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More Than Just a House

In Toni Morrison’s, *Beloved*, history is something than cannot be escaped. Due to the severity of 124’s negative presence, the influence the House has on the characters is extremely versatile. As it eventually supports the theme of the importance of community, 124 makes known the conflicts endured by each character throughout the novel by displaying its painstaking attributes.

Although it is known that 124 is not a pleasant place to live, to say the least, the House itself comes with a great deal of history behind its presence and actions it takes. As conflicts are endured by the characters throughout the novel, much of those conflicts, both internal and external, can be traced back to an ultimate reasoning that the house uses as its motive. “So Sethe and the girl Denver did what they could…. For they understood the source of outrage as well as they knew the source of light.” Although several family members fled from the terrors that 124 presented, Sethe decided to take on what it had to bring by staying there with her daughter Denver and facing the constant ripping of her conciounce. The overcoming of what the house had to bring served as reconciliation to her guilty past, which the house fed off of. “Who would have thought that a little old baby could harbor so much rage…? Not only did she have to live out her years in a house palsied by the baby’s fury at having its throat cut….” As the house makes its motives known, the past makes its way into the lives of Sethe, Denver, and several other characters that make their way into its presence. The only thing that makes Sethe able to bare the dug up history that haunts her is the fact that she killed her baby for the better, an internal conflict that becomes more outwardly expressed further on in the novel.

As thoughts of the past present themselves in matters outside 124, like Paul D arriving, new conflicts arise as relationships in the House grow. The internal conflicts faced by Paul D, Sethe, and Denver are fueled by the House itself.

Although they try to make light of the past through their reunion, Sethe and Paul D are faced with challenges that 124 only makes harder through the arrival of Beloved. Before the physical arrival of Beloved, Paul D has a physical face off with her spirit that is controlled through the House. “… he bashed it about, wrecking everything, screaming back at the screaming house. ‘You want to fight, come on! God damn it! She got enough without you.” This lash back of Paul D is motivated by frustration, because just as he was beginning to make a physical connection with Sethe by condoling her emotional unstableness, the House made its overwhelming presence known. The spirit of the House that lashes out is that of the baby who was murdered by Sethe, so as the House sees a connection to her being made, the House feels it must come to end. Beloved is driven to make her way back to Sethe, and nothing can stop her. “… it will be there waiting for you…. Even though it’s all over- over and done with- it’s going to always be there waiting for you.” Although Sethe was not speaking in terms of the House when she was talking to Denver about memories of the past, the fact that she emphasized that the past will always be there waiting for you shows that she is saying this with conviction to Denver partly because of the House that is overtaking her. As Beloved arrives to 124 physically broken, it is through Sethe that she satisfies her goal of regaining life. When the prominence of Beloved in the house beings to become overwhelming, Paul D decides that it is all too much for him to handle. “He believed he was having house-fits, the glassy anger men sometimes feel when a woman’s house begins to bind them. But always he associated the house-fit with the woman in it.” Beloved’s presence makes living in 124 all the more unbearable, not only for Sethe but also for Paul D. As Paul D begins to feel his actions being manipulated by an outside force, he attributes his leaving of 124 back to the House.

With Denver being her only company besides Beloved, Sethe begins to grow very weak. Beloved and her neediness, that is always satisfied by Sethe, begins to make the walls cave in around Sethe which eventually drives Denver to take matters in to her own hands.

When Denver is eventually driven to reach out to the community around her, it has a positive impact on the life in 124. As conditions continueinly worsen in terms of living and the physical state of Sethe, Denver takes heed of the notice when Beloved begins to become the head of the household. “In any case she substituted a snarl or a tooth-suck for a waving poker around and 124 was quiet.” The houses actions now revolve around Beloved and her actions. Although Beloved was once a guest in the House, she now not only rules Sethe’s actions, but can make the house quiet with a single complaint. Knowing something must be done to change the state of 124, Denver is forced outside of her comfort zone. “… she stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch.” Denver has not stepped outside of the premise of her house in over a decade; however, her decision to do so is driven by the downfall of her mother. Since she made a selfless decision by going out and offering work for food, and noticing people of the troubles going on at 124, the conditions at the House make a drastic turn around soon after. “But when Paul D sees the ancient dog… he is certain 124 is clear of her. But he opens the door to the cold house halfway expecting to hear her.” The conditions of the House have been made clear of Beloved by the solitude of the community around 124. The House and the dreaded solitude it represented is supported through the community that came together after Denver’s plea for help. After the clearing of Beloved and a better presence overall, Paul D expects to find an old, anxiety-filled environment when he opens the door, instead, he finds himself able to embrace a life with Sethe and Denver.

Although the House creates a painstaking environment for everyone that resides in it, 124 also serves to show the importance of leaving things in the past and venturing out into the future. As history controls the motives for the House and its actions, stepping outside a comfort zone was proven to make things better. The House made its evil desires known through the running away of Sethe’s boys, venturing off of Paul D, Beloved’s unhealthy presence, and Sethe’s deterioration. However, the House also represented a positive outcome in the end when a feeling of solidity and comfort was felt by all of them at 124.