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**Slavery in Alex Haley's *Roots* and Toni Morrison's  
*Beloved***

Bachelor Paper

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2007

Univerzita Pardubice  
Fakulta filozofická  
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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*Beloved***

**Obraz otroctví v dílech *Kořeny* od Alexe Haleyho a  
*Milovaná* od Toni Morrison**

Bakalářská práce

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V Olomouci dne 28. 3. 2007

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## **Abstract**

This bachelor paper deals with a significant part of American history. It analyzes slavery as it is seen in novels of two African American writers who felt a need to express to the story of their ancestors. First part of this paper briefly discusses slavery from a historical point of view including first talented black authors and after that a digest of African American literature ensues. The body of the paper consists in the analysis of selected novels that is divided into three following parts – life of slaves, attitude of slave owners and interpersonal relationships. Each chapter covers with feelings and thoughts of people held in bondage and with their psyche weakened by the institution of slavery. Final part concerns a literary style of both authors and the importance of selected works.

## **Abstrakt**

Tato bakalářská práce pojednává o významné etapě amerických dějin. Analyzuje otroctví tak, jak je viděno v románech dvou afroamerických spisovatelů, kteří cítili potřebu vyjádřit se k osudu svých předků. První část práce popisuje otroctví z hlediska historického včetně prvních nadaných černošských autorů. Poté následuje stručný přehled afroamerické literatury. Hlavní část práce je založena na analýze zvolených románů, která je rozdělena do tří částí – život otroků, postoj otrokářů a mezilidské vztahy. Každá kapitola se zabývá smýšlením a pocity otroků a také tím, jak byla narušována jejich psychika. Závěr práce je věnován literárnímu stylu obou autorů a významu zvolených děl.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Right to life, right to liberty, right to education, right to work, right to freedom of speech, right to worship, equality before the law and non-discrimination – these are the basic human rights of every single person. Be able to travel, to choose a job, to freely make decisions and live life to the full – that is only a fraction of people’s possibilities. How long, however, have we had these choices? The United Nations adopted the first Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 followed by several other treaties regarding racial discrimination, discrimination against women or rights of a child (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Nevertheless, what rights did a person have before 1948? Was it the law of the jungle? Did powerful people subjugate the poor?

History is filled with violence perpetrated to human beings. History’s greatest crimes, such as the Holocaust, will never be forgotten. Slavery is one of them as well. Africans, and not only them, enslaved by Europeans settling in America and needing labour, had to undergo a long way to reach their freedom. Their way was not easy at all. For 250 years slaves were forced to live without any human rights, they worked from sunset to sundown, could not form a proper family or even live a real life. When freed, a lot of them struggled with poverty and racism. Moreover, it took them another 100 years to achieve their civil rights and to be treated as equal people.

Let us look at their lives.

## 2. SLAVERY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON LITERATURE

### 2.1. From captivity to victory

Slavery dates back to ancient times. It existed in ancient Greece, Rome or Egypt but in 17<sup>th</sup> century it expanded enormously in America. First slaves were brought by a Dutch ship in 1619 but they were not slaves in a legal sense. Some blacks gained their freedom after serving a term of years and they were assigned land like white servants. However, as plantations in the South enlarged, their owners started to recognize that they needed more field workers. In consequence of this, slave trade became a profitable business and southern colonies revised its laws to establish that blacks could be kept in slavery permanently, generation after generation.

Slaves were transported mostly from Africa where Americans organized raiding parties to satisfy the high demand for labour. Captive Africans were shipped to American coasts in terrible conditions and many of them did not survive. The rest was sold at slave-markets. John Simkin describes that slaves worked at plantations eighteen hours a day, they lived in huts without any furniture and slept on a pile of straw. They were allowed to form families but there was no law to protect a slave family against separation. Slave owners had a right to sell their bond servants at will. In addition, slave marriage was advanced because of child-bearing. Plantation owners thus obtained more field workers for free (USA History: Slavery in the United States).

Slaves were treated as a property, not as human beings. Jindra Ondryášová mentions:

Although the Declaration of Independence, adopted on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1776, proclaims that the function of government is to guarantee the unalienable rights with which men are endowed, including 'Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness', the Negroes were excluded from these rights. (148)

After all, the approach to slavery divided America into two parts. As the North was mainly industrial, it needed more skilful workers to labour as shipbuilders, fishermen or craftsmen. The South, on the other hand, developed to vast plantations and thus required plenty of slaves, no matter if skilled or unskilled. Therefore, slaves import

to northern states was not as huge as to southern states. Moreover, abolitionist parties started to form in the North and they grew rapidly. All northern states abolished slavery around 1780's and Southerners began to fear revolts of blacks. As a result, they tightened up domestic rules for slaves. The slave trade was officially prohibited in 1808. Many people thought that this would lead to the end of slavery. The reality was different. Because a cotton-growing industry was extending more and more, the demand for slaves was increasing as well. At that time, a lot of slaves tried to run away. The secret network of cooperation among slaves, free blacks and also whites that helped slaves escape from the South to the North was known under a term "Underground Railroad" (John Simkin).

The differences between the South and the North, especially the abolition of slavery in the northern states, separated the United States into the slave South and the free North. After Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, southern states formed the Confederate States of America because they did not agree with Lincoln's anti-slavery policy. They wanted to preserve slavery and their independence, so in 1861 the American Civil War began. It was the most important war for black people because it ended slavery forever. In 1862 Abraham Lincoln, the President of the United States, issued The Emancipation Proclamation which declared:

That on the 1st day of January, A.D. 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free, and the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such person and will do not act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom. (Franklin and Moss 617)

Slavery came to an end definitely in 1865 when the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified.

Nevertheless, the situation of blacks did not get any better. As they did not own any land, had a little personal property, they were forced to stay on plantations and worked as paid labourers. Furthermore, Anton Pokrivčák comments that "as a 'second-class citizens', they faced racial segregation in schools, hospitals and other public



facilities” (91). Jindra Ondryášová continues to remark that secret organizations, such as the Ku-Klux-Klan, arose in the South in order to forestall the equality of whites and blacks. Negroes therefore concentrated in places where black communities dwelled and started to found schools, colleges and churches (148).

Desegregation is dated to the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century when black citizens of United States fought for voting rights and racial integration. This Civil Rights era lead by Martin Luther King terminated the discrimination of black people, yet not completely. Even though the equality of whites and blacks became a reality of today’s world, some people are still steep in prejudice. Hopefully, it is just a matter of time.

## **2.2. African American literature**

Before the actual recognition of African American literature, traditions and stories of enslaved people had been passed orally from generation to generation. When African writers started to penetrate the literature, themes like freedom, equality or racial segregation counted among the most mentioned ones. Generally speaking, Black literature depicts stories and events that concern blacks in terms of slavery, life within American society, racism or disparagement of their qualities (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online).

Talented writers of African ancestry appeared on American literary field as early as late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Among the first authors belongs Phillis Wheatley, a poetess who was determined to prove that “a black poet was as capable of artistic expression as a white poet” (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online). As she was the first woman to show that black people are intelligent enough to write poetry as well as white people, many whites refused to believe that she wrote the poetry by herself.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the American Civil War, slave narratives as a subgenre of African American literature emerged. Slave narratives written by former slaves such as Frederick Douglass or Harriet Jacobs bolstered the abolitionist movement. These tales are assumed to be highly autobiographical as they capture a true life of slaves and events of that time likewise. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* written by Harriet Beecher Stowe is presumably the most known book worldwide describing a

harsh life in servitude. The novel pictures a period before American Civil War and it made a great contribution to the abolition of slavery (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online).

The end of slavery brought new opportunities to black people. They could attend educational as well as other institutions, which resulted in flowering of black culture. Between 1920's and 1930's, a period known under the term 'Harlem Renaissance', African American literature reached one of the highest points. Encyclopedia Wikipedia explains the significance of this era:

The Harlem Renaissance marked a turning point for African American literature. Prior to this time, books by African Americans were primarily read by other Black people. With the renaissance, though, African American literature – as well as black fine art and performance art – began to be absorbed into mainstream American culture.

Following years were dedicated to Civil Rights Movement with the aim of desegregation of African Americans. Black authors thus concentrated on issues regarding human rights in order to end the superiority of whites leading to the discrimination of blacks. Worth mentioning are names like Amiri Baraka, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison or even the leader of this movement Martin Luther King, Jr. who, along with other protesters, wrote books and essays related to the Civil Rights Movement (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online).

Black literature of 1970's termed as 'the black women's literary renaissance' brought black authors the desired appreciation. Their works reached the mainstream of American literature; most of their books became best seller and were awarded. In addition, academia acknowledged African American writings as a proper and regular genre and their writers began to be accepted worldwide. Women authors such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison or Maya Angelou greatly contributed to the renaissance in 1970's and today, together with Alex Haley or playwright August Wilson, range themselves with the top American writers (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online).

### **2.3. Toni Morrison**

Toni Morrison was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford in Ohio. As a small child she listened to her father's folktales of black community, which influenced her later writing. Morrison received a B.A. in English from Howard and completed a Master of Arts degree at Cornell University. She started her career as an editor at Random House where she helped to promote African American Literature. Since 1989 she was the Robert F. Goheen Professor of Humanities at Princeton University where she tutored in creative writing and supported young artist in developing new forms of art based on cooperation. She retired from her position in 2006.

Morrison has written several novels that comprise an important part of the American canon. Among her first works belong *The Bluest Eyes*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*.

*Beloved*, her most famous piece of work and a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, deals with the legacy of slavery and destruction of identity of former slaves. Sethe, a mother of four children, cannot cope with her past and although she tries to repress her memories, slavery has branded her for the rest of her life.

Other works of Morrison include *Jazz*, *Paradise* and *Love*, the last novel published in 2003. Thereafter Morrison concentrated on children's literature and together with her son Slade Morrison has written a series of books *Who's Got Game?* (SparkNotes).

### **2.4. Alex Haley**

Alexander Palmer Haley who grew up in an African American family in the South began his career as a seaman in the Coast Guard. During his 20-year service he taught himself the craft of writing and after leaving the Coast Guard he fully developed his writing skills. He worked for *Playboy* magazine and made a lot of interviews with people such as jazz legend Miles Davis, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., George Lincoln Rockwell or Cassius Clay who changed his name to Muhammad Ali. His interviews with Malcolm X resulted in his first literary work *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

followed by *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. The success of this novel was astounding. Lisa Drew, an editor of *Roots*, comments:

‘One can't overemphasize the impact of *Roots*,’ she reflects. ‘It filled a huge gap in our country's past – not only African American history, but all Americans' history – and sold more copies at a faster rate than any previous book.’ (qtd. in *Bundles*)

*Roots* are based on a family history of the author himself. During his child's stays at his grandmother Cynthia Palmer he used to listen to a story of an American ancestor and was amazed “when the long narrative finally got down to Cynthia” (Haley 707). In his subsequent years he decided to search for his family ancestry and *Roots* is the result of dogged searching, intercontinental travelling and writing for more than ten years. The *Roots* saga begins with the birth of Kunta Kunte who is captured and abducted to America around the age of seventeen. After horrifying sea voyage he is sold at a slave auction and becomes a field worker at the plantation of his owner. Not able to reconcile himself to his fate, he tries to escape whenever a possibility suggests itself. Yet his fourth attempt is fateful. Chased by slave catchers he is caught and half of his right foot is chopped off. Although he is cured by a white doctor, Kunta's new master, he is crippled for the rest of his life and has to abandon all hope of freedom. A few years later he gets married and fathers a daughter Kizzy whom he repeats his story of capture and teaches her some African words so that she will know who she is and where she comes from. When Kizzy is sold for breaking the rules of Kunta's owner, she ends up at a disreputable slave owner who immediately rapes her. After giving a birth to a son, she is telling to him and afterward to his children a story of their great-grandfather. The narrative goes on through the American Civil War and all the events leading to the abolition of slavery until it reaches Haley's grandmother who was two years old “when her father, Tom, and grandfather, Chicken George, led a wagon train of recently freed slaves westward to Henning, Tennessee” to settle down and start a new free life (Haley 707).

*Roots* won the Pulitzer Price and was also adapted for the screen. Galvanized by such a success, Haley began to write a second historical novel, yet unfortunately he did not complete it. After his death, David Stevens finished two of Haley's writings: *Queen: The Story of an American Family* and *Mama Flora's Family* (*Bundles*).

### **3. LIFE OF SLAVES**

#### **3.1. African-born slaves**

Growing up in a village with a family, enjoying a childhood with brothers and sisters, learning to survive in strange environment and listening of elderly people's advice, that is how life of children in African villages looks like. They are taught to read and write, cite Koran and respect principles of their community. Although Africans live a 'primitive life' in contrast to European civilizations, they are wise, conscientious, cultivated and high-principled. Nevertheless, how hard it must have been for them to be abducted from their families and be brought to a civilized country where they lost their freedom and became slaves for the rest of the life?

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century when slave trade became a great business, countless numbers of slave ships crossed the Atlantic Ocean. It is commonly stated that only 1/3 of captured Africans survived this passage because of appalling conditions. Alex Haley describes:

The stinging bites, then the itching of the body lice, steadily grew worse. In the filth, the lice as well as the fleas had multiplied by the thousands until they swarmed all over the hold [...] The urine, vomit, and feces that reeked everywhere around him had spread into a slick paste covering the hard planking of the long shelves on which they lay. (176-77)

When the ship finally reached an American coast, Africans found themselves in a strange country full of peculiar customs and habits. They did not understand the language, nor did they comprehend the behaviour of black people who "docilely follow behind a toubob who wasn't watching them or even carrying a weapon, rather than try to run away – or kill him" (Haley 211). Yet after several abortive attempted escapes caused by the unknowingness of a foreign land, many Africans realized that there was no way to gain their freedom again and they started adapting to the life they were condemned. Alex Haley writes:

Though it shamed [Kunta] to admit it, he had begun to prefer life as he was allowed to live it here on this plantation to the certainty of being captured and probably killed if he tried to escape again. Deep in his heart, he knew he would never see his home again, and he could feel something precious and irretrievable dying inside of him forever. But hope remained alive; though he might never see his family again, perhaps someday he might be able to have one of his own. (287)

Initially, Africans who were proud of their nationality despised plantation-born blacks because they did not show enough dignity and respect to their own African origin. Moreover, these American-born slaves seemed to like the way of life they lived (Haley 271). However, by observing all things and events happening on plantations, African people suddenly recognized that these slaves acted differently if a white person was around. The attitude of an African towards other slaves on the plantation started to change and gradually they found the way of mutual communication (Haley 245).

Although they hated the language of whites, as well as everything associated with these people, they were practically forced to learn it if they did not want to isolate themselves. An example can be found in the writing of Alex Haley:

The lessons continued through the following days and stretched into weeks. To Kunta's astonishment, he began to discover that he was becoming able not only to understand but also to make himself understood [...] (276)

Even though Africans adjusted to American living, their tribal traditions still persisted in them. After their arrival and following years, they often compared things they had seen and occurrences they had witnessed to customs in Africa and very often they recalled their African families (Haley 241-44). Nevertheless, as enslaved Africans hardly met anybody of African origin who they could share their memories with, they abandoned all these ideas about "African customs and traditions; for not only would they never be observed here, nor respected – indeed, he would also be hooted at if he so much as mentioned them" (439). So the only possible action for African people dragged to captivity grounded in suppression of their traditions, thoughts and especially of their own self.

### 3.2. Motherhood

Motherly love is a strong feeling disregarding the time we live in or place we stay at. The bond between a mother and a child evolves since a conception and grows stronger and stronger. During the slavery era child-bearing was greatly supported because a child born to a bondswoman automatically became a property of a slave owner. And as a property, the child could be sold if needed. How did a mother feel then when her child was taken away from her? Alex Haley writes:

‘Kizzy! Kizzy chile! Lawd Gawd, don’t let ‘em sell my Kizzy!’ As she burst out the back door with Kunta behind her, Bell’s screams reached away out to where the field hands were, who came racing [...] ‘O my Lawd Gawd!’ Bell shrieked. ‘Massa, please have mercy! [...] Jes’ cheap, low-class white folks splits up families!’ shouted Bell. ‘You ain’t dat kin!’ Bell blocked their path. ‘Den sell me an’ ‘er pappy wid ‘er! Don’t split us up!’ (451-52)

How did a young black woman feel when she was forced apart from her family and auctioned off usually as “good breeding stock”?

Violation of black women by her masters was a fact of life at that time. In his book Alex Haley mentions that some slave owners abused Negresses just because they liked their bodies but others raped them in order to expand the number of their slave. The rapists did not mind a child lying next to a woman nor did they care if a woman was already pregnant.

‘Massa, massa, it too soon,’ she pleaded tearfully. ‘I ain’t healed up right yet, Massa!’ But when he simply ignored her, she struggled only long enough to put out the candle, after which she endured the ordeal quietly, terrified that the baby would awaken. (Haley 464)

This act of violence did not naturally pose a sexual pleasure for black women. Some of them even rejected to nurse “a hairy white thing, fathered by ‘the lowest yet’” (Morrison 258). Some women were ashamed of having a child with lighter skin than was theirs, “for all anyone had to do was compare her color and the baby’s to know what had happened – and with whom” (Haley 463).

On big plantations, on the other hand, there could be found a black woman that nursed her children as well as infants of others. Mothers were allowed no more than three weeks of “maternity leave” and afterward they had to return to the field. The child was therefore commended to a “nanny” who breastfed them all. Sethe, the main protagonist of Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, describes: “Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma’am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none” (200). According to Michele Mock, this separation of a mother and a child resulted in Sethe’s strong maternal affection. Mock continues: “Deprived of a mother’s milk and bond, Sethe wants better for her children”. She swears to herself that her children will never experience hunger, never have to share and they will always have milk that belong them (*Spitting out the Seed*). She is determined to provide milk for her infants in any case.

‘Anybody could smell me long before he saw me. And when he saw me he'd see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me [. . .] I told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it.’ (Morrison 16)

In fact, Sethe’s maternal instinct and her obsession of delivering milk to her baby kept her alive all the way to her children. Exhausted and on the brink of death, Sethe desired to survive simply because of one thing. To bring her small daughter milk that was hers. She succeeded. What is more, her devotion to her children was so immense that she would rather kill them to save them from a life of slavery. When her old master from the South found the place where Sethe with her children concealed so that he could take his property back and raise these children as field workers, he sighted a picture of hardly understandable act:

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time [...] (Morrison 149)



Yet for Sethe, “a nigger woman”, this was the act of love. She defends herself: “I stopped [the master...] I took and put my babies where they’d be safe” (Morrison 164). This event is based on the real story when in 1856 Margaret Garner attempted to escape from slavery with her brood. Facing the recapture, she decided to kill herself as well as her babies rather than facing the slavery again. Before slave catchers caught her, she managed to murder her daughter (SparkNotes). The story of Sethe is therefore not entirely fabricated, for it is based on a slice of life. She and other characters of this novel are indelibly marked by the institution of slavery forever. Even though free, former slaves were not able to forget the hardship during their bondage. They were treated as subhuman, traded as commodities and that is why Sethe wanted better life for her children, better than was hers. Sethe’s attachment to her children, however, results in her own destruction. She is haunted by the spirit of her daughter and thus unable to reconcile herself to her past. She has indulged her life in her children. “The best thing she was, was her children” (251).

Contrary to Sethe who “wouldn’t draw breath without [her] children” (Morrison 203), Baby Suggs is compelled to learn to master her maternal feelings. Giving birth to eight children, she has learnt that “it wasn’t worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway” (Morrison 139). Her two daughters, “neither of whom had their adult teeth”, were sold away without knowing, her small boy exchanged for lumber, others escaped or were dead. Baby Suggs said: “God take what He would” (Morrison 23). Nevertheless, her maternal instinct did not allow her to forget her children and she still wondered about their lives. “Did Patty lose her lisp? What color did Famous’ skin finally take?” (Morrison 139). Baby Suggs eventually dies not knowing “where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive” (Morrison 140).

### 3.3. Manhood

Every man is proud of being a man. Manhood may slightly be seen as something preternatural. Man is expected to provide for a family, take care of “male affairs” and be a hero of a kind. Yet this was impossible in the time of slavery. Slaves were viewed as things that presumably did not have any feelings or even needs. They had to obey their masters, do what they were told without any protests or even a sign of disapproval. Before the abolishment, slaves were completely defenceless. Deprived of human and civil rights, they could be beaten to death, sold or separated from their families. Alex Haley writes:

‘It’s a law niggers can’t carry no gun, even no stick that look like a club [...] law say can’t be no nigger funeral if dey think it’s a meeting’ [...] Law say you kill anybody white, you hang; kill ‘nother nigger, you jes’ gits whipped. Law ‘gainst teachin’ any nigger to read or write, or giving’ any nigger any book.’  
(273-74)

On the other hand, if married, bondmen were heads of households and felt responsible for events within the family. Alex Haley describes that when Chicken George was forced to leave his family because he gained freedom contrary to other members of his family, he was looking for a place where all his family could live together when they would become free. After the abolition of slavery, he returned to his family and took them to “The Promised Land” (684-86).

In addition, some slave owners were human and raised their slaves to become real men. Paul D, the male protagonist of *Beloved*, grew up with his two brothers on a farm owned by Garner, “a boss who showed them how to shoot and listened to what they had to say” (Morrison 219).

[Paul D] grew up thinking that, of all the Blacks in Kentucky, only five of them were men. Allowed, encouraged to correct Garner, even defy him. To invent ways of doing things; to see what was needed and attack it without permission. To buy a mother, choose a horse or wife, handle guns, even learn reading if they wanted to [...] (Morrison 125)

This harmonious coexistence, however, does not last long. When Garner has died, a “schoolteacher” is sent for. Having utterly different mindset towards slaves, he is determined “to put the place aright” (Morrison 226). Garner’s slaves cannot stand this situation and after failed escape attempt Paul D is led to the prison in Alfred.

Inhuman treatment of black people not only in prisons but also on slave ships or plantations resulted in destruction of their identities. Men became insecure about their manhood, often wondered about their value and clamped the lid hard on their emotions and feelings. Consequently, Paul D creates a tobacco tin instead of his heart in which he locks his terrifying experience of his imprisonment and memories of his dead brothers. He compares his life with the life of Mister, a rooster that has lived simply because Paul D has saved its life:

‘Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn’t allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you’d be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn’t no way I’d ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something else was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub.’ (Morrison 72)

Although Paul D was emotionally crippled, he was a man of action. Settling in Sethe’s house, he drives the baby ghost away and “assumes the male role of protector” (Carden). In addition, he tries to convince Sethe that they “can make a life” (46). Even though they have common past, their contemporary lives differ significantly. Sethe, whose heart belongs to her children, is overwhelmed by her memories that circulate in her head and hence she is unable to aim her life at future. Paul D, who is affected by his past as well as Sethe, is not capable of showing his real feelings because he has put all his emotions in the tobacco box in order to protect himself from other emotional harms.

He would not pry [the rusted tobacco tin] loose...in front of this sweet sturdy woman, for if she got a whiff of the contents it would shame him. And it would hurt to know that there was no red heart [...] (Morrison 73)

After all, Paul D realizes that only Sethe is a woman who “could have left him his manhood” and he lets the box burst to provide for them “some kind of tomorrow” (Morrison 273).

### 3.4. Skilfulness as a way to freedom

It is generally known that slaves were imported to American coasts to labour on plantations that spread enormously throughout the whole South. Consequently, most of the slaves were purchased as field workers. They hammered on plantations of cotton, tobacco, sugar cane and rice. Nonetheless, as time passed, some masters found out that they were also clever with their hands. Considering their profit, they realized that a skilful slave could earn his owner money and make a name for his master, too. After a proper judgement slaveholders could send a talented bond servant to training. An example could be found in Alex Haley's work:

Massa Lea broke the news to [Tom's father...] 'I've worked out an arrangement to board your Tom over at the Askew plantations,' he announced solemnly, 'for a three-year apprenticeship with that nigger blacksmith Isaiah.' (578)

Thereafter, the trained slave was allowed to open his workshop where he mended varied tools and shod horses. The change from a field labourer to a craftsman changed also a status of this slave. Not only did he become more valuable, he also earned some money and thus began thinking about buying freedom.

Yet artisans were not the only ones to earn some money. As a small child, Chicken George demonstrated his interest in cocks that were his owner's pride and joy. He became his master's helper and with his support Chicken George earned a lot of money. Although losing it all, he finally gained his freedom for his services (Haley).

As well as Chicken George had a talent for cockfights, fiddler had a gift for fiddling. Longed to be free, he saved his wage until he got the right amount.

'I done it!' The fiddler was a study of excitement [...] 'Took me playin' over nine hunnud times fo' white folks to dance, an' I sho' didn't know if I'd ever make it [...] African, I got dat seven hunnud dollars what massa long time ago tol' me I'd have to earn to buy myself free!' (427)

How did he have to feel when his master had changed his mind? “‘Dat son-of-a-bitch!’ the fiddler screamed suddenly, and flinging back his arm, he hurled his fiddle into the stream” (429).

Freedom was the only thing slaves hungered for. Even though they “had never drawn one free breath, [they] knew that there was nothing like it in this world” (Morrison 141).

Family relationships also played an important role. Sethe’s husband Halle, for instance, freed his mother by payment because he wanted her to “sit down for a change” (Morrison 140). Chicken George included all his nine-member family in his thoughts about buying freedom (Haley 571-72).

‘Trouble to start wid,’ he said, ‘jes’ can’t do nothin’ but guess roun’ what massa’d ax for us all. Me an’ you an’ de passel o’ young’uns.’ (Haley 571)

Yet after becoming free, many slaves suddenly came to realize that the only job they knew was working in the field.

On the other hand, even black women were highly handy in spite of the fact that it did not ensure them freedom. Sethe wanted to have a proper dress for her wedding with Halle and so she sewed it (Morrison 59). Baby Suggs’s husband taught her how to make shoes and shoemaking became her livelihood at liberty (Morrison 143-45). When the blacksmith Tom made a hand loom for his wife Irene, she sewed for him a shirt from the cloth that she had made herself. Afterwards she sewed shirts for all her brothers-in-law and dresses for girls.

She plaited rugs of cloth scraps; she made both tinted and scented Christmas-New Year holiday season candles; she carved dried cows’ horns in pretty combs, and gourds into water dippers and birds’ nests in fancy designs. She put some of her fragrant dried-rose leaves or sweet basil between the folded garments, making the black and white Murrays alike smell about as fine as they felt. (Haley 638)

Generally stated, black people certainly had dexterous hands but they were usually not given an opportunity to show it as their owners not only undervalued them but in most cases treated them like dirt.

### 3.5. Powers of language

Spoken English was the most important wellspring of information for people held in bondage. Although many of them spent their entire life in one place, there was always a way to get information about events concerning their enslavement.

A person who probably heard most of information was a buggy driver. When this slave (it was always a male) drove his master to various meetings, he met other drivers and they swapped all the news they were informed of.

And Luther kept bringing regular reports from house slaves, stablehands, and other drivers he talked with on every journey the massa made to attend sick people or to discuss what was going on in New England with other massas [...] (Haley 296)

Other important “informers” were cooks in “big houses”. During serving meals these women listened very carefully to what “massa” and “missus” said (Haley 246). Alternatively, they listened “at the keyhole of the dining room whenever the massa had guests [...] (Haley 299). Slaves, who did not labour on plantations and were allowed to travel, brought news from their journeys. This could be an example of Chicken George or the fiddler. The blacksmith Tom set up benches for his customer in front of his workroom and “positioned [them] carefully just within earshot, though far enough away that the whites didn’t suspect that as Tom worked, he was monitoring their conversations” (Haley 635-36).

Smoking and whittling and now or then taking nips from their pocket flasks as they talked, they had come to regard Tom’s shop as a locally popular meeting place, supplying him now with a daily flow of small talk and sometimes with fresh, important news [...] (Haley 636)

When evening came and slaves finished their work, all of them gathered and spoke about news each of them had heard. Although slaves usually did not cross the frontier of a county, they knew “so much about things they’d never seen and places they’d never been to” (Haley 358). By passing information from one to the other, they got wind of various uprising, free blacks in the North and finally of their emancipation.

Some blacks could also read and write. They usually learnt that as kids while playing with white children.

‘I’s knowed some a de words ever since I was a young’un,’ she continued. ‘It were the chilluns of my massa back den that teached me. Dey liked to play teacher, ‘cause dey was going to school, an’ de massa and missis didn’t pay it no ‘tention on count of how de white folks tells deyselves dat niggers is too dumb to learn anythin’.’ (Haley 352)

The knowledge of reading and writing was contributing as well as fatal. Reading enabled slaves to get information from newspapers (Haley 352) or forge travelling passes for which Kizzy was sold away from her family (Haley 450-51). Besides, every black person who wanted to free themselves by payment had to be able to count.

Morrison mentions the education of blacks as well and states the attitude of whites:

For a nickel a month, Lady Jones did what whitepeople thought unnecessary if not illegal: crowded her little parlor with the colored children who had time for and interest in book reading. (Morrison 102)

John Simkin confirms that teaching of black children was considered to be illegal. Regardless the law, there were brave teachers who continued in running their schools. If they were caught in the act, they were usually jailed (USA History: Slavery in the United States).

During imprisonment or Atlantic voyages captives communicated via songs. Bound together, they danced in the circle and sang about their woes. Alex Haley in his book describes that during passages captive women sang about what had happened on ship-board, about disputes of whites, about everything they had heard or seen and thus informed their compatriots who vigilantly listened and planned the attack (187). As slave traders did not understand African language, they “only grinned with happiness” (194) because African women sounded happily but “the words they sang told how these horrible toubob had taken every woman into the dark corners of the canoe each night and used them like dogs” (180). Morrison mentions the singing too. When Paul D

experiences the prison camp, he and other prison inmates are compelled to sing and dance as well.

They chain-danced over the fields, through the woods to a trail [...] They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves...They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life. (Morrison 108)

Capuano analyzes:

Song affords [slaves] a form of personal testimony against the horrors of their past, and it strengthens them for the difficulties they come to accept as their future. (Truth in Timbre)

Singing enabled slaves to exhibit their feelings and suffering indirectly and helped them to overcome their disgrace and humiliation (Capuano).

### **3.6. Religion**

According to John Simkin, southern slaveholders did not support any religious beliefs professed by slaves. Africans were not allowed to continue with their rituals related to the faith in Allah and a usage of drum, the main instrument used for transferring information in Africa, was also prohibited (USA History: Slavery in the United States). The evidence can be found in Haley's novel when one of the blacks named individually slave laws: "Dey's even a law 'gainst niggers beatin' any drums – any dat African stuff" (274). Still and all, it is believed that Africans did not give up their African faith immediately and carried on praying.

Christian religion professed by plantation-born slaves was not encouraged either. John Simkin explains that a reason for that was the Bible that declares the equality of all people. Therefore, southern masters tried to prevent slaves from learning to read (USA History: Slavery in the United States). Nevertheless, Haley describes that a lot of slaves professed Christianity and attended also huge gatherings where they prayed and christened children as well as adults (391-97). Although this might be a fiction, a



construction of the New Hope Colored Methodist Episcopal Church is a fact. The church has been built by Matilda's family, a family who counted among the first freedman slaves (Haley 690-91). Matilda was a very religious black woman who raised all her children in the faith in God. She could write and read and she also held slave-row prayer meetings. Consequently, this is a proof enough that not all blacks were illiterate and many of them were certainly good Christians.

#### 4. ATTITUDE OF SLAVE OWNERS

Whoever would successfully manage slaves [...] must first understand that their African pasts of living in jungles with animals gave them a natural inheritance of stupidity, laziness, and unclean habits, and that the Christian duty of those God had blessed with superiority was to teach these creatures some sense of discipline, morality, and respect for work – through example, of course, but also with laws and punishment as needed, although encouragement and rewards should certainly be given to those who proved deserving. Any laxity on the part of whites [...] would simply invite the kind of dishonesty, tricks, and cunning that came naturally to a lower species [...] (Haley 378)

Even though some parts of Haley's novel are fictive, especially conversations among characters, the above interpretation of slave owners' attitude to black people is considered to be more than true by the authoress of this paper. Supported by given sources and perused facts of this topic, the authoress has not come across any evidences of different points of view. However, it is believed that the treatment of bond servants varied depending on the personality of a master.

Still, slaves were deprived of their rights and came under the property of slaveholders. As such, they were assigned a surname of the person they belonged to. Slave owners kept records of their material possessions and noted down every black child born on their plantation.

Massa Waller opened the large black Bible... turned to a page devoted to plantation records... and wrote in fine script: 'Kizzy Waller, born September 12, 1790.' (Haley 369)

Such records provided Alex Haley with enough information about his ancestors and became basic elements for writing *Roots*.

There was also a need to introduce several slave codes with the arrival of blacks in order to secure the safety of whites and establish rules for blacks. According to John Simkin, "the death penalty was introduced for a whole range of offences... for murder, rape, burglary, arson and assault upon a white person" (USA History: Slavery in the United States).

In addition to slave law, every slave owner usually established his own plantation rules that had to be observed. Mr Garner in Morrison's novel, for example, gave an order that his slaves were allowed to leave the plantation only in his company (140-41). Mr Waller sold every black person without mercy if he or she would break his rules: "The law is the law. She's broken my rules." (Haley 452) Whenever whites heard about rebellions of blacks in neighbouring countries, domestic rules were tightened because with growing number of slaves, the number of revolts increased and whites started to fear for their lives. One of the most successful uprisings when Nat Turner with a small group of other slaves killed his master's family, and on their way further on they had killed another 50 people, brought a very tense atmosphere (John Simkin).

'Trustin' niggers got whole families dead now!' yelled Massa Lea. [He] confiscate[d] the axe, the hatchet [...] pocket knives [...] With his boot he shattered Sister Sarah's box of remedies [...] Before other cabins he flung away treasured possessions and smashed others with his fists or his feet. (Haley 548)

After such revolts blacks were usually forbidden to gather and were scared of following measures due to their master's stand-offish behaviour.

As it was stated at the beginning of this chapter, the approach to slaves differed from master to master. Various examples can be seen in Haley's novel. In spite of his unyielding character, Mr Waller could be ranged with "kind masters". Let us see his qualities from the view of his slave:

'Massa we got don't 'prove a dat. It's how come he don't have no overseers. He say he don't want nobody beatin' his niggers. He tells his niggers to oversee deyselves, jes' do de work like dey know to, an' don't never break none a his rules. He swear sun won't set here on no nigger break his rules.' (Haley 293)

Overseers were people responsible for running a slaveholder's plantation and their task was to increase the profit as much as possible. They supervised the work of slaves and because of the pressure from plantation owners they used corporal punishments for those who did not work enough. Lashing of slaves was the most widespread punishment (John Simkin).

However, not all plantation owners relied on overseers. Mr Garner, as well as Mr Waller, trusted their bond servants as for the field work and thus neither of them needed an overseer. On the other hand, the overseer undertook the submissiveness of slaves and guaranteed the highest possible revenue. The overseer simply meant security. That is why Mr Murray changed his mind in spite of his satisfaction with the work of his blacks. He says: "I've always liked the idea of an overseer, even though my niggers do a good job raising my crops" (Haley 675).

Total contrast to Mr Garner was his brother-in-law called schoolteacher who superintended Garner's plantation after his death. The schoolteacher did share Garner's attitude to slaves and completely revised rules for blacks. Paul D, one of the slaves narrates:

[Firstly he took away] his shotgun, then his thoughts, for schoolteacher didn't take advice from Negroes. The information they offered he called backtalk and developed a variety of corrections to re-educate them. He complained they ate too much, rested too much, talked too much [...] (Morrison 220)

After the revelation of Garner's slaves' planned escape, the schoolteacher acts unmercifully. One of them "is tied at the waist to a tress" with "a hickory fire in front of him...His feet are cooking; the cloth of his trousers smokes" (Morrison 226). Laughing and singing he is finally shot because "the fire keeps failing" and after all the schoolteacher has changed his mind: "This one will never be suitable" (Morrison 226). One other is sent to a work camp in Alfred, another one probably hung.

Even black women were not spared the insensate behaviour of whites. Rapes and humiliation was nothing unusual and whites did not concern with women's sense impressions. As women are generally weaker than men, whites succeeded in getting what they wanted through the use of force.

When he sprang, seizing Kizzy, she wrenched loose, shrieking, as with an angry curse he brought the whip cracking down across the back of her neck [...] Then the man was on his knees besides her, one of his hands choking back her scream [...] the other stuffing dirty burlap sacking into her mouth until she gagged [...] he banged her head against the floor, again, again, again, then began slapping her – more and more excitedly –

until Kizzy felt her dress being snatched upward, her undergarments being ripped [...] Striking her another numbing blow, the man jerked down his suspenders... and then came the searing pain as he forced his way into her [...] (Haley 455)

Moreover, physical violence had also psychological sequels. The atrocity committed on pregnant Sethe when two white boys, nephews of schoolteacher, took her milk that belonged to her little girl scared Sethe forever. She says:

I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching them and writing it up. I am still full of that, God damn it, I can't go back and add more. (Morrison 70)

When they ascertained that Sethe told on them to Mrs Garner, who was however powerless, the schoolteacher commanded one of his nephews to whip Sethe's back. Nevertheless, Mock observes that the act of taking her milk was "far worse than the beatings [... it was] a violation worse than genital rape" (Spitting out the Seed).

Still, slave owners were people as any others with positive as well as negative sides and they were able to show them both. As it was stated before, a lot of masters supported slave marriages because of several reasons. Firstly, it was assumed that a married man would be temperate and would not attempt to escape. Secondly, a married woman was likely to give birth to a child who became a property of the master according to law then (John Simkin). A wedding took place on plantation with the approval of the master and some masters also attended this simple wedding ceremony.

All members of both the white and the black Holt and Murray families would attend in the Holt big-house front yard, with their minister performing the ceremony [...] (Haley 635)

After jumping the broom, a wedding tradition at the end of the ceremony, whites returned to the house and let the blacks to celebrate in their own way.

Some slave owners also demonstrated their human nature when any of their slaves died. Mr Waller, for instance, accompanied his other slaves to the grave and they buried the dead together (Haley 381-82).

Another way of expressing kindness consisted in issuing travelling passes. The travelling pass was issued by a slave owner and given to a slave who was about to travel with the permission of his master. A bondman who had left plantation without a travelling pass laid himself open to the risk that he would be caught by road patrols whose tasks was to catch and punish every black without this pass. Since some slaves were rather skilful and their masters were aware of their values, they sometimes made a responsive step towards such a slave so as not to lose him. When Mr Lea heard that his trainer nigger ran after black girls at nights, he had better wrote him out a travelling pass than risk that his best slave would be caught and beaten to death. He says:

‘I don’t want that road patrol maybe shooting you like happened to that Mr. Jewett’s trainer nigger, so [...] I’m goin’ to write you out a travelin’ pass [...] Ain’t never thought I’d do that for no nigger!’ (Haley 530)

Occasionally, slave owners had also feelings for family relationships of slaves. It was a common thing at that time that a black man married a black woman who lived, and after the marriage also stayed, on another plantation. If the black man was in possession of a rich slaveholder, he usually bought the black woman not only for the reason of their marriage but mainly to increase the number of field workers. This was also a case of Mr and Mrs Murray who bought wives of their two slaves, Tom and Virgil (Haley 636). Even Mr Lea, a disreputable slave owner who rarely showed any sympathies to his blacks, sold a slave family together when he went bankrupt.

The slave trader paused for effect. ‘But y’all one lucky bunch of niggers! Your misses insists y’all got to be sold together, and your massa’s goin’ along with that! [...] They could get more to sell y’all apiece, plenty more!’ (Haley 615)

In addition, during the American Civil War all southern owners certainly believed that the institution of slavery would remain. Mr Murray hoped for that as well and during his interview with Tom he expressed his expectations of “enjoying the rest of [their] lives together” (Haley 672). Tom nodded but “thought that it was impossible for a massa to perceive that being owned by anybody could never be enjoyable” (Haley 672). Since freedom was irreplaceable.

## 5. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

### 5.1. Importance of community

Community is important for every human being. It is associated with solidarity, unity and friendship. The power of the community might not be so huge today but in the time of slavery the alliance of blacks meant hope, hope for better tomorrows.

African slaves felt this need as well. When they came to America, they felt isolated, mortified, they had to cope with their feelings on their own; they had to come to terms with their fate. After a while they realized that sociability with other slaves was the only thing that kept them alive. The idea of not seeing their home again was partly made up for friendships and their future families.

After years of driving for massa all day and returning at night to a cold supper before crawling onto his solitary pallet, now [his wife] Bell saw to it that the same supper she fed massa [...] was simmering over the fireplace in their cabin when he got home [...] All in all, [Kunta] was amazed to find that he liked almost everything about her, and he would have rebuked himself for not having come to his senses sooner if he hadn't been feeling too good to spend much time thinking about all the years he'd wasted. He just couldn't believe how different things were, how much better life was, that it had been just a few months before and a few yards away. (Haley 350)

Since blacks had nothing in their possession, they expressed their affection by deeds. When Kunta began trying to pair off with Bell, he made a few pieces of utensils for her. Amazed Bell started to cry. "It was the first time in her twenty-two years on Waller plantation that any man had made something for her with his own hands" (Haley 338).

Uncle Pompey astonished Kizzy in the similar way. He made a little shelter on the field for her one-month-year old son when Kizzy had to go back to work. Seeing the shelter, Kizzy's eyes "glistened with tears" (Haley 465). Uncle Pompey was so embarrassed by her thanks that he just "grunted and chopped faster" (Haley 466).

The importance of community is obviously seen in *Beloved*. Sethe who had successfully escaped from slavery with her four children and settled down at her mother-in-law's house in Cincinnati was accepted by local community without any problems. However, when she has killed her daughter to save her from a life of slavery, the community has turned its back on her not understanding her act. Sethe continues to live without any friends or help from her neighbourhood. Although she works in a restaurant, she is alone with her thoughts unable to forget her past. Her two sons leave and she stays with her daughter Denver who is afraid to darken their door. Denver's segregation from community is brought about her mother's act of murder, too. After several months of attending Lady Jones's school not noticing that "she was being avoided by her classmates", she got the knowledge of her killed sister and she "never went back" (Morrison 102). Scared that something terrible could make her mother kill her too, she "never leaves [the] house and watches over the yard, so it can't happen again" (Morrison 205). After "eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life" (173), Denver determines to "step off the hedge of the world" (Morrison 243). Seeing her mother's gradual destruction caused by *Beloved*, the reincarnation of her murdered daughter, Denver goes for help. The Cincinnati community feels that they should "wipe the slate clean" and gathers in front of Sethe's house. They exorcize *Beloved* and thus "makes up for its past misbehaviour" (SparkNotes). By discovering the world around, Denver also finds her own self and matures in a young intelligent woman who is preparing to go to a college. Yet Sethe whose mind is full of memories and horrors of slavery cannot cope with all things that have happened to her and spends her last days in bed.

The exclusion from Cincinnati community worsened not only Sethe's state of mind but also Baby Suggs's.

[...] to belong to a community of other free Negroes – to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counselled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed – and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance – well, it could wear out even Baby Suggs [...] (Morrison 177)

Baby Suggs's life was as hard as one can imagine. Loosing all her children, even the one who has given her freedom, she "acquires a daughter and grandchildren and



sees that daughter slay the children [...]” (Morrison 177). She cannot bear any more sufferings and lies down to her bed “fixing on something harmless in this world” (Morrison 179). Longing for more colours around her, she finally dies.

Let us look at the Cincinnati community from the outside. Cincinnati was a place where free blacks lived alongside the whites. Its inhabitants act like one big family helping each other as well as others. Stamp Paid together with Ella and John lend a hand every black person who tries to get across the river. They have “been pulling coloredfolk out the water more’n twenty years” (Morrison 186). Among the saved ones were also Sethe and her brood. The helpfulness of the Cincinnati community is expressed in following lines:

‘Choose anyone. They let you be if you want em to. My house. Ella. Willie Pike. None of us got much, but all of us got room for one more. Pay a little something when you can, don’t when you can’t.’ (Morrison 231-32)

For all that, the community leaves Sethe and her family including Baby Suggs to their fate. When Sethe was released from prison and “made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone,” Ella and others have turned away from her (Morrison 256). Only Stamp Paid worries about the whole situation especially after Baby Suggs’s death and intends to visit Sethe yet never makes it. Whenever he steps on her door yard, he feels like a stranger, an unknown feeling for somebody who has never knocked “because it was always open to or for him” (Morrison 172) Seeing Sethe’s door shut and feeling a coldness of this place, he leaves unable to reconcile himself to this situation. Nevertheless, when news about Sethe’s dead daughter who has come back to revenge spreads among the community, it is “Ella more than anyone” who persuades other women of rescuing Sethe (Morrison 256).

When Ella heard 124 was occupied by something-or-other beating up on Sethe, it infuriated her [...] As long as the ghost showed out from its ghostly place – shaking stuff, crying, smashing and such – Ella respected it. But if it took flesh and came in her world, well, the shoe was on the other foot... (Morrison 256-57)

In the end, the community has finally fulfilled its job.

The Cincinnati community included also white people represented by siblings Bodwins. They provided Stamp Paid and Ella with clothes and goods for runaway slaves “because they hated slavery worse than they hated slaves” (Morrison 137). Bodwins helped Baby Suggs to start a new free life allowing her to stay in their old house in exchange for domestic services. When Sethe was imprisoned for the murder of her daughter, Mr Bodwin as a member of the Society for abolishing slavery got her out of the jail and found her a job in a restaurant. Mr Bodwin, called the “bleached nigger” by his enemies, belonged among the whites who were wise to the repercussion of slavery and together with his sister helped every black person who appeared at their door. He followed his father’s advice that “human life is a holy, all of it” (Morrison 260).

## **5.2. Family relationships**

Each member of a family is interlinked to other members by a certain bond. People sometimes become aware of it too late when they separate or something bad happens. Life of slaves was very hard; they faced day-to-day worries about their future, a whimsicality of their masters and they were practically powerless against all wrongs done to them. Everything they had was their own family and fellowship with other members of a “slave row”. Confined to a life on plantations, they actually did not see life. They did not possess anything, they only had each other.

However, a family life of slaves was as any other. Wives managed a kitchen, cared about children and also looked after their husbands night and day.

When she did have a husband at home, though, Matilda submerged her doubts and disappointments and tried to be the best wife she knew how. If she knew he was coming, a big meal was waiting; if he came unexpectedly, she prepared one right away [...] if he arrived complaining of aching feet, she would rub them with a warm paste of roasted onions and homemade soap. Finally, whenever the candles were blown out and they were again between her fresh sheets, Chicken George would make up for his absences to the utmost. (Haley 544)

A strong emotional relationship also developed between Matilda and her mother-in-law Kizzy. Knowing the fact of Kizzy’s separation from her parents in her

teenage years, Matilda tries to compensate her suffering by her own family. Hearing the snatches of Kizzy's dreams about her sorrows, Matilda "was growing to love Kizzy as she had her own mother" (Haley 541)

[The snatches] were always the same: 'Mammy...Pappy...Don't let 'em take me! ... My people's los'... Ain't never see 'em no mo' dis worl'...' Deeply touched, Matilda would whisper something like, 'We's yo' people now, Gran'mammy Kizzy.' (Haley 541)

An alliance between a father and a son can be found in Haley's novel, too. When Chicken George persuaded his master of his son's handiness and Tom was sent to training, Chicken George started to ponder how much money they could earn together. When he introduced his plan about freeing the whole family by payment to his son, Tom was zealous.

'What do you think 'bout my idea, boy?'  
'Pappy, gwine blacksmith my head off! I jes' wish you'd o' said something 'fo' now.'  
'Wid two us, I knows we can do it!' said George, beaming.  
(589)

Nevertheless, to all intents and purposes a whole "slave row" was one family. Living collectively usually for their entire lives, relationships among slaves were certainly very close. When Chicken George announced his aim to Matilda, she cried: "Lawd, George [...] jes' don't see how jes' one man s'posed to be tryin' to buy ever'body, but I sho' jes' couldn't walk off an' leave dem" (Haley 573).

Yet when Matilda's family is sold to other slaveholders, for their master has gone out of business, their fellows remain including grandmother Kizzy. Despite Tom's effort to buy them, they die earlier than Tom manages to save enough money.

### 5.3. Status of (former) slaves towards environment

Attitudes to slaves, their oppression, humiliation and deprivation of their rights – all these topics have been already discussed in this paper. Nevertheless, even slaves had their strategies how to behave, how to win their masters over or how to avoid ongoing abasement after their emancipation.

As it was stated before, slaves were very well informed about events happening in America. If the news was in favour of them, they were exulted but they did not dare to manifest their joy before their owners. Firstly, they would have been presumably punished and secondly, they would have revealed their foreknowledge. Their strategy was as follows: “Bes’ thing for us all to do...is act dumb as we can, like we ain’t even heard ‘bout what gwine on” (Haley 662). This was the best way to keep their master calm and thus preserved current state of affairs.

Some bond servants even knew their owner’s weaknesses and strengths. Chicken George took advantage of it when he attempted to convince his master to send his son Tom to training.

An instantly disapproving expression came upon Massa Lea’s face, as if by reflex, and it fueled George’s determination not to fail Matilda and Kizzy in his promise to help Tom. He saw that he’d have to make what he knew would be the strongest appeal to Massa Lea – picturing the financial advantages. (Haley 575-76)

It is essential to say that the position of slaves did not change promptly when they were set free. They were still discriminated and prejudices prevailed on both sides.

When Tom settled with his family at a new place and started to think about an appropriate location for his workshop, his plan was thwarted by whites.

‘Well, boy [...] no need of wasting time, we’ll get right to the point. You can blacksmith, that’s fine. But if you wan to do it in this town, you’ll have to work for a white man that owns the shop. Had you figured on that?’ (Haley 688)

The discrimination of blacks can be seen in Morrison’s novel as well. Although Sethe earns enough money to buy food for Denver and herself, she prefers stealing it

from the restaurant than “standing in line at the window of the general store with all the other Negroes” (191). Since whites were served first and only then could black people do their shopping. Sethe’s explanation does not need any comments. She “just didn’t want the embarrassment of waiting out back of Phelps store [...]” (189).

Preconceived opinions against skin colour lasted for almost another one hundred years. Whites did not like blacks and blacks did not like whites because of the superiority of white people. Mixing of black and white skin was regarded as unsuitable.

‘He too high-yaller. He could nigh ‘bout pass fo’ white – jes’ not quite [...] He too light fo’ black folks, too dark fo’ white folks. He cain’t he’p what he look like, but don’t care how hard he try, he never gon’ b’long nowhere. An’ you got to think ‘bout what yo’ chilluns might look like! I don’t want dat kinda life fo’ you, ‘Lizabeth.’ (Haley 693)

African Americans bore a label of secondary nation for many years. Facing the supremacy and oppression of whites, they had to work very hard to achieve their aims and to win their status. Morrison writes:

Even the educated colored: the long-school people, the doctors, the teachers, the paper-writers and businessmen had a hard row to hoe. In addition to having to use their heads to get ahead, they had the weight of the whole race sitting there. (198)

## 6. LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

Although both novels deal with a life of slaves, they belong to different literary genres. In case of Haley's *Roots* we can talk about a family saga based on oral tradition of author's family. Haley spent more than ten years searching for the history of his ancestors. Scanning long microfilm rolls and infinite number of records he documented "the highlights of the cherished family story" (Haley 712). Yet where the boundary between fact and fiction lies no one knows. The author himself says:

...every lineage statement within *Roots* is from either my African or American families' carefully preserved oral history, much of which I have been able conventionally to corroborate with documents. Those documents, along with the myriad textural details of what were contemporary indigenous lifestyles, cultural history, and such that give *Roots* flesh have come from years of intensive research in fifty-odd libraries, archives, and other repositories on three continents. Since I wasn't yet around when most of the story occurred, by far most of the dialogue and most of the incidents are of necessity a novelized amalgam of what I know took place together with what my researching led me to plausibly feel took place. (Haley 726-27)

Haley also visited Gambia in West Africa and travelled to the village of his ancestor Kunta Kinta where he met an oral historian who told him the same story Haley used to listen in his grandmother's house. In his following search, Haley found a contract in which John Waller transferred to his brother a part of his property including a man slave called Toby. Toby was a name given to Kunta Kinta by John Waller. After that Haley also traced a record of the ship that brought Kunta to America and as slaveholders kept records of children born on their plantations, Haley could easily compile his genealogy. *Roots* is therefore based on real events, yet some parts are certainly fabricated. The novel also includes the autobiography of Haley himself who becomes a central character for last thirty pages.

Even though Haley was sued for plagiarism, the impact of *Roots* was phenomenal. Adapted into a television miniseries, *Roots* stimulated Americans' interest in genealogy. Furthermore, it "had challenged many white Americans' long held belief

that blacks were intellectually inferior with no history or culture worth recognizing” (Bundles).

Morrison’s novel is classified as a historical fiction. It is loosely based on a legal case of Margaret Garner who ran away with her children from a plantation in Kentucky. When she was caught by her owner, she attempted to kill her brood. Morrison borrowed this event and externalised a ghost story with elements of magical realism.

Magical realism is a mode of writing that can be simply characterized as an “amalgamation of realism and fantasy”. Magical elements are set in an otherwise normal world and are accepted by characters as a part of their lives. Characters do not question the logic of these elements nor do they try to avoid them (Moore). Sethe and Denver, for instance, has lived in a house with a baby ghost of Sethe’s murdered daughter for eighteen years. They have got used to a rage of the ghost, and moreover it has become Denver’s secret company. “The ghost in [their] house didn’t bother [them...]” (Morrison 164).

Another feature of magic realism consists in representation of identical events from multiple points of view. In case of *Beloved* we learn by reading about the murder of Sethe’s daughter from a perspective of Sethe, Stamp Paid, Baby Suggs and also from a schoolteacher, though indirectly via anonymous narrator speaking in the third person.

In addition, present time penetrates past times and “Morrison unfolds the story in a circular, elusive way,” which is another characteristic of this genre (SparkNotes).

In spite of the fact that *Beloved* is based on a real-life incident, the motif of this novel consists in moral dilemma whether mother can kill her infant in order to save him or her from affliction and adversity.

The novel is “a powerful commentary on the psychological and historical legacy of slavery” (SparkNotes).

## 7. CONCLUSION

Considering all things so far written, we can come to the conclusion that slavery became a profitable business to the exclusion of thousands of African people enslaved against their will. Deprived of freedom and human rights, they were treated in an inhuman way and traded as commodities. No white man took into consideration that blacks were human beings as anyone else. An enormous growth of cotton industry required more and more field workers and since slaves were practically the cheapest labour, it was a sufficient argument for keeping them in servitude as long as possible. Fortunately, northern states realized that slave trade was immoral and manumitted their slaves. Ultimately, the American Civil War set all slaves free.

It is necessary to remark that a harsh treatment of slaves resulted in destruction of their identities and inability to resign to their fate. Black women were violated by their masters and considered as breeding stock. Often separated from their brood, their mind was occupied with memories of their children for the rest of their lives. Men, on the other hand, were slightly privileged if skilful. They could acquire better job as buggy drivers, musicians or craftsmen. However, all blacks were unified and the reason for their cohesion is more than obvious. They hungered for freedom. Even though white people thought poorly of them and rated them as primitive, blacks were not empty-headed at all. Some of them could write and read, they professed Christian religion and were also hardworking. They valued other slaves living on the same plantation and shared with them all information and news they had heard. A community was all they had. Moreover, it was a solidarity of others that helped black people during their escapes. Nevertheless, their life at liberty was not much better. Freedman slaves were not certain of their qualities and their psyche was disturbed by horrors they had experienced in bondage. Easily identified by the colour of their skin, they faced continuing discrimination of whites, and on the top of that they bore the destiny of their race. Luckily, it is all gone and a life of a black person equals a life of a white man.



## RESUME

Být otrokem jistě nebylo snadné. Otroctví existovalo již ve starém Řecku a Římě a i když bylo s otroky zacházeno nemorálně, nikdo se nad tím příliš nepozastavoval. Každý mocný Řek či Říman měl svou hrstku otroků, kteří mu sloužili a kteří mohli být prodáni stejně tak, jako propuštění na svobodu. Otroctví v Americe však přesáhlo všechny možné hranice. Americké státy upravily své zákony tak, aby mohly otroky držet v zajetí po celé generace. Obchod s otroky se slibně rozvíjel po celá desetiletí. Afričané, kteří byli dopraveni na americké pobřeží v děsivých podmínkách, byli zbaveni svobody a zbytek svého života strávili jako dělníci na poli. Stali se majetkem bílých, kteří s nimi mohli dělat prakticky cokoli. Bít muže, znásilňovat ženy, prodávat ještě nenarozené černošské děti, či oddělovat od sebe celé černošské rodiny. Žádný otrok si nebyl jistý svým zítřkem. Zbaven veškerých svých práv mohl jen přihlížet.

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou života otroků tak, jak jej ve svých dílech popisují Alex Haley a Toni Morrison. Oba autoři se řadí k afroamerické literatuře, která dosáhla svého největšího rozkvětu v 70. letech. Afroamerická literatura se vyznačuje tématy jako svoboda, rovnoprávnost nebo rasová diskriminace. Obyčejně zachycuje život v otroctví i život po osvobození, zkoumá postavení černochoů v americké společnosti a neopomíná ani podceňování lidí s tmavou barvou pleti.

Sám Haley prošel obdobím rasové diskriminace, svou vůlí a pílí však dosáhl uznávaného postavení. Jako reportér napsal mnoho rozhovorů se slavnými osobnostmi a poté, nadšen rodinou historií své rodiny, se rozhodl vydat se po stopách svých předků a sepsat rodinnou ságu. Vzniklo tak unikátní dílo popisující sedm generací černochoů, a to od zajetí Afričana Kunta Kinte až po otce Alexe Haleyho. Morrisonová, narozdíl od Haleyho, se ve své knize zaměřila spíše na následky otroctví – na psychiku otroků a vnímání sama sebe. Přestože je to příběh duchařský, odráží se v něm jak život otroků držných v zajetí, tak jejich život na svobodě. Na základě těchto dvou děl se autorka této práce pokusila zanalyzovat život utlačovaných černochoů, jejich příběhy, pocity, možnosti, trápení i brutálnosti, kterými museli jako zotročený lid projít.

První část práce je zaměřena především na postavení otroků. Ženy jako matky neměly žádná práva na své děti a ve většině případů byly černošské děti prodány již v předškolním věku. Mladé africké ženy se prodávaly zejména na „chov“, aby porodily

co nejvíce dětí, které se následně staly majetkem otrokářů. Muži i ženy vykonávali především práci na poli, neboť Jih, kde se otroctví rozvinulo nejvíce, byl plný bavlníkových či tabákových plantáží. Muži však mohli vykonávat i práce jiné, například jako kočí pánovi bryčky nebo řemeslníci, kteří za svou práci dostávali i zaplacení. Vlastnosti jako zručnost a talent jim mohly přinést dokonce svobodu. Tyto lepší profese jim také umožňovaly kontakt s okolím a při svých cestách získávali od ostatních otroků informace o událostech a dění v Americe, které se jich dotýkaly. Všechny nové zprávy pak vyprávěli ostatním otrokům, kteří neměli možnost plantáž opustit. Ačkoli byla černošům odepřena jakákoli práva na vzdělání, někteří z nich se naučili číst a psát během svých dětských let. Pobíhající po usedlosti s bílými dětmi, které si rády hrály na učitele, se černošské děti naučily více slov, než si bílý otrokář dokázal představit. Otroci také vyznávali víru v Boha a jejich život v manželství byl jako jakýkoliv jiný, tedy až na skutečnost, že neexistoval žádný zákon, který by chránil jejich lidská práva.

Druhá část práce je pak protikladem části první. Ve druhé části se autorka pokusila z dostupných materiálů shrnout postoj otrokářů, jejich chování vůči otrokům a jejich pohled na otrokářství. Popisuje se zde nejen nelidskost vlastníků otroků, kteří se chovali často brutálním způsobem, ale také jejich kladné stránky, kdy dokázali dát najevo porozumění a soucit.

Třetí část je zaměřena na mezilidské vztahy, na sounáležitost a solidaritu mezi otroky, na důležitost rodiny a přátelství i na postavení otroků po zrušení otroctví. Dozvídáme se o velmi křehkých rodinných vztazích, které hrály velkou roli při myšlenkách na vykoupení, a o nezbytnosti lidské pospolitosti při útěcích či začátku nového života po osvobození. Kapitola o potřebě lidského zázemí popisuje ochotu bílých i černých navzájem si pomáhat a podat pomocnou ruku jakémukoliv člověku. Jako poslední je zdůrazněn fakt, že i po osvobození byli černoši nadále utlačováni a tíhu své rasy nesli ještě dalších sto let.

Závěr práce je věnován rozboru zvolených děl z hlediska literárního a studuje formální způsoby vyjadřování daných autorů.

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## ÚDAJE PRO KNIHOVNICKOU DATABÁZI

Název práce	Obraz otroctví v dílech <i>Kořeny</i> od Alexe Haleyho a <i>Milovaná</i> od Toni Morrison
Autor práce	Lucie Janů
Obor	Anglický jazyk pro hospodářskou praxi
Rok obhajoby	2007
Vedoucí práce	Mgr. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.
Anotace	Bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou života otroků tak, jak jej ve svých dílech zobrazili Alex Haley a Toni Morrison. Práce je zaměřena na postavení otroků v otrokářské společnosti i mimo ni, na psychiku otroků a na následky tohoto utlačování.
Klíčová slova	Alex Haley – <i>Kořeny</i> Toni Morrison – <i>Milovaná</i> Afroamerická literatura otroctví, utlačování černochů