

Three Stages in the Construction of Sethe's Subjectivity in *Beloved*

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Abstract: *Beloved* is the work of a famous American writer-Toni Morrison, which told us how a black female slave named Sethe who was tangled by her dead daughter killed by her. By examining the construction of female black slaves' subjectivity construction, this passage proposed there are three stages in Sethe's subjectivity construction. She firstly experienced lots of oppressions which pushed the forming of her self-consciousness. Then she took actions to fight against the so-called destiny and gained the subjectivity. Three stages not only show the consciousness-production of Sethe, but also reveal the history-the miserable sufferings of black slaves.

Keywords: *Self-consciousness, Subjectivity, Beloved*

Our subjectivity is not natural, inevitable or eternal; on the contrary, it is produced and reproduced in and by specific power relations. (Richard 610) The construction of one's subjectivity is a process influenced by many factors which functions in a sequential way or relation. Sethe's subjectivity was missing at first. As there forms a historical environment that slaves accepted their identity as a slave. But after experiencing slaveholder's oppression, she gradually constructed her subjectivity through three stages.

1. The First Stage: Experiencing Oppression

Feminism emphasizes multifaceted struggles on against white racism, against economic domination and exploitation, against gender discrimination between blacks and whites. (Zhang Zhongzai 464) However, Sethe, as a female slave, experienced at least two kinds of oppressions.

The first oppression came from the Slavery-racism. Under the Slavery, all the slaves are just properties of the owner. They are sold or exchanged just as merchandises without any autonomy. All the instructions must be obeyed. Basically, there is seldom owners those treat them as people. Their life is mastered by owners totally. Therefore, as a slave, Sethe had to work for her owner day and night. Heavy work with bad treatments and life conditions, Sethe is compelled to endure both physical and mental torments.

The second oppression originated from her gender. Compared with men, female slave had to undergo the torture of birth except bearing the pain of heavy work. What's more, they are still forced to work even though they are pregnant. However, there is something even more unbearable. Those "mothers" can only give birth to kids without the opportunity to bring them up. Because babies belong to those slave owners, too. Therefore, the pregnancy of a slave matters a lot to the owners. This is either an increase in the labor force or a new income as they can sold them for other things. Under this circumstance, female slaves descend to reproductive machines. They must have to handle the heavy work, put up with the pain of pregnancy and the separation of their own babies.

These are just what Sethe had experienced. Slavery and unaffectionate owners resemble two heavy stones weighing upon their backs. Oppressed by Slavery and owner both physically and mentally, she lived a rough life, indeed. There is none who doesn't eager to end this kind of life.

2. The Second Stage: Forming Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness is the self-introspection consciousness of human beings, and the consciousness of their own attributes, personality, state, activities and the relationship between themselves and the outside world, that is, the consciousness of taking oneself as the object.

Although every slave is yearning for putting an end on slaved life, most of them have no other choices as escaping only means freedom but not adequate food and clothing. Their skin color also makes them easily identified. On this occasion, most of them just accept the seemingly predetermined fate. Coupled with the small possibility of their free activities and the position of being exploited, enslaved and dominated, they lose part of the nature of the subject. The activity function of the subject is faceted and deformed, and the subject consciousness can only exist in a potential form. As time passes, they tend to be numb and to be feelingless. They are goods at the mercy of others without self-consciousness. Maybe that's one factor of the long-lasting Slavery.

However, Sethe made a change. Under so much oppressions, she didn't want to stand it anymore. She started to have the consciousness of her own attributes and refused to be a doll. She made attempts to decline to leave her own baby and grasp the right back from the hands of owner. She rejected the slaved life. She escaped from the Sweet House. Therefore, she had freedom, which means no restrictions to her activities. Thus, her self-consciousness is forming.

3. The Third Stage: Fighting Against Destiny

On her way of escaping, Sethe and her daughter confronted the pursue of the slave owner. If they were captured back, her daughter must have to undergo the similar miserable life like her. Considering that, she made an incredible decision.

She killed her little daughter.

Sethe loves her daughter. There is hardly a mother who doesn't love her child. It is really an inner torment to choose in such a dilemma. It can be compared to the moon shoot to kill own baby in person. Anxiety. Desperation. Perplexity. Hesitation. Reluctance. Anguish... All emotions intertwined in her mind. Her mental sufferings are beyond our imagination. On the way to produce our subjectivity, one has to experience a hard process.

Therefore, her infanticide is a crucial turning point. Putting aside behavioral correctness, she did change Beloved's destiny of being slaved. It is an announcement to declare the war to the Slavery. In fact, the one she killed is not only Beloved, but also can be seen as her objectivity. It means that she also killed part of herself. Sethe's objectivity is more likely an image of a female black slave who is obedient to her owner and is tortured by Slavery. However, now, unlike other slaves, she did not just accept the slaved destiny and choose not to submit to the owner, to the Slavery. She realized that one's life ought to be mastered in one's own hands. One person is an individual organism possessing the agency towards human activity. They are not merchandise, not one's properties, not working machines. They belong to themselves. They have the dominant right of their own activity. Considering her behavior, it can be deemed as an production of her subjectivity.

4. Conclusion

Tortured by so many oppressions, Sethe gradually formed her self-consciousness and the rose like lions after slumber to fight against the destiny and Slavery. It is a process. Oppressions stimulate the forming of her self-consciousness, and based on which she improved her self-consciousness to gain her own subjectivity.

However, in addition to Sethe's awareness to fight for own freedom, what else we should attach great importance to is Slavery itself, an item with historical significance. According to Patricia Waugh, those who have been excluded from the constitution of that so-called "universal subject"-whether for reasons of gender, class, race, sexuality-are unlikely to revel in the "jouissance "of its disintegration. (Patricia Waugh 565) Therefore, we should not only know the impact of Slavery, but also have the awareness to help blacks reproduce their identity after the disintegration of Slavery.

Slavery is the Pandora's box. Although the above content only analyzes Sethe's sufferings, any suffering of an individual black in slavery is actually that of the Black as a race. Under the torments of Slavery, countless black slaves were sold, oppressed, exploited and abused. The number of those black slaves, who lost their love, freedom, families, subjectivity and even lives, is out of count. What's worse. Even though the Slavery had been put an end, its impact on black people was profound. Although the end of slavery signals the beginning of a "post" colonial period for African Americans, their status continues to be defined by slavery's colonial ideologies. (Mary Jane,181) Even today, they are discriminated with low status by the Whites. Therefore, the heavy disasters Slavery bring to the black

slaves are beyond all doubt. An end cannot be a literal end but an end both literally and realistically. No matter who we are, we should reconstruct the real history and face up to it. Then, blacks can be assisted to get mental, spiritual freedom to eliminate those injuries put upon them.

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