

Toni Morrison's Novel *Beloved* – A Character Analysis

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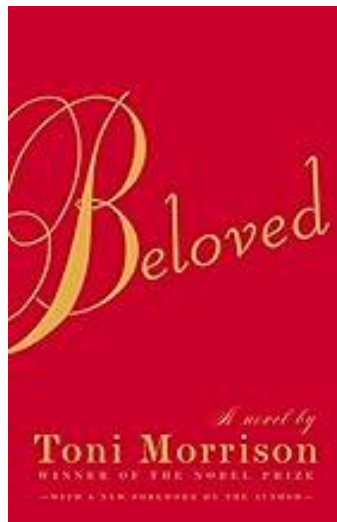
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Abstract

In 1987, Toni Morrison stunned the world with her fifth novel, *Beloved*. The novel was based on a newspaper clipping that Morrison read in *The Black Book* and it brought fame, recognition, and heaps of awards. Dedicated to 'Sixty Millions and More', *Beloved* exposed the inhumanities of the American slavery system and its psychological, race, class, and gender impacts on the African Americans. A slave mother killed her daughter, deciding it to be the best sending on for her daughter rather than sending her back to slavery. The book was a best seller and was considered Morrison's masterpiece.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Slave, Slavery, African American.



Courtesy: www.amazon.com

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is composed of flashbacks, memories, and nightmares. It can be included in historical fiction, gothic horror story, and bildungsroman

(coming-of-age novel) types of novels. In *Beloved*, Morrison shows her mastery over going deep down to the complex psyches of numerous characters who endure the horrific burden of slavery's folded and unforgivable sins. The story is based on a real-life situation of a black slave woman, Margaret Garner, who escaped from Kentucky plantation, killed her own daughter to emancipate from the terrible bondage of slavery. In Morrison's view slavery denied black slave mothers the right to feel maternal love. They were not destined to be entitled to motherhood. These women were not mothers but breeders. The black women were brought to America to breed slaves and to attend to the personal needs of slave holders, to care for their families and to work in their fields.



Tony Morrison (1931-2019)

Courtesy: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Toni-Morrison>

Toni Morrison depicts many characters in her novel *Beloved* (1987). The main characters are Baby Suggs (Sethe's mother-in-law), Sethe Suggs, Beloved, Denver Suggs, Paul D., School Teacher, Halle Suggs (Sethe's Husband), Buglar and Howard (Sethe's sons). In addition to these characters, there are also some minor characters who took important roles in the making of the novel. The characters of Mr. and Mrs. Garner, Amy Denver, Stamp Paid (Joshua), Sixo, Patsy, Paul & Garner, Ella, Edward Bodwin help to construct the plot and the theme of the novel. Morrison shows the problems of society in her novels. Through these characters she shows the painful life of the black slave community and how they endured life

under the tyranny and subhuman condition of slavery. These characteristics suggest that importance lies not only in what is said, but also in how it is said.

As a feminist, Morrison shows the problems of the women in the society through her characters. She shows the living standard of the black community of that time very vividly. The women of her community too recognize her role as a preacher and their service who taught them to love their bodies. The principal characters in *Beloved* are in struggle with a past that is part of white/male historical discourse: Sethe, Paul D. and Ma'm (Sethe's mother) they all are victims of their unforgettable past that haunt them constantly. *Beloved* is characterized by mothers losing their children and how children endured the suffering of separation from their parents. The structure and the style of the foregrounds are ambivalence of slave women about motherhood that violates their personal integrity and that of their families.

The protagonist of the story, Sethe, a 13-year-old child of unnamed slave parents was brought to Sweet Home, a plantation home run by Mr. and Mrs. Garner. After arriving at Sweet Home Sethe was forced to select Halls Suggs to be her mate. In this house Sethe lives like a close family with her mother-in-law Baby Suggs, her two sons, Buglar and Howard and her infant daughter Beloved. When after the schoolteacher took charge of the Sweet Home after Mr. Garner's death, there swept a wind of change in the Sweet Home's atmosphere. The cruelty and the iron whip of the schoolteacher could no longer be tolerated by the black slaves. They chalked out plans to escape from the home. Sethe sent her children Howard, Burglar and Beloved to safety with their grandmother in Cincinnati. She then made her own escape and safely reunited with her mother-in-law Baby Suggs and her babies in Cincinnati.

School teacher found out the hiding place of Sethe, he recaptured Sethe and her children. Sethe decided that she and her children would be better off dead than returning to bondage. Sethe sliced the throat of the eldest daughter "Beloved" and also threatened to dash out the brain of her infant daughter, Denver. The Sheriff took Sethe and Denver to jail and condemned them to hang. Three months later Sethe was released from jail and reunited with her children at Baby Sugg's house at 124 Bluestone Road. Not long after this reunion, the ghost of "Beloved" started to haunt the house at 124 Bluestone Road.

Paul Garner

Paul D Garner is the last of the Pauls alive at Sweet Home. A former slave from Sweet Home who survived the horrors of slavery evolved into a resourceful contemplations man. After the death of the rebellion, Sixo Paul D is manacled, shackled, and fitted with a bit. He escapes from his torture and roams from place to place. After that he comes upon Sethe Suggs house at 124 Bluestone Road. Then the two have a close relationship. Paul D and Sethe work towards establishing a 'normal' family life for the first time for either of them.

Paul D learns about the worst of Sethe's past. He goes to Sethe to hear the story from her own lips. Paul D makes the mistake of sounding like a schoolteacher when he suggests to Sethe that she acted more like an animal than a human being in killing her child. The romantic relationship between Paul D and Sethe is disrupted by the insistent presence and full weight of the ghost of Beloved. The novel's ending suggests that Paul D and Sethe will have a chance to begin again their relationship in the end.

Sethe Suggs

Sethe Suggs is the protagonist of Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved*. She is a slave at Sweet Home plantation who escaped to Cincinnati. So scared by slavery, that at the threat of returning she tried to kill all her children. Love for her children and hatred of slavery causes her to commit an unthinkable crime of killing her own daughter Beloved in order to keep her children free from a life of bondage. Sethe is haunted by her memory and her daughter's ghost until Paul D, a fellow slave at Sweet Home, comes to live with her thirteen years old Sethe had arrived at the Garner's plantation in Kentucky (Sweet Home) as a replacement for Baby Suggs whose freedom has been purchased by the man who will become Sethe's husband and the father of her four children (Halle Suggs). After giving birth to her fourth child during her escape to freedom, Sethe experiences full freedom for the first time in her life. She has been scared by the physical brutality of the schoolteacher's nephews. She escapes from the enslaved population of Sweet Home. The schoolteacher and his nephew located Sethe and her group's hide out and came with the Sheriff. Sethe and her children were put back into slavery. Fury with the thought of putting her children back to the bondage of slavery she attempts to kill her own children.

Born of a slave mother, Sethe was brought up by the surrogate mother, Nan. From such problems Sethe likes her children to be free from these things. She does not like her children to be treated same as to her by the white masters. She would like to keep her

children far from such things. Sethe even thinks many wrong ideas in her mind about her children. In her mind, killing her children to save from slavery is ultimate expression of a mother's love. She loves her children very much and such ideas come to her mind. So, kills her first born baby named Beloved. She does not tell Denver the reason why she murder Beloved: She refuses to leave her children without a mother when they have gone to Ohio, and she risks her own life to reach them when she is released from jail. She returns to Baby Suggs house at 124 Bluestone Road; She stays there with her children and is determined to endure life in stoic fashion, even after it becomes obvious, that the house is haunted by the ghost of Beloved, her dead daughter. When a visit from Paul D Garner, a former slave from Sweet Home, sets into motion a series of life brittle and transforming events, including the return of daughter from dead. When Beloved shows up at 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe house, Sethe becomes devoted to the woman, she eventually comes to believe is the reincarnation of her murdered daughter.

Baby Suggs

Baby Suggs is Sethe's mother-in-law who was brought out of slavery by her son, Halle at Sweet Home. She is also called Grandma Baby, the spiritual Center of Morrison's *Beloved*. She was mother to Halle Suggs, mother-in-law to Sethe Suggs and grandmother to Howard and Buglar (Sethe's son) and Denver Suggs (daughter) and the child Beloved. She acts as a mother figure and stabilizing force for Sethe and Denver.

Sethe was her replacement on the plantation and Baby Suggs took Sethe and her children to 124, her home in Cincinnati. She was respected in the community but refused after Sethe's murder of her own daughter there. She even witnessed on event that her daughter-in-law, Sethe as an infanticide, her precious grandchild (Beloved) put to death at the hand of Sethe. When the Black community betrays her, she loses her faith in people. She withdraws from the community into the world of colors and resigned to her best contemplate colours until she died.

Beloved

Beloved is one of Sethe's children and the oldest daughter who was killed. Beloved came in the form of a woman in the house. She is approximately 19 year old who shows up at 124, Sethe's house with new shoes and a fancy dress.

She is child-like, her skin looks new and uncalloused. She even likes stories and sweets, as a child would, and she attaches herself to Sethe. The most common interpretation of Beloved's character is that she is the spirit of Sethe's dead child. Beloved is the supernatural and represents the spirit of multiple people; Morrison does not develop her character as an individual. She defines herself through Seth's experience and action.

Beloved represents Sethe's unnamed child. Her restless spirit haunts first as a ghost and then as a flesh and blood woman.

Denver Suggs

Denver is the second daughter of Sethe. She represents the future for the free Black community. She is a charmed child to Sethe. Denver was born on the Ohio River with the help of a white girl. Sethe was escaping to freedom from Sweet Home. She survived her mother's attempted murder and stayed in jail with Sethe because she was still a runaway slave along with her brothers and grandmother. Denver became isolated and self-centered. The town people avoid Sethe and her family after the murder. She was not happy when Paul D arrived and even, she behaved rudely to him. But when Beloved came, Denver was happy that her company came to her as a sister. Denver was the first to recognize Beloved as her sister returned from the dead.

Denver tried to protect Beloved from Sethe because she was afraid that Sethe might try to kill one or both of them again. As Beloved gradually looked over the house and weakened Sethe, Denver recognized that the family's survival rests upon her shoulder. Denver, being a naturally bright young woman, recognized that the demanding ghost would never be satisfied. One daughter Beloved is dead and remains forever as child haunting their house. Denver lives as a child, never venturing beyond her own yard. Denver ended up being the one to go outside of 124 to get help in the end and took care of Sethe once Beloved left.

Mr. and Mrs. Garner

The Garners owned Sweet Home; a plantation house where black slaves were kept like cattle. The Garners thought that they were superior to other slaves. Morrison depiction of this character of liberal brand of slavery demonstrate that regardless of whether a master was to be considered as a kind or mankind; slavery was still slavery. Mr. Garner treated his slaves kindly and mercifully and his wife Lelliam Garner treated both Baby Suggs and Sethe very

lovingly and humanely. She did not punish Sethe for stealing fabric to make herself a wedding dress. She gave Sethe a pair of crystal earrings as a wedding gift.

After Mr. Garner's death Mrs. Garner handed over Sweet Home to her cruel brother-in-law, the schoolteacher, as she became incompetent and ill. The death of Mr. Garner left the plantation in debt and forced Mrs. Garner to sell their slaves.

Halle Suggs

Halle Suggs is Sethe's husband and the youngest of Baby Suggs' eight children. He is the only one that Baby Suggs was allowed to keep as her son. He earned enough money to purchase his mother's freedom. Sethe chose him from among the available young men enslaved at Sweet Home. Along with Sixo, Halle planned to escape to freedom.

Howard and Duglar Suggs

Howard and Buglar Suggs are the two oldest children of Sethe and Halle Suggs. They lived their life with the constant anxiety of wondering what their resident ghost would do to them. They were even frightened by their mother and by Beloved's ghost. They lived in the house with the knowledge that their mother tried to kill them. Finally, they ran away from 124 Bluestone Road.

Amy Denver

Amy Denver is a young white girl and a slave who took care for Sethe when Sethe ran away from Sweet Home. When she found Sethe lying on the grass helplessly, she took Sethe to an abandoned shed and managed her blooded, swollen feet and soothed the whelps on her back with cobwebs. She helped with Sethe's delivery of her fourth child, Denver. She headed to Boston on a quest for Carmine (red) velvet. Amy is an excellent example of Morrison who challenges white supremacy.

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