Beloved: Denver Character Analysis

“I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. Romans 9: 25” (Morrison 2).

In 1987, Noble Prize winner Toni Morrison wrote the novel “Beloved”, which told of a profound and shattering story that carries the weight of history. In his novel, Morrison used characters that held a lot of layers- meaning their face value dynamic was not completely accurate, as flashbacks and hidden details reveal more and more about the upbringing and growth of every character in his novel. One specific character in his novel-Denver- is developed through key life circumstances that originally defined her as being the ‘charmed’ child who was emotionally stunted, later becoming the independent figure in her household through her dynamic growth shifts, thus allowing her to become a direct victim of conflict, but also the source of light and the solution to that same turmoil.

Denver was born, “…a foot rose from the river bed and kicked the bottom of the boat”(Morrison 99). Sethe, the protagonist of the story, was pregnant with Denver and was also running away from Sweet Home, a slave plantation in Kentucky. After she escaped, she was lucky enough to be found by Amy Denver, a white girl who cared for her and helped her escape to Ohio. As Sethe and Amy were about to cross the Ohio River, Sethe went into labor, and Denver was born in a boat on the river. Once Denver was born, Sethe wanted people to know who brought her daughter into the world, naming her Denver: “That’s pretty. Denver. Real pretty” (Morrison 100). This marks the history leading up to the existence of this character. By writing a full overview of Denver’s life from top to bottom, Morrison was then able to focus her growth and development as a direct consequence of the action and conflict, brought about by Beloved. Denver is seen very prominent again in the novel when she is almost killed, “Sethe traded the living baby for the dead one” (Morrison 179). The schoolteacher, nephew of the plantation owners, had come back to collect Sethe and her children, but since Sethe did not want her children to go through what she had as a slave, she attempts to murder them. Sethe slit the throat of her oldest daughter, and Denver would have been next, but Stamp Paid, a figure of salvation and companion of Baby Suggs (Sethe’s mother), managed to stop Sethe on time. Her brothers, Howard and Buglar in turn ran away, leaving Denver to grow up alone. This inclines her to spend her time alone in what she calls ‘Emerald Closet’- a place closed in within boxwood bushes. Denver faces loneliness and isolation from this, saying “I can’t no more. I can’t no more. I can’t live here. I don’t know where to go or what to do, but I can’t live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don’t like me. Girls don’t either (Morrison 17). All of her life, Denver has been isolated beyond the world of 124 Bluestone Road, affecting both her psychological and emotional state and growth. Her development has been stunted, thus causing her to act much younger than her actual age. At this point in the novel, Morrison has made her out to be an extremely fragile character, not defined by herself, but instead her dependence on her mother, her sister’s ghost, and later her sister’s ‘reincarnation’ back into physical form. Due to this high level of dependence on other characters, Denver started the novel very tentative- shy, introspective, and easily paralyzed by fear. When Paul D comes in and sparks Sethe’s interest, Denver is very cruel to him, as she does not want him ‘taking away’ the only security she has. She feels lonely and scared because everyone avoids her because her mother tried to murder her too, and she often questions if her mother will try again.

Following up on this idea, people tend to fear Denver and her family because of their disturbing past. Denver even tried to attend school at Lady Jones'-"She had almost a whole year of company of her peers and along with them learned to spell and count" (Morrison 120). Denver had been going to Lady Jones' school for nearly a year when the embarrassment of her life wore on Denver too harshly, causing her to never go back-"It was Nelson Lord…who asked her the question about her mother – and all the rest of those afternoons held, out of reach forever" (Morrison 121). Denver later asked Sethe about her imprisoned time, and went deaf the second before she heard the answer. Her deaf then became alleviated by the sound of her sister, Beloved's, ghost climbing the stairs. This marks the first time the baby had manifested itself. After that, the ghost became spiteful, angry, and abusive. Denver, in the novel, has immense contact with the supernatural. She even takes care of Beloved when she comes back in physical form- "Upstairs Beloved was dancing…Denver sat on the bed smiling and providing the music. She had never seen Beloved this happy. She has seem her pouty lips open wide with the pleasure of sugar or some piece of news Denver gave her" (Morrison 87). Denver is delighted by the sight of her previously absent sister happy again. Denver feels as though there is finally another person in her life besides her mother. After living this long in a life of isolation, Denver was then willing to do whatever it took to maintain another person in her life, because she herself, was not enough to satisfy her fragile life purpose.

When Morrison shifted the blatant actions of Beloved, this marks the beginning of the journey to a transformed Denver. The baby begins to escalate its malevolence towards Sethe, seeking revenge for murder. Denver sees Beloved choke Sethe- "I fixed it, didn't I? Didn't I fix her neck? After you choked her neck. I kissed her neck. I didn't choke it. The circle of iron choked it" (Morrison 119). Denver became certain that Baby Suggs' ghost had nothing to do with it, that is was actually Beloved. This accusation on Denver's part shows how disturbed she had actually became- now having conflicting issues with the two people she needed the most. Due to this division, Denver then had to begin to establish a sense of purpose, not in Sethe's need to rationalize her past decisions, nor in Beloved's manipulative and abusive tactics, but instead in her own reality and character. Denver's relationship with Beloved is then seen here beginning to evolve because she is starting to understand Beloved's abusive feelings toward Sethe. Denver then becomes dynamic because she steps out of her comfort zone, leaving the security of her house. She then is filled with a sense of duty, which allows her to have a purpose- to beg Lady Jones for a job- "I want work, Miss Lady…I can't do anything, but I would learn it for you if you have a little extra food. My mama doesn't feel good" (Morrison 292). Denver wants to find work to provide support for her family- especially Sethe, who is being abused, starved, and killed by Beloved. This marks her most apparent transition into the adult role at 124. Denver sees Paul D in town later- "Paul D licked his lips. 'Well, if you want my opinion-' I don't- I have my own, she says. ' You grown', he said. 'Yes, sir" (Morrison 314-315). Denver develops courage in herself and in turn goes out into the community to form relationships and become self-involved. She speaks with Paul D for the last time, and shows just how much she had grown into her own person. This is the last Morrison shows of Denver, because then she leaves the scene to move forward towards her future, that of which is assumed to be more civil and sincere than her past. This symbolizes her sense of self, and her ability to finally muster the courage to move on from her past. This sharply contrasts with the beginning exposure to her characters showing that in the novel, "Beloved", Denver is a dynamic character, maturing at most every obstacle thrown to her.

Denver gets a lot of the blunt trauma in the novel, so it is almost impossible to not feel some form of sympathy towards her, but even that does not discourage her, for she provides a light to

the conflict. Despite her family troubles, or her own troubles at best, she is constantly hyper aware of what others need before herself. When her mother was being destroyed by Beloved, she went out into the town with the initiative of getting more food and money to help Sethe. In the novel, Denver serves as a symbol of hope- not only to other characters in the novel, but in the grand scheme of life as well. Yes, she gives the extra initiative to save her mother, but she also serves as a general reminder that despite the pain and despair of the world, no one is bound to their current life position. In the novel, Denver was shown as a companion to her sister, and a savior to her mother. In a book full of turmoil, pain, and suffering, she is the calmness to the storm- providing a sense of light outside the dark fury of madness. Denver's character herself serves as a reminder that all will go through some sort of tribulation in their existence- its inevitable, but anyone cane overcome despite the challenges and find purpose in their existence and in the aid of others. Although Denver was in all reality a character on a page who showed dynamism through the page turns, she served a greater meaning to the novel as a whole, being the most encouraging and successful example of growth and development, a light within the conflict.

Toni Morrison's, "Beloved" shows how one specific character in his novel-Denver- is developed through key life circumstances that originally defined her as an emotionally stunted survivor, later becoming the independent figure in her household through her dynamic growth shifts, thus allowing her to become a direct victim of conflict, but also the source of light to the turmoil, nameless beyond ages. There is something special about "Beloved", perhaps the play on human vice and folly, the subconscious mind, or the expression of different voices- but within it all it stresses the reality of life experience. Filled with bitter poetry and suspense as taut as a rope, "Beloved" stares unflinchingly into the abyss of slavery, transforming history into the powerful story of Sethe.