

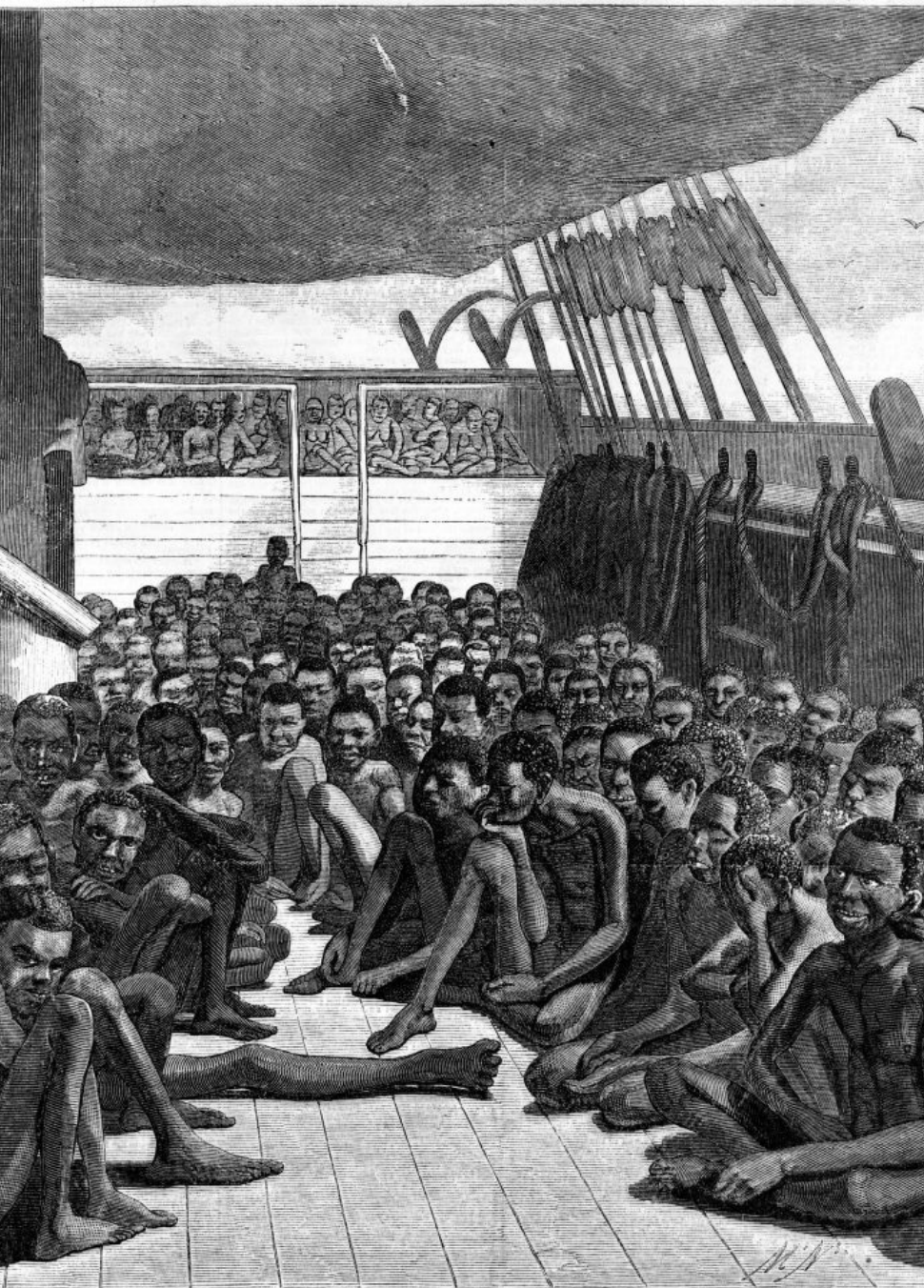
Is Beloved Real?

From "Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved who is not Beloved," by Elizabeth House



Ghost or not?

- Most reviewers assume the mysterious title character is the ghostly reincarnation of Sethe's murdered daughter
- House argues that we can read *Beloved* as a *real* girl whom Sethe mistakes for her daughter because she so longs for the daughter's return



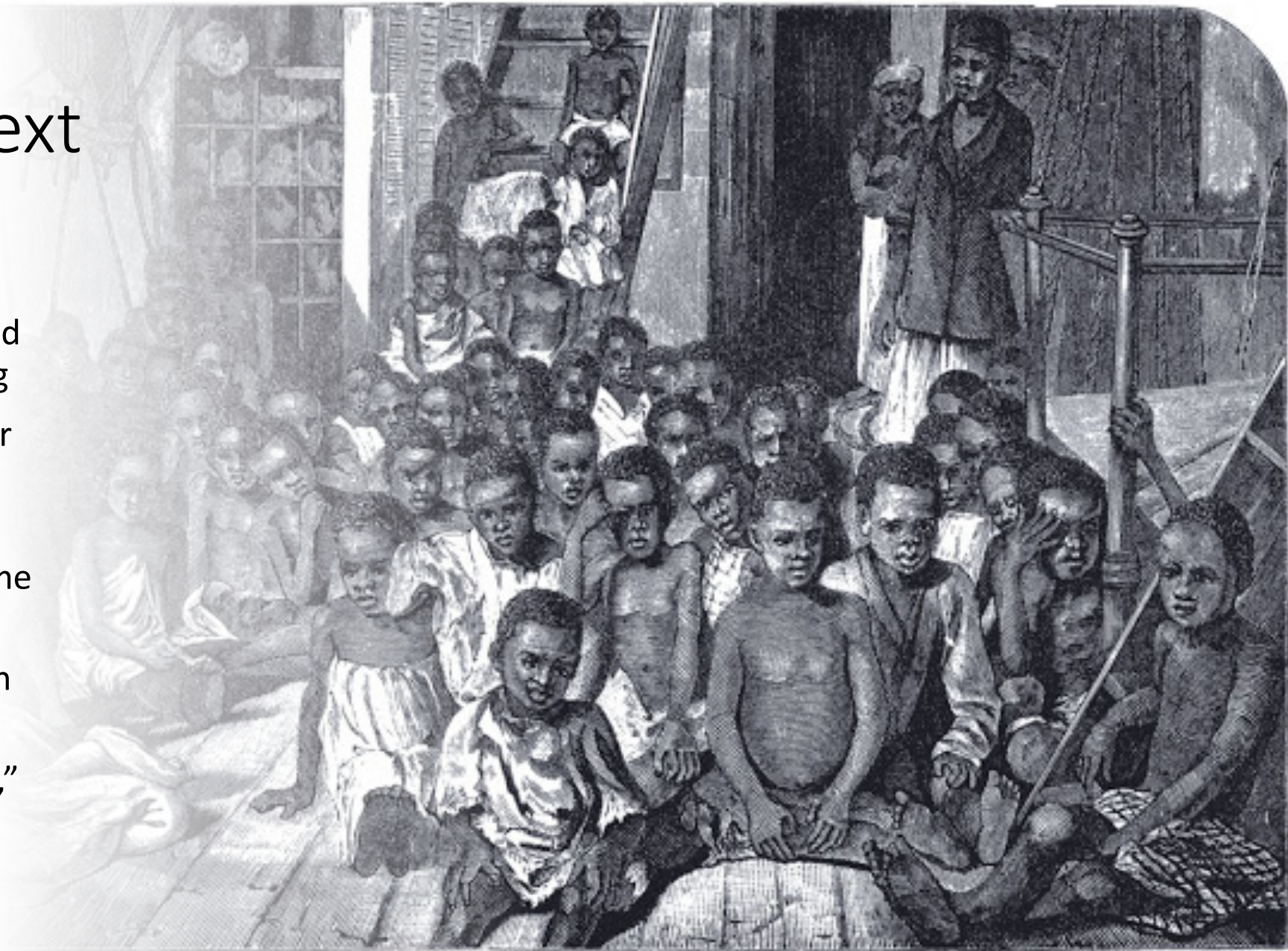
THE SLAVE DECK OF THE BARK "WILDFIRE," BROUGHT INTO KEY WEST ON APRIL 30, 1860.—[FROM A DAGGERREOTYPE.]

Beloved's Stream-of-Consciousness Passages

- Describe how white slave traders captured the girl and her mother as the older woman picked flowers in Africa
- Put on board a dimly crowded slave ship where many died
- To escape this hell, Beloved's mother leaped into the ocean, and thus, in the girl's eyes, willingly deserted her

Close reading of text

- Beloved is a young girl (not big)
- “All of it is now” — memories so vivid that it seems like it’s still happening
- Crouching = crowded into the lower deck of a slave ship
- At first, men and women are separated, but then the storms come and they’re mixed together
- Father figure who carries the girl on his back
- She loves him because of his “song,” but he dies on the ship



GROUP OF SLAVE-CHILDREN ON BOARD THE “DAPHNE.”

(From a Photograph by the Author.)

Close reading of text (cont.)

- Tale begins in Africa, when the girl is watching her mother pick flowers and put them in a basket
- Mother falls down (she opens the grass)
- Clouds of gun-smoke in the way
- On the ship, the mother no longer has earrings, but an iron collar around her neck
- Dead people in a pile, men push them through the ship's portholes with poles
- Mother jumps into the ocean, leaving Beloved





What happens after

Story jumps in time, to several years later, when she arrives at the creek behind Sethe's house

Most plausible explanation (acc. to House)

- Stamp Paid said there was a white man over by Deer Creek who kept a black girl “since she was a pup” (235)
- If Beloved were constantly inside, she's have unmarred skin
- Morrison gives credence to this thesis: Sethe voices a similar guess (119) and Ella has a similar experience (the lowest yet)

Sexual abuse

- Beloved says she knew “one whiteman who was in the house she was in and who hurt her (119)
- “In the dark my name is Beloved” (75)
- “Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light” (241)





Wants to be with her mother

- When she sees the creek, she remembers the water where her mother disappeared.
- She imagines diamonds and teeth in the water
- No education, no experiences of the outside world, her perceptions are strange (almost like a feral child)
- Looks in the creek, sees her own reflection and thinks it's her mother's face
- Dives into the water, but cannot "join" and feels abandoned for a third time; "I am alone" (213)

Conflates Experiences

- Beloved surfaces, makes her way to the house
- When Sethe smiles at her after the carnival, she thinks she's found her mother
- In second half of her narrative, she conflates experiences: "Sethe is the one that picked the flowers"



Mistaken Identity

- Beloved is haunted by the loss of her African parents and comes to believe that Sethe is her mother
- Sethe so longs for her dead daughter that she is easily convinced that Beloved is the child she lost



Textual Evidence: Epigraph

*I will call them my people,
which were not my people;
and her beloved,
which was not beloved*

ROMANS 9:25



Textual Evidence: Miscommunications

About Denver and Beloved:

“They could have their talks easier there [in Denver’s room]: at night when Sethe and Paul D were asleep; or in the daytime before either came home. Sweet, crazy conversations full of half sentences, daydreams and misunderstandings more thrilling than understanding could ever be” (67).





Is Beloved More than Herself?

From "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and
Dispossession in *Beloved*," by Deborah Horvitz

Represents enslaved women

- Beloved stands for every African woman whose story will never be told
- “Sixty million and more” in the book’s dedication
- She represents Sethe’s mother, Sethe herself, and Sethe’s daughter: a merging of identities



Bridges

- Beloved serves as a bridge between American and Africa
- Between the past and the present
- The dead and the living
- Flesh and spirit

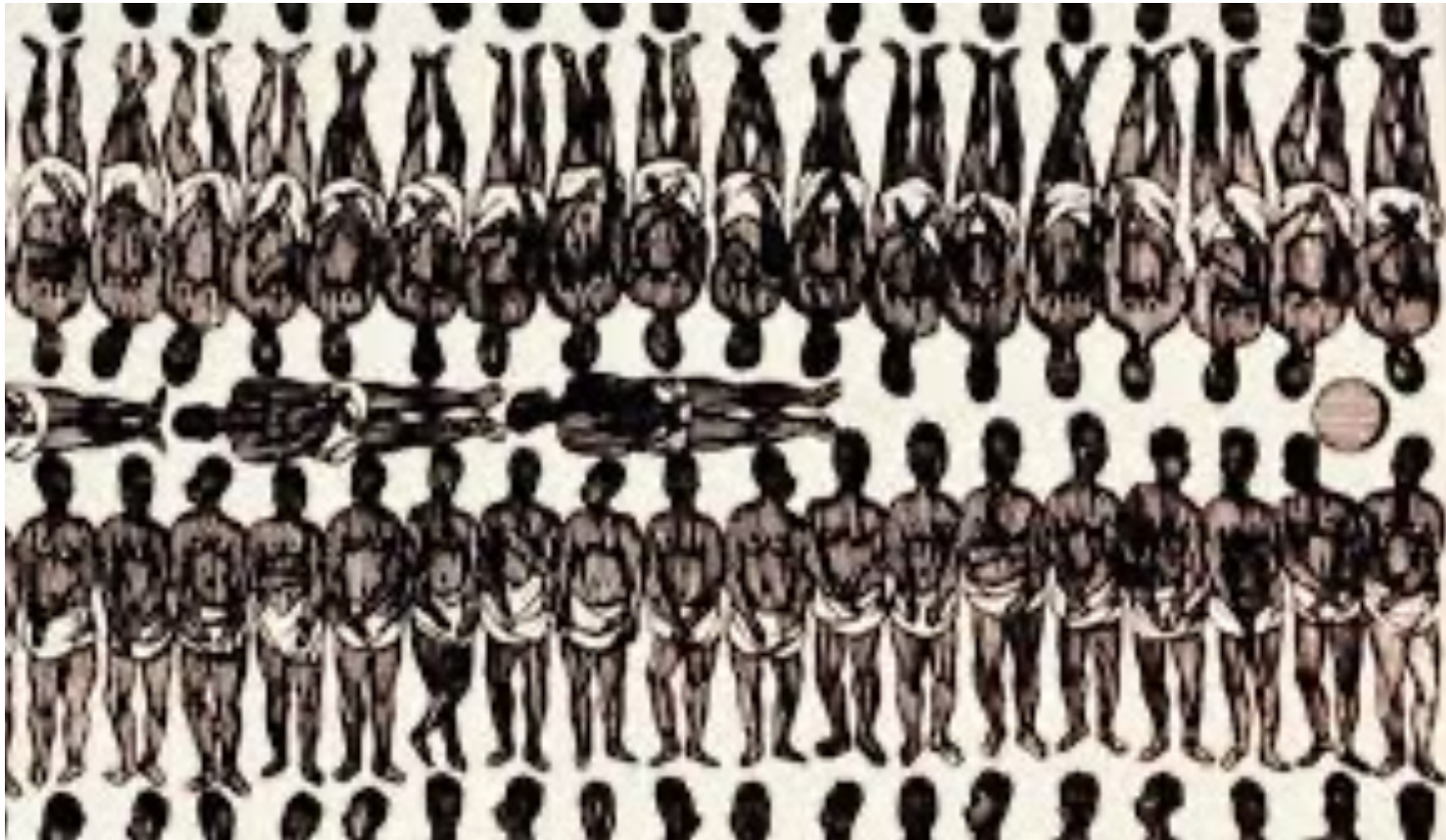


The past won't stay past

- The past keeps repeating itself, won't go away
- "It's all out there" (36).
- "Nothing ever dies" (36)
- "All of it is now" (210)



Middle Passage



- If Sethe remembers her mother, she must also remember that her mother was taken from her
- Her own mother committed infanticide
- Death and middle passage evoke the same language; they are the same existence
- Crouching in a dark place with bodies surrounding you
- A communal grave? The hold of a slave ship?

Merging of identities

- Sethe's mother who picks flowers in Africa?
- The "hot thing" the iron collar around the neck of the woman on the slave ship, the hanging of Sethe's mother, the saw around the baby girl's throat, the memory of sexual abuse?
- Beloved both an individual and a collective being

