

Text 1: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Part 3 Chapter 26

"Then the mood changed and the arguments began. Slowly at first. A complaint from Beloved, an apology from Sethe. A reduction of pleasure at some special effort the older woman made. Wasn't it too cold to stay outside? Beloved gave a look that said, So what? Was it past bedtime, the light no good for sewing? Beloved didn't move; said, "Do it," and Sethe complied. She took the best of everything—first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair, and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children, waving away flies in grape arbors, crawling on her knees to a lean-to. None of which made the impression it was supposed to. Beloved accused her of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her. She said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her? And **Sethe cried, saying she never did, or meant to—that she had to get them out, away, that she had the milk all the time and had the money too for the stone but not enough. That her plan was always that they would all be together on the other side, forever.** Beloved wasn't interested. She said when she cried there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. That she had nothing to eat. Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light. Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. **That she would trade places any day.** Give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back just one of Beloved's tears. Did she know it hurt her when mosquitoes bit her baby? That to leave her on the ground to run into the big house drove her crazy? That before leaving Sweet Home Beloved slept every night on her chest or curled on her back? Beloved denied it. Sethe never came to her, never said a word to her, never smiled and worst of all never waved goodbye or even looked her way before running away from her. *Parallelism*

When once or twice Sethe tried to assert herself—be the unquestioned mother whose word was law and who knew what was best—Beloved slammed things, wiped the table clean of plates, threw salt on the floor, broke a windowpane.

She was not like them. She was wild game, and nobody said, Get on out of here, girl, and come back when you get some sense. Nobody said, You raise your hand to me and I will knock you into the middle of next week. Ax the trunk, the limb will die. Honor thy mother and father that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. I will wrap you round that doorknob, don't nobody work for you and God don't love ugly ways.

No, no. They mended the plates, swept the salt, and little by little it dawned on Denver that if Sethe didn't wake up one morning and pick up a knife, Beloved might."

Text 2: Ari Aster, *Hereditary* (2018), (dinner table) Scene 90 (?)

Quotes:

"A fourth chair divides Annie and Peter"

"But you can't take responsibility for anything, so now I can't accept. And I can't forgive. Because nobody admits what they've done!" / She sits down. A heavy silence."

"PETER: And what about *you*, mom? (long pause, then) / didn't want to take her...and *she* didn't want to go... So why was she there? / Annie looks at him. Incredulous. She is boiling with rage, but...this has also hit her somewhere deep. **She's desperately avoided facing this question since the accident.**"

Intro: introduce texts & global issues

Points (Don't know how long these are allowed to be):

1. Theme: mothers in gothic/horror media, relating to two texts -> global issue of family WRT individuals and societies. Motherhood the basis for survival of species, center of communities, celebrated/idealised as a virtue; but also uncomfortable, in many ways taboo, esp troubled mother-child relationships
2. Primal **terror** of personal responsibility guides some gothic literature (Dorian Gray, Frankenstein, Jekyll & Hyde): Expressed by proxy (with a visceral edge) through children. Responsibility for children taken to an extreme (Sethe) or rejected semi-consciously (Annie)

Beloved:

what King calls terror

the structure of

"It hurt her when mosquitoes bit her baby -"
~~extra~~ almost supernatural parent-child connection
inhibited, chaos & ~~se~~ desperation of the society

3. Sethe cries: "she had the milk all the time and had the money too for the stone but not enough": Fixation on stolen milk/incomplete gravestone as a motif, shows enslavement prevented her from being a good mother, fulfilling idealised role
4. Through slavery, maternal love prevented/inhibited: Sethe (unlike Baby Suggs, &c) allows herself to love her children enough that it harms them. (& whole community distanced, Denver's life disrupted, Sethe's own individuation prevented)
5. (link to Hereditary) Ideal family in her mind is made impossible by circumstances

Hereditary:

6. Unattainable idealised family situation: Leads Annie not to want to have her son (she admits earlier she never "felt like a mother," "I didn't, I was trying to save you," etc), avoid responsibility for Charlie's death in scene (Q); miniatures symbols of this
7. "I am your mother" - She doesn't behave in the role of a mother, is aggressive towards her children, but still wishes for the respect she feels motherhood affords her. (Division expressed visually in scene: empty chair + she places herself above them) *link to role of mother in family: responsibility of women*
8. & as in Beloved, guilt over not being able to provide for child partly leads to child's demise

Conclusion:

9. As the concept of virtue is fetishized in some gothic literature, so is the "virtue" of motherhood in these examples; diff degrees of sympathy *link to overanalysis of female morality*
10. Relate to global issue: Texts both explore the limits of maternal love, their role in the ecosystem of the family and the community. Beloved -> fragmenting of black families by slavery; Hereditary -> dysfunction of one family under supernatural influence

Extra points: