

Analyse the effects of the writing in the following passage, considering in what ways it is characteristic of Morrison's narrative methods and concerns.

The following passage is highly characteristic- even one might say a quintessential example- of many of Morrison's narrative methods and thematic concerns in *Beloved*. The passage has the reader bear witness to Stamp Paid's recollections and meditations on his feelings towards three of the key female characters in the novel and their situations: first Sethe in the present, then Denver and her birth and finally, what he calls a more painful memory, Baby Suggs and her death. Morrison's concerns explored by the passage are intrinsic to the novel's narrative: those of haunting, displacement, memory (both personal and collective), black community and generational trauma. It is appropriate that such varied and interwoven themes are presented through equally knotted methods: and here we see Morrison's characteristic use of a nonlinear, shifting narrative voice, enigmatic symbolism and her poetic, almost lyrical, prose. Because of Stamp Paid's varied foci and internalised thoughts on them, this passage seems to very much be in support of Wilson Harris' view that 'the imagination of the folk involved is a crucial inner recreation response to the violation of slavery.'

Morrison opens the passage by aligning the reader with Stamp Paid's centre of consciousness and immediately establishes a characteristic tone of uncertainty and equivocation in the character's self-reflections, 'Maybe he should have left it alone; maybe Sethe would have told him herself; maybe he was not the high minded Soldier of Christ he thought he was...' Clearly, the repeated 'maybes' convey his divergent and unsure thoughts but it also speaks more broadly to Morrison's postmodern take on objective truth and even hints at a suspicion of established institutions such as religion. 'High minded Soldier of Christ' ironically hints at the hypocritical moral standards of Christianity in late 19th Century America. It's important to remember as well, that The Church, like many of the country's establishments would be seen to a certain extent as a construction that is both white and patriarchal and this thus explains her implicit criticism thereof.

Within the same paragraph, Morrison characteristically segues into employing different generic conventions, drawing on supernatural gothic elements to describe the setting of 124, how it was 'worrying Sethe and Denver with a pack of haunts he could hear from the road.' In contrast to the mutable nature of truth aforementioned, this feature of the past invading the present is one immutable feature that runs throughout the novel. Indeed, it's noteworthy that the novel's first line is one of personification, '124 was spiteful.' The hauntings of 124 work in literal and symbolic ways. First, there is a very real (or 'magically real' within the logic of the novel) literal haunting which causes very real problems for the

characters, 'Even if Sethe could deal with the return of the spirit, Stamp didn't believe her daughter could.' However, there is a more interesting and more profound **symbolism** attached to the haunting, with Morrison's suggestion being that such a haunting is experienced by the black community en masse. This is the **notion of unresolved generational trauma** caused by slavery still affecting the present and is a development of the genre of the Southern Gothic. Of course, Morrison's writing style is too sophisticated to reference this concern explicitly but it is alluded to through the **narrative perspective** here and elsewhere in the novel. This extract represents a good example of the **interplay between personal and collective memory and rememory**, with Stamp's recollections of Denver's birth and Baby Suggs' death adding to earlier versions of these events from different perspectives. The **sheer number of characters mentioned by Morrison in the first paragraph- five-** is indicative of how interconnected they are. These fragmented individual memories can be seen as Morrison indicating how the black community's **fractured psyche needs healing** by coming together with their shared experiences. It is only through this, it is implied, that the traumatic ghost of the past can be truly buried.

Morrison's **gothic methods give way to a more lyrical style** as Stamp Paid's narrative shifts its focus towards Denver and Baby Suggs. Horace Walpole was referring to the gothic when he wrote that '**never is the reader's attention relaxed,**' but with Morrison's **characteristic** and jarring **shifts between perspective and genre**, this opinion is even more applicable to *Beloved*. This lyrical language is not conjured from a vacuum though. Rather, it comes right after another **feature of Morrison's prose style: shocking matter of fact references violence**. Morrison likes to pepper her novel with these in order to shake the reader from their reverie when immersed in the sometimes dream-like, often surreal descriptions of Sweet Home and 124 and here is no different. Stamp Paid reflects how his presence was necessary to prevent Sethe from spreading '**her baby brains on the planking.**' The visceral and casual nature of this description illustrates how tragically **commonplace death was for 19th Century slaves**. While Sethe is certainly ostracised by the black community for infanticide, death itself is unremarkable, this memory of Stamp Paid passing without comment from either him or any other narrative voice.

Immediately after this, Morrison brings in the **lyrical** in relation to Stamp Paid's memories of Baby Suggs, '**Deeper and more painful...scorching his soul like a silver dollar in a fool's pocket.**' The **simile** here is interesting, as it indicates that Stamp Paid carries with him something valuable but is too stupid to know how to use it. This again gives credence to the necessity as Morrison sees it of their being a **shared black community with a shared, dynamic memory; the memory of the individual being insufficient**. The past is presented as being cherished, Baby Suggs, **metaphorically** being the '**mountain to his sky**', his memory of her being the high point in Stamp Paid's life.

And yet, in the final **characteristic** concern of this passage, and perhaps the most tragic element of both it and the novel, Morrison presents the black community as being far from unified and their future uncertain. First, we have the **characterisation** of Sethe refusing to assimilate into the demands of the black community, marking herself as an outlier as she remains ‘**dry-eyed**’ at Baby Suggs’ death. Through Stamp Paid’s narrative, Morrison hints at why Sethe, despite her ‘**thick love**’ remains so stoic. Is it because on some level, Sethe, the independent, freed, sexual protagonist of the novel realises consciously or otherwise that the rites of Baby Suggs’ funeral risk being the same as all the other rites being enacted by the now freed slaves- simply echoes of their former slave owners’. It is significant that Sethe orders for the body to be taken ‘**to the Clearing,**’ an instruction which speaks to the notion of their being a new identity of religious togetherness, separate from existing white models, waiting to be forged by black people in the future; a future which Morrison believes must look to its past to find its own unique identity. It is also significant that this order of Sethe’s was ‘**prevented by some rule the whites had invented,**’ **characteristically** presenting the whites as arbitrary, unreasonable and controlling.

In this passage from part two, Morrison does not insult the memory of real-life slaves by offering glib and simple solutions to predicaments such as Stamp Paid’s. Indeed, as Williamson points out, ‘**Black communities unconsciously reproduced many of the most characteristic sociological features**’ of their previous overlords. There does remain a **characteristic** concealed but present sense of hope in this passage; hope that the black community can find its way forward together- men and women both, by forging a path for the future from their shared past.

Key

Red: A05

Blue: Quotations

Orange: question focus

PinK: Methods (techniques)

Green: Concerns/ themes/ purposes

Mr. Pollicutt, 29.01

Glossary

Quintessential – Representing the most typical or perfect example of something.

Recollections – Memories or acts of remembering past events.

Meditations – Deep thoughts or reflections on a subject.

Intrinsic – Essential or fundamental to the nature of something.

Haunting – The lingering presence of something disturbing, often used metaphorically for traumatic memories.

Displacement – The forced movement of people from their homes, often due to conflict or oppression.

Generational trauma – Psychological harm passed down through families due to historical events such as slavery.

Nonlinear – Not following a straightforward, chronological order.

Enigmatic – Mysterious and difficult to understand.

Lyrical – Expressing deep emotion in a poetic, musical way.

Segues – Smooth transitions from one topic or scene to another.

Generic conventions – Common features or techniques used in a particular literary genre.

Gothic – A style of literature featuring horror, the supernatural, and dark, mysterious settings.

Mutable – Changeable or not fixed.

Immutable – Unchanging over time or unable to be changed.

Personification – A literary device in which human characteristics are given to non-human things.

Literal vs. symbolic – Literal refers to the exact meaning, while symbolic means representing a deeper meaning.

Unresolved – Not dealt with or settled.

Reverie – A state of being lost in one's thoughts, daydreaming.

Surreal – Dreamlike, strange, or unreal.

Visceral – Deeply emotional or affecting the body physically.

Infanticide – The killing of an infant.

Metaphorically – Describing something in a figurative way, not literally.

Assimilate – To absorb and integrate into a society or culture.

Stoic – Emotionally restrained, showing little or no outward emotion.

Rites – Ceremonial acts or rituals, often religious.

Arbitrary – Based on personal choice rather than reason or a system.

Concealed – Hidden or kept secret.

Sociological features – Aspects of society that shape human behavior and relationships.

Chat GPT's (harsh!) analysis of this essay

Essay Analysis, Grade, and Feedback (CIE A Level 9695 Paper 4)

Strengths of the Essay

1. Knowledge & Understanding (AO1) – Level 6 (High)

- Demonstrates an excellent understanding of *Beloved* and Morrison's narrative techniques.
- Engages confidently with the passage, identifying key themes such as **haunting, generational trauma, memory, and black community**.
- Effectively incorporates critical perspectives (e.g., **Wilson Harris, Williamson**) to strengthen the analysis.

2. Analysis & Response (AO2) – Level 6 (High)

- Offers **detailed, perceptive analysis** of Morrison's style, including **nonlinear structure, gothic elements, symbolism, and poetic prose**.
- Identifies **shifts in tone and genre** effectively, especially in discussing the transition from gothic horror to lyricism.
- Discusses Morrison's **postmodern critique of truth and religion** insightfully.

3. Structure & Argument (AO3) – Level 5 (High)

- The argument is **cohesive and well-developed**, with a clear progression through different aspects of Morrison's style.
- Each paragraph builds on the previous one, ensuring **logical flow and sustained analysis**.
- However, some **sentence structures are complex and slightly convoluted**, which may affect clarity.

4. Use of Quotations & Close Reading (AO4) – Level 6 (High)

- **Excellent integration of textual evidence**, with precise **quotation selection and explanation**.
- Engages in **close reading** of language and imagery (e.g., analysis of "**silver dollar in a fool's pocket**" and "**her baby brains on the planking**").
- Discussion of **personification** in '**124 was spiteful**' is particularly strong.

5. Quality of Writing (AO5) – Level 5 (High)

- **Sophisticated vocabulary** and **varied sentence structures**.
 - Some phrases are **overly complex** or slightly **verbose**, which might obscure meaning.
 - Minor **typos and grammatical slips** (e.g., "Morrion" instead of "Morrison," "their being" instead of "there being").
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Areas for Improvement

1. Conciseness & Clarity

- Some **sentences are dense and difficult to follow**. Simplifying sentence structures would enhance clarity.
- Example:
 - Original: *"It is appropriate that such varied and interwoven themes are presented through equally knotted methods: and here we see Morrison's characteristic use of a nonlinear, shifting narrative voice, enigmatic symbolism and her poetic, almost lyrical, prose."*
 - Improved: *"Morrison's interwoven themes are mirrored in her intricate narrative style, including nonlinear shifts, enigmatic symbolism, and poetic prose."*

2. More Explicit Connections to the Question

- The essay sometimes **assumes knowledge of the passage without explicitly linking back to it**. Ensure every paragraph **ties explicitly to the passage and its significance within the novel**.

3. More Nuanced Discussion of Morrison's Narrative Voice

- The essay **discusses narrative shifts well**, but could **further explore how Morrison's polyphonic narrative impacts the reader's perception of memory and trauma**.

Final Grade & Justification:

Mark: 22-24/25 (A, Level 6)

- **Exceptional engagement with the text, strong analysis, and excellent use of textual evidence.**
- **Well-structured argument** with insightful connections to **themes and Morrison's style**.
- **Slight verbosity and minor grammatical issues prevent full marks.**

💡 **Final Tip:** Work on **clarity and conciseness** while maintaining depth of analysis. Simplify phrasing slightly to enhance readability. Otherwise, this is a **very strong** response! 🚀