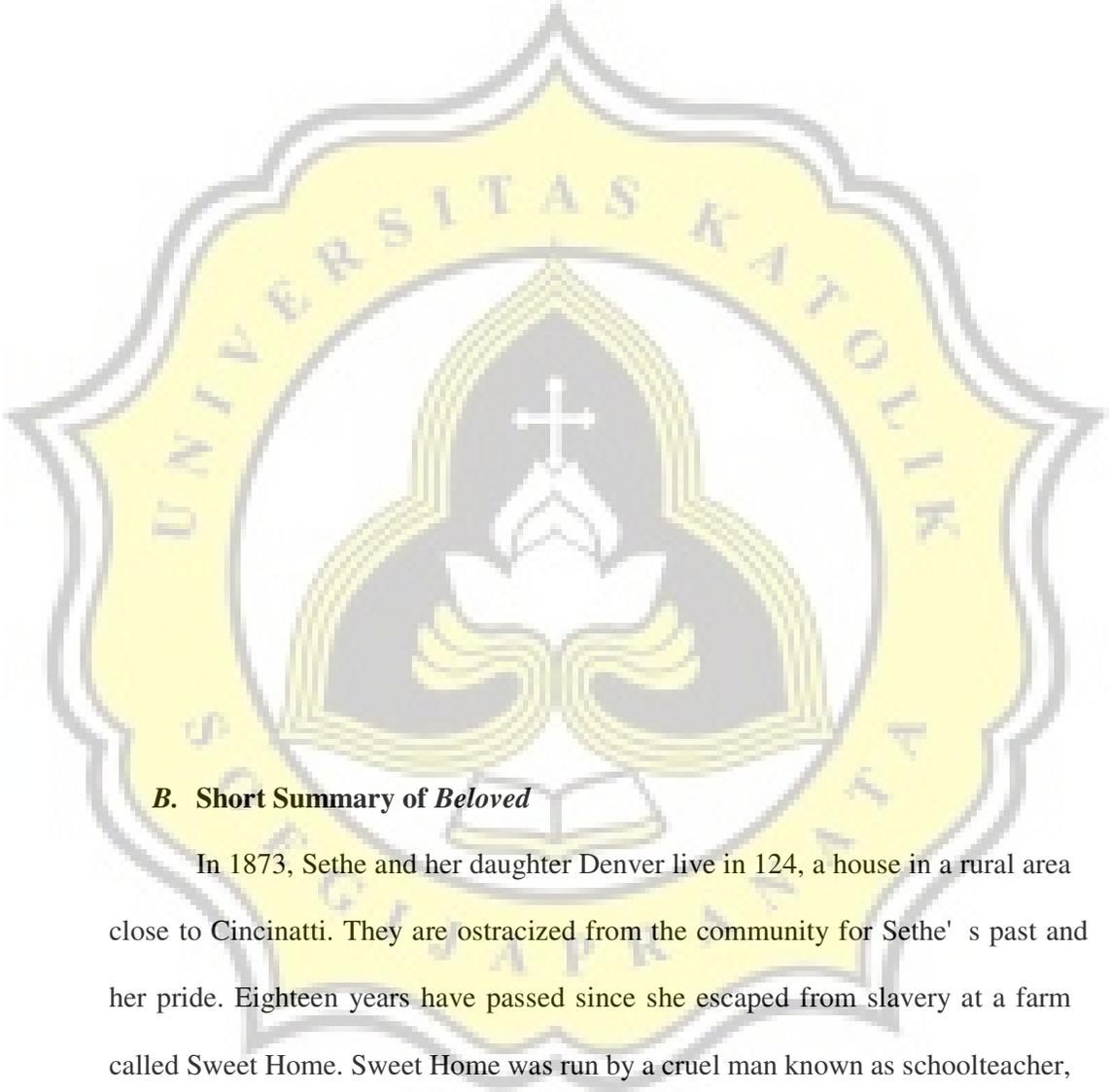
the house like a parasite, growing ever stronger as Sethe grows weaker. Sethe' s sanity begins to unravel, and Beloved only grows more demanding. Denver is forced to go to the community for help.

A group of women, led by Ella, a former agent of the Underground Railroad, go to 124 to exorcise Beloved' s ghost. The ghost is forced to leave, but Sethe' s spirit has been nearly broken. Paul D returns to her, vowing to help Sethe heal herself. Denver, Paul D, and Sethe will build a new life, one in which they learn to deal with their painful past while focusing on the future.

Beloved is a haunting and dark novel, full of gothic elements and acts of terrible violence. The ghost represents the power of the legacy of slavery, which continues to trouble Sethe eighteen years after she won her freedom. Beloved is the spirit of the dead baby returned but she is also an embodiment of all suffering under slavery; her memory extends back to the slave ships that first carried blacks to the Americas. The question of the rightness of Sethe' s terrible act is a difficult one—moreover, it is a question that the novel does not attempt to answer in a definitive way. Morrison is more concerned that we understand why Sethe did what she did, as well as the ways that her decision has haunted her ever since. The novel effectively conveys the brutality and dehumanization that occurred under slavery, putting Sethe' s act in context without necessarily condemning it or excusing it.

The structure is fragmentary, closely tied to the consciousness of each character and weaving suddenly between past and future. More time is spent describing past events than the action of the current moment, reinforcing the idea of the past lingering and shaping life in the present. The novel is often repetitive, telling the same stories of the past again and again, giving more information with each repetition. All of the characters

of the novel, former slaves and the children of former slaves, suffer a troubled relationship to their own past. Their relationships to their past often make it impossible for them to live for the present or plan for the future, and slavery has often damaged the ways that they experience love and think about their own worth as human beings.



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