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**Slavery and Identity Reconstruction of Female**

**Characters in Toni Morrison's *Beloved***

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation entitled *Slavery and Identity Reconstruction of Female Characters in Toni Morrison's Beloved*, aims at showing the way slavery imposes a harsh system that pushes slave owners to treat their black slaves like beasts, and imposes on them rules that a human being cannot bear. Hence, slavery affected slaves psychologically, and forced them to believe that they had lost their identities under such treatments. In the novel, female characters are the most affected by this constitution. It made them fear about everything, especially Sethe. Her past experience traumatized her, it let on her psychological troubles. The novel itself represents the story of Sethe and her tragic life during slavery. For that reason, this research work attempts to explore and analyze the social status of slavery in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). The analysis highlights the effects of slavery upon the female characters. It also points out how slavery contributed in making them believe that their identity vanished and they have to construct a new one.

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# Dedication

This modest work is dedicated to

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- To my brother Nadjim, who had always supported me whether materially or morally.
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# **General Introduction**

Early African American literature in eighteenth centuries was dominated by autobiographical spiritual narratives. Then, it reached its peak with slave narratives in the nineteenth century with the Harlem Renaissance. The period was the time of the flowering of literature and arts with writers such as Phillis Wheatley "*Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*" (1773), and Olaudah Equiano "*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*" (1789). Frederick Douglass "*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*" (1845), continuing today with authors such as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Walter Mosley. These African American writers have been rewarded with the highest prizes, like the Nobel Prize given to Toni Morrison. Just as the extreme variety of African American history, African American literature is also varied. Its focus was on themes and issues of particular interest to black people in the United States, such as the role played by African Americans within the American culture and society, slavery, racism, and finally equality. These writings also tend to deal with oral forms like sermons, spirituals, blues, gospel music and rap. The first black American and the eighth woman to be chosen for the prestigious award was Toni Morrison.

Toni Morrison, originally named Chloe Ardelia, was born on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, USA. Morrison was known for her use of the black experience in her works. The experience that she got from her family is used in her novels. Her family influenced her development as a writer. She also made a reference to her life through the characters of her novels, such as the character of Sethe in her novel *Beloved*, when she spoke about the way Sethe educates her children alone as the way she did her also. She wrote many novels such as *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Sula* (1974) which provided her a nomination for the National Book Award. In 1977, Morrison won the National Book Critics Circle Award for her book *Song of Solomon*. She had also written other works such as *Tar Baby* (1981), *Jazz* (1992),

*Paradise* (1998), and the novel which is considered by most of critics to be her best one *Beloved* (1987) which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is one of the most popular works in African American literature. It highlights many social problems during the twentieth century such as cultural identity, injustice, slavery, and motherhood. The core subject of *Beloved* is slavery and this research work aims at showing the extent to which the psychological status of each of the main female characters was affected by slavery. Furthermore, the main question would be: how did slavery affect slaves' psyche and force them to create a new identity to get back theirs?

The present work is done to examine the way identity was destructed by slavery which was one of the society's major issues of that period, and how slaves resisted under such harsh and severe way of living. The novel as a whole is related to life under slavery. It is considered to be one of the most famous books written to represent the period of slavery and to tell its horrors. It played a big role in showing the reader the savagery and the harshness that slaves working on Sweet Home experienced, such as violence, and who were treated as if they were nonhumans.

It is evident that there were many critics who dealt with Toni Morrison's *Beloved* themes, yet this research paper attempts to demonstrate the way identity is reconstructed through the female characters under the institution of slavery.

Morrison's novel has attracted the attention of many writers, journalists, and even historians, and this is what made them criticize the work. Among them we have, Harold Bloom in his book "*Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Toni Morrison's Beloved*" who says that Morrison through her novel *Beloved* said that during slavery's times it was up to the slave owners to construct the identities of blacks and whites. Whites are human beings, but blacks are not. Black bodies are like texts; they are full of signs left by the whites

to tell the horrors of slavery. When slaves were beaten by their owners, those blows leave scars on their bodies, such as the marks left on Sethe's back.

Shelby Larrick in her article entitled *Psychological Criticism of Toni Morrison's Beloved* argues that the behavior of some of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* characters at the beginning may seem brutal and savage, but when getting deep in their stories and their past, it is easy to understand that their actions were reactions to the psychological oppression of the traumas of slavery. Each one of these characters had suffered in his way, either directly or indirectly, from slavery.

Carmen Gillespie who said in her book "*Toni Morrison: Forty Years in the Clearing*" that *Beloved's* story is a painful one because it tells many things through its lines. It speaks about memory and forgetfulness at the same time, also about negation and recuperation. Through Sethe's flash-backs one can feel memory, but she wants to forget that horrible past. So she is both denying and recalling the past. It is a part of her life that she cannot omit or change.

In addition to the previous critics, Adriana Zühlke in her book "*Toni Morrison's Novel 'Beloved' An Analysis*", argues that *Beloved* is a novel full of emotions. It includes many feelings such as love, hatred, scare, and affection. All those emotions are presented through Sethe's motherly love, a mother is passionate and loves her children, but she hates slavery and she becomes scared when she thinks that they will be used as slaves to serve the whites. The views of Bloom, Larrick, Gillespie and Zühlke are as a support to Toni Morrison's objective, because the writer's aim is to show and highlight the reality of African Americans way of living during slavery, their miseries and unhappiness.

In interpreting Toni Morrison's *Beloved* the appropriate theory that can be used is the Psychoanalytic Theory or Freudian Theory. This theory focuses first on the text itself without

taking into consideration the outside influence, by examining characters, conflicts, dream sequences and symbols occurring in the text that will lead to a better understand of the work.

Second, the aim of an author will be much clearer when knowing about his life, his ideas, and the context in which he grew up. This theory contains powerful connotations such as the son's desire for his mother. In the novel, Beloved's return was because of her mother; she was all the time talking to her, she wants her mother to speak about the past. Beloved's desire for her mother made her obsessed by her.

This research work is divided into two chapters. The first chapter examines the period in which the story takes place, the historical context, the life and achievements of the Toni Morrison, the summary of the story that will tell the important events that occurred in the novel, and the character's description. All these give a general sketch of the context and the content of the novel.

The second chapter will deals with the way in which slavery destroys the characters' psyche by applying the psychoanalytic theory. Then it focuses on the way characters search for their identities, how the author sees and uses the term of identity in his work, and to which extent he supports this idea of characters' searching for their identities.

By the end of this research, the conclusion will state the result of the analysis made upon the female characters. The conclusion will be a final step which summarizes the aim of the research.

## **Chapter One:**

# **A General Overview of Toni Morrison and *Beloved***

## **Introduction**

Toni Morrison is one of the most influential African American novelists and prolific writer of the twentieth century. She deals with various sensitive subjects concerning the African American community. *Beloved* is, according to many critiques, her best novel and this is due to the topics it deals with. The present chapter gives an overview of this novel, starting from the socio-historical context to its plot. It also deals with the biography of Toni Morrison, a part that will help us understand the motives and influences of the writer. Finally, the three main female characters will be described as they are the main interest of this novel.

### **1. The Historical Context of the Novel**

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison leads the reader to become more aware of the physical and psychological disaster that the harsh American system committed upon the African American people, how blacks were perceived, used and treated by the American population. The novel is a voice to the denied African American people especially women. It narrates facts that happened in the past. Morrison makes past events visible for the reader; she placed them in a place where it can be known and discovered by the reader.

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* the relationship between history and memory is dramatized. She uses memory to explore and represent the various dimensions of slave life. By doing so, she seeks to make slavery accessible to readers for whom slavery is not a memory but a remote historical fact to be ignored, repressed and forgotten. (ctd in Maschler 3).

As a novelist, Morrison set her fiction in key periods of African American history. She dedicated her literary career to narrate black experience under slavery. She succeeded in doing that through the roles she gave to the characters of her novels. Morrison is revealing their

lives as they were living it, and is telling the effects of racism and enslavement under the institution of slavery.

In describing *Beloved*, Carmen Gillespie argues that it is a novel which tells the conditions, under which both main characters Sethe and Paul D. were living.

*Beloved* is the story of what happens in the silences of trauma. The novel reveals the lives of its two main characters, Sethe and Paul. D. Both are former slaves and both are trying to create lives for themselves in the wake of decimating and pervasive personal histories. Both are forever marked by the legacy of their individual experiences with American slavery. (19)

Through time, slavery may have changed and taken new forms but still had the same principles; it is a kind of using someone's life for the benefits of other persons. Slavery had its beginning in 1619, when the first African slaves were brought to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, to aid in the production of such profits as tobacco.

In his book *Atlas of African-American History* James Ciment explains the relationship between slaves and masters; he says that it is true that they were living in a modern society but slaves were harshly exploited by their masters to gain much more profits:

Indeed, American slavery was complex. On the one hand, masters and slaves were part of a modern and dynamic economic system that yoked together one of civilization's oldest forms of labor—slavery—with modern, global free markets. Planters were businessmen (and occasionally women), willing to use any means necessary to realize the maximum return from their investments in human flesh. And their slaves were hyper-exploited workers who saw virtually

all of their surplus labor value—that is, the value of what they produced minus the cost of keeping them alive—taken from them, literally by force. (53)

Ciment also argues that this relation between slaves and masters concerns also their personal life. All what slaves were doing in their daily life was controlled by the masters:

At the same time, slavery was more than just a labor relationship. Slavery—as encoded in the laws and customs of the 19th century south—gave to one class of people absolute control over the lives of another. For slaves, marriage, family, friendship, home, labor, leisure—all depended upon the whims of the master (53)

Slaves helped in building the economic foundations of the new nation because it was practiced throughout the American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Ciment adds that slavery helped in the American productions of goods especially cotton production:

Between 1800 and 1860, cotton production doubled every 10 years. By the latter year, the American South was producing two thirds of the world's supply. At the same time, cotton exports were worth double the amount of all other goods and crops exported by the United States. (53)

Slavery was also important to the South's economy because it was the source to the cotton gin invention since the demand for this product in Europe was growing. By the mid nineteenth century, the American westward expansion with the abolition movement, which was growing in the North, created a debate over slavery, which was a direct cause to the bloody American Civil War (1861-65).

In the late eighteenth century, the abolitionist movement emerged in the North and the country began to divide over the issue of slavery between North and South. In 1820, the Missouri Compromise banned slavery north of the southern boundary of Missouri, which Southern saw as a threat to the institution of slavery itself. After, in 1857, the Dred Scott case held that congress did not have the right to ban slavery in states and that slaves were not citizens. Negroes had no rights of citizenship, and slaves that escaped to Free states were not free, but remained the property of their owners and must be returned to them. This decision breathed new life to the floundering abolition movement. Ferrell in her book *The Abolitionist Movement* explains why the Abolitionist movement was created. She claims that this act was a reaction to the violation of slaves' rights as humans and to say that slavery should not exist:

The history of the Abolitionist movement in the 1600s-1700s-if such a movement can be said to have existed- is essentially the history of the increasing use of slaves in the British North American colonies and the growing commitment of Quakers to prove that slavery was wrong, that it was a violation of human brotherhood and of the "Golden Rule" (17)

When Abraham Lincoln, a member of the anti-slavery Republican Party, was elected to the presidency in 1860, many southerners were convinced that slavery would never be permitted to expand into new territories acquired by United States, and might ultimately be abolished. Deborah H. DeFord in her book *Slavery in the Americas Life Under Slavery* said that slavery was a serious problem during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln:" In 1860, Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election with less than 40 percent of the popular vote. By then, the nation was hopelessly divided, and although the arguments focused on states' rights, the heart of the problem was slavery" (DeFord 93, 94)

According to DeFord Southerners wished that slavery would never know an end because it was the source of the South American economic well being:

The South had become a society that depended on slavery for its economic well being. Southerners would not voluntarily end or limit slavery. The Democratic Party, especially in the South, believed that individual states possessed the right to decide for themselves whether to be Slave states or Free states. However, the Republican Party in the North claimed that the nation must stand united to halt the spread of slavery or fall divided. (94)

Precipitating the Civil War, eleven southern states attempted to secede from the union, and during the war, president Abraham Lincoln presented the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which stands for freeing the slaves which were in all the areas of the country.

Furthermore, Abraham Lincoln established an institution in which he gave the access to blacks to join the United States Army. The United States Colored Troops (USCT) served on many battlefields, and won many Medals of Honor, and brought victory to the Union in the war. On December 1865, Eight months after the end of the Civil War, the United States adopted the Thirteenth Amendment to the constitution, which outlawed the practice of slavery: "With the end of the Civil War in April 1865 and the passage of the Thirteenth amendment in December, the slaves' deepest longing became a reality. Slavery came to an official end in the United States" (DeFord100).

## **2. Toni Morrison's Life and Achievements**

Toni Morrison, a Nobel Prize- winning author, was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, USA. Her original name is Chloe Ardelia Wofford, but for the world she is

known as Toni Morrison. She was the second oldest of four children born to George and Ramah Wofford.

Morrison had Southern roots even though she was born in Ohio. Her father's origins are from Georgia, and her mother's family was from Alabama. She was born during the Great Depression in the United States. Her father worked in different jobs just to provide his family's needs. Chloe's mother was a strong woman who was against injustice. Though Chloe's childhood's times had been hard she had a joyful infancy; their house was full of music, her mother and grandfather loved singing, and this love was due to their life under the legacy of slave culture. As Barbara Kramer cited in her book *Toni Morrison: A Biography of A Nobel Prize Winning Writer*:

Although times were hard, Chloe's childhood was not bleak. The Wofford home was filled with music. Ramah Wofford was in the church choir, and she was always singing around the house- Jazz, Blues, Gospel music, and Opera. Chloe's grandfather, John Solomon Willis, played the violin and for a while had supported his family with his music. (11).

The life of the Wofford's family was not full of joyfulness. They were living in slavery, they didn't have the right to live and have pleasure. However there were many traditions that the family had, such as storytelling, singing, and reading which gave them the opportunity to live like any person who practices his traditions. Even Chloe's mother was a member of a book club.

Morrison lived in a multicultural environment; she used to go to school with Greek, Italian, German, Irish, and African-American children. She had also another education rather than the one she got at school. Her parents transmitted to her the African-American cultural education through folklore and myths. These formed her childhood, so one can say that it also

built her personality. The family lived in the Midwest of America so it possessed a great appreciation and love for black culture. Her father's parents had died before her birth; she never knew them. Wofford's family is so close; each one of them is told to be responsible for his acts; it is maybe due to the legacy of slavery which separates families and makes each one of them responsible for only himself. Her career as a writer was a direct consequence of her family's influence, as Carmen Gillespie states in her book *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*: "Toni Morrison's family had a profound influence on her development as a writer. Morrison spent a great deal of time with her extended family, particularly with her maternal grandparents" (3). The influence of her grandparents is seen through her novels. Morrison did not experience slavery, but she lives it through the stories of slaves told by her grandparents. They helped her to know more about the past.

When she was twelve years old, Morrison started working to help her family. She wanted to prove that she can be responsible. At the age of thirteen she worked for a white family; she used to clean their house; it was an after-school job. She studied in Lorain High School where she was guided to the National Honor Society. Chloe loved reading, "By then she was reading all the great Russian and French novels as well as novels by English writers Jane Austen and American novelists Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather, and William Faulkner" (Kramer 16,17). She liked those books because she loved the way they were written. It is clear that she was dreaming to become famous like them.

In 1949 she graduated from high school, and pursued her studies at Howard University in Washington, D.C.«After high school, Morrison attended Howard University, where she studied English and classic literature in preparation for becoming a teacher» (Learning section 2), Chloe was the first woman in her family who went to college: she breaks the old traditions.

Her mother did her best to help her to follow her studies: she even worked as a ladies' room attendant.

Once at university, Chloe decided to use the nickname "Toni", because of the troubles people faced when pronouncing her name. She thought that Toni was more familiar. She loved reading and it was due to her family «Reading was highly regarded in the family- one grandfather was a figure of respect because he had taught himself to read and Morrison learned the skill at an early age» (Learning section 2). English was her favored language: she was a fan of English writings. Howard University was mainly a black school, but Toni didn't had chance to read lot of African-American writers' works, the program was based on classics written by American and white English writers, like Herman Melville, William Shakespeare and Nathaniel Hawthorne. It is clear that slavery didn't know an end. Even works written by blacks were not permitted to be put in the American libraries.

Toni became a member of a group of theater called the Howard University Players «Morrison joined the theatrical group, the Howard University Players, where she encountered students who were more concerned with talent than with color. The troupe performed throughout the South» (Li 12, 13), thanks to this group she had the chance to travel over the South when they were performing in plays during summers.

In 1953 Toni got her diploma from Howard University, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature and minor in classics. Later on she went to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where she got her master of arts degree in English in 1955, as Stephanie Li states in her book *Toni Morrison: A Biography* «After completing her BA at Howard, Morrison studied at Cornell University, where she received a master's degree in English» (13).

Toni started her academic career teaching English at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. A year and half later she came back to Howard University where she taught

English. In 1958 she got married with an architect from Jamaica called Harold Morrison. Then she became known as Toni Morrison, and in 1961 they had their first son Harold Ford.

During the fifties Morrison was not considered just as a novelist, she lived in the pre-civil rights era. So she can be also seen as a historian as John Duvall states in his book *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness*

What I attempt to do in this study is to see Morrison not only as a novelist who has written about history, but also as a historical figure in her own right. From this perspective, I argue that it does matter to her work that she grew up in pre-civil rights America, just as it matters that she became a writer in post-civil rights America (ctd in Jefferson 46).

Morrison's life during the civil rights movement was a positive point for her. She was present there and she experienced the racial segregation of black population, that's why she was able to narrate all the history of that period. She was also suffering from racism as any other black citizen. She expresses her feelings through her words.

Morrison had never thought that one day she would become a writer. She reads to know more about different cultures, or maybe it was just a continuation of what her family taught her. In 1962, she became a member of a group of writers on campus «Morrison had not thought about becoming a writer, but she did like to read. It was that interest that drew her to a writer's group on campus in 1962» (Kramer 22). It was a group of ten writers, who used to meet each month to read and study their works, and each one must bring a written work, it is understandable that for Morrison it is a kind of challenge to herself.

Morrison resigned from Howard University; she was expecting her second child "Pregnant, Morrison traveled to Europe in 1964 and lived there briefly before traveling back to the States to divorce her husband and to return temporarily to her parents' home in Lorain,

Ohio" (Gillespie 6). Here it is a sort of sacrifice that Morrison did: she made her family a priority over her job. She gave the image of an ideal mother. From here one may understand that in her novel *Beloved* she compares her offering to the one of Sethe. Both of them can do anything for the benefits of their children. Morrison's family went to Europe and it is there that Toni and her husband separate, and later they divorce. Morrison did not give much information about her private life with her husband, perhaps she thinks that there are things that should be kept for us. After her divorce Morrison remains with no job, knowing that she has two babies to feed. She didn't have the choice, she returns to her family's home in Lorain, Ohio, where her second son was born. Though her family helped her in raising her children, Morrison wanted to do it by her own. She was a responsible girl from her childhood.

Later, in 1965 she traveled to Syracuse with her sons, where she began thinking seriously about writing "Morrison and her sons moved to Syracuse in 1965, and it was there that she began to get serious about writing" (Kramer 24). Possibly she thought that it was time for her to start narrating all what she had collected since she was so young. Morrison worked as a textbook editor at Random House in Syracuse, New York. Even raising her sons as a single mother and working at the same time was not an easy task; she also continued working on her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. She had the power to overpass any obstacle. Her love for her children offers her the force to fight. Later she was promoted to senior editor and relocated to New York City, with this she was the first African-American woman to hold this position, and at the same time she resumed her teaching career. The position she acquired in her work can tell that even black people are able to obtain high positions. Subsequently she started practicing her profession of teaching her domain "In 1971, she began teaching literature and creative writing at the State University of New York at Purchase as an associate professor" (Gillespie 7).

Morrison followed the footsteps of her parents. She worked at different jobs; she worked at Yale University as a visiting lectureship, then she traveled from state to another: New York, New Haven, Connecticut, so that she will replenish her responsibilities as a professor and an editor. With her black skin and with all the discrimination existing in the society she succeeded to demonstrate her existence as a black woman.

With using both her black experience and the narratives told by her family Toni Morrison wrote many novels which made her well known around the world: *The Bluest Eye* (1970) which was a beginning to a young and skillful novelist. *Sula* (1973) provided Morrison a nomination for the National Book Award. It narrates a black female experience from childhood to womanhood. In 1977, Morrison gained the National Book Critics Circle Award for her book *Song of Solomon*. *Tar Baby* (1981), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998), *Beloved* which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Morrison wrote also other novels like; *Love* (2002), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2011), and *God Help The Child* (2014).

Today Morrison is in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University as the Robert. F. Goheen professor. Morrison is one of the reasons that African Americans miseries and traditions are known in the world today. As Jane Foress Bennett said in her article *Introducing Toni Morrison*:

«She is an astounding writer-not simply because her use of language simultaneously rivets one to the page and explodes assumptions of what can and can't be said in words, but because she tells stories we need like water: the meaning of child sexual abuse, of motherhood, of living African-American lives beyond the constraints and deathliness of US policies and ideas, of women's loving» (66).

Morrison is an amazing writer. She uses the ideas to write her novels, she knows exactly how to place her special words so that the reader will get the ideas transmitted through the

novels. Her experience as a black woman and as a daughter of an enslaved family allowed her to write about various subjects concerning society in the past. This of course is helping in the spread of African American story around the world.

### **3. Plot summary:**

In *Beloved*, The story begins in 1873 in Cincinnati, Ohio. It tells the story of a former slave named Sethe, who was living and working at Sweet Home as a slave in Kentucky. She was exploited and punished severely, and she could not take it anymore, so she decided to escape and never go back to slavery:

"Schoolteacher found you?"

"Took a while, but he did. Finally"

"And he didn't take you back?"

"Oh, no. I wasn't going back there. I don't care who found who"» (31).

She did it, she run away, and in her way to Ohio she had her second daughter that she named "Denver" after the girl who helped her. In her way she attempted to kill all her children, because she didn't want the slave catchers to take them back to slavery. But she killed just her oldest daughter by cutting her throats.

Later on, when Sethe arrived at Ohio she lived with her mother-in law Baby Suggs and her children: Denver, Howard, and Buglar. Sethe was rejected by the society because of what she did to her baby. People could not accept it.

Sethe's two boys ran away from the house, and then Baby Suggs dies. Sethe was working as a cook, and she was living with her daughter Denver. Denver stays alone; she was the only one who stayed with her mother: "Hot, shy, now Denver was lonely. All that leaving: first her brothers, then her grandmother—serious losses since there were no children willing to circle her in a game or hang by their knees from her porch railing" (9).

The house was scary, and it seems that it is haunted, but Sethe does not mind about that:"124 was spiteful. Full of baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims" (1).

One day, Paul D. Garner, a former slave, appeared; he knew Sethe because they were enslaved together. He lived in Sweet Home with Sethe. Paul. D knew everything about Sethe's past, about the hardship she went through in the plantation. Because he knows all about her, she feels like she can talk to him freely about everything. But Denver did not appreciate the idea of keeping this man with them at home.

After that a mysterious woman appears "The rays of the sun struck her full in the face, so that when Sethe, Denver and Paul.D rounded the curve in the road all they saw was a black dress, two unlaced shoes below it, and Here Boy nowhere in sight"(36- 37), this woman is called Beloved as the name written on the headstone of Sethe's dead baby. Denver liked so much Beloved, she considered her as her sister.

The idea that Denver needs a friend pushed Sethe to let Beloved stay with them at home. Sethe was also thinking about her dead daughter, she thought that it is her baby that came back: "Sethe was flattered by Beloved's open, quiet devotion. The same adoration from her daughter (had it been forthcoming) would have annoyed her"(41). Denver saw her as her old sister, but the only one who didn't appreciate the idea of keeping Beloved at home was Paul. D.

Beloved became a member of the family, and Denver was all the time trying to please her, though Beloved wanted just to own all what Sethe had: "She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have. Her eyes stretched to the limit, black as the all night sky"(54).

Beloved was seducing Paul D. But this was not the cause of the separation between Paul.D and Sethe. Paul.D met Stamp Paid, who was an old friend of the family and he told Paul.D about the murder of Sethe's baby, and how she did it, but Paul.D was unable to believe what Stamp Paid said:

"So Stamp Paid didn't say it all. Instead he took a breath and leaned toward the mouth that was not hers and slowly read out the words Paul.d couldn't. And when he finished, Paul.D said with a vigor fresher than the first time, I'm sorry, Stamp. It's a mistake somewhere 'cause that ain't her mouth"(113).

He told Sethe about what he heard from Stamp Paid, consequently they got in a dispute, then he left the house, but Sethe was thinking about Beloved, and she didn't care about Paul D.

Beloved was freer since Paul. D wasn't there, so she was alone with the two girls. Sethe and Denver gave Beloved everything, but Beloved wanted more and more, she even succeeded to keep Sethe at home; she stopped working so that she will spend all her time with Beloved. Consequently, there was no more food at home, and Denver thought that they will die, so she had to go out and ask for help in the town even if she had not left home for years. She tried to find a job though it was hard to get one, especially that the majority of the families in the town are as poor as them.

Paul. D was living in the church in the basement, since he left Sethe's house. His friend Stamp Paid didn't want him to stay there, he wished that people's town would have opened their houses to him.

Neighbors were helping the three women, but it was not sufficient, because the food was not shared between them; Sethe gave a big part to Beloved, since now she is pregnant with Paul D's child. The situation stayed as it is until Denver found a job. For Sethe, she was not only all the time hungry, but also she became Beloved's slave. Beloved took everything

from her. Denver couldn't support such situation, so she went to ask for work in the Bodwins's house.

Janey Wagon who is a house servant in the Bodwin home found a job for Denver. She convinced the Bodwins that they have to keep someone with them at night, since they are getting older and she couldn't stay with them.

The news about Sethe's daughter coming back were in the town, people thought that it came back to bedevil her, so a group of women from the community gathered and went to Sethe's home, to 124 Bluestone to drive out Beloved and save Sethe.

Once they were there, Mr. Bodwin arrived to take Denver to work. Sethe heard the women singing so she came out with Beloved. When she saw Mr. Bodwin she had a flashback and she thought that it was schoolteacher who came to take back her children to enslave them. She had an ice pick in her hand, so she attacked him with it, but Denver and the women intervened and saved him. Mr. Bodwin was unconscious about the danger he faced, all what he was conscious about was the attractive, beautiful, naked, and pregnant woman who was standing in the doorway.

Denver and Paul D. met in the street, and their reaction was that they run into each other. Denver is happy in her new life out in the community. She continued working for the Bodwins, and at the same time Miss Bodwin was teaching her. Her sister Beloved is not with them now; she disappeared the day Sethe attacked Mr. Bodwin and tried to kill him. But after that Sethe was not fine, she had some healthy troubles. She was exhausted after Beloved's adventure. Later on Paul D. got back with Sethe and returned to live in her house. He tried to persuade her that she is the best of her own, and not Beloved.

#### **4. Characters Description:**

The impact of slavery was a cause for the father's absence in the novel; that's why the role of the mother was dominant. In the novel, Morrison presents the house always as women's responsibility. Here one can say that Morrison reflects her personal life and experience through this novel. In *Beloved* women are oppressed for multiple reasons. The brutal institution of slavery which stole their rights of womanhood, also being especially a black woman is a clear reason for oppression, although women tried to prove their existence by playing their roles at home and out with the society. Sethe, Denver and Beloved are black women who suffered a lot in their life, and they have special and important roles in the novel that cannot be ignored.

##### **4.1. Sethe:**

She was born on a distant plantation that she barely remembers; her mother was an African-born slave, and she never knew neither her name nor who she is. As Carmen Gillespie states in her book *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* "Sethe is born a slave on a farm where her mother works in the rice fields and cannot even breast-feed her. Another woman, Nan, nurses Sethe"(44). She was brought to Sweet Home when she was a young teenager, where she got married with a man named Halle Suggs. Sethe had four children, two daughters and two sons. In his book *Reading Toni Morrison's Beloved* Paul McDonald said "...wife of Halle and daughter-in-law of Baby Suggs. [Sethe] attempted to murder her four children Buglar, Howard, Denver, and Beloved, in order to avoid having them taken into slavery"(91).

Sethe is haunted not only by the ghost of her dead daughter, but also by the memories of her life as a slave "She resides at 124 Bluestone Road in Cincinnati and is seemingly haunted by the ghost of her murdered child. She is also haunted by the trauma of her experiences as a slave"(McDonald 91). She does not want even to speak about her past; she

prefers reliving it in her head. One of the traces of slavery is the mass of scars on her back resembling to a tree "Sethe has been beaten so badly by schoolteacher that she has a scar on her back that Amy says resembles a chokecherry tree"(Gillespie 44). Sethe was scarred by the physical brutality of school teachers' nephews; however she seems to be even more disturbed when she has discovered that most people saw her as nothing more than an animal which can do nothing and without any value "After her actions, schoolteacher thinks her worthless, so he and the nephew leave"(Gillespie 44), and with this she feels that she lost her identity and her personality. Her objective was to reach freedom and give a free life to her children just to prove her humanity. Her escape from Sweet Home demonstrates that Sethe can resist impossible conditions just to keep her children far from slavery.

Sethe is a proud and independent woman who is extremely devoted to her children "She is fiercely independent woman but the guilt she feels over her actions, together with the psychological pain associated with her slave history"(McDonald 91).She was ready to do the impossible to save them. Though she barely knew her mother, Sethe's motherly instincts are her most striking characteristics. Her ambiguous relationship with her mother causes her an internal struggle, her mother worked for long hours and do not have time to spend it with her.

Of all her mother's children, Sethe was the only one given a name and allowed to live. Her mother decided to run away and abandon her alone to face the horror of slavery on her own. This abandonment affected Sethe deeply and helps in explaining Sethe's choices as a mother. She resolved not to do the same thing to her children; she refuses to leave them without a mother when they have gone ahead to Ohio. She risked her own life to save theirs. When she was faced with the reality that her children may be sent back into slavery, Sethe chooses to free them through death rather than allow them to encounter even a portion of her past experiences. She attempted to kill her children rather than see them returned to slavery.

She killed her older daughter by cutting her throat; that's a real proof of what she can risk for her children.

For Sethe, killing her children to save them from becoming slaves is the ultimate expression of motherly love and protection.

#### **4.2. Beloved:**

In his book *Bloom's Guides Toni Morrison's Beloved* Bloom said that Beloved's identity is mysterious; Sethe and Denver believe that Beloved is the ghost of Sethe's killed daughter; her real name is never known; « Beloved is the name of the mysterious woman who arrives at 124 Bluestone Road. Beloved goes through various identities—an infant, a sister, a lover » (14).

Many debates exist over the real identity of Beloved; some critics claim that she is the embodied spirit of Sethe's murdered daughter, such as Gloria G. Roberson claims that "Beloved was the spirit of the deceased infant killed by her mother, Sethe Suggs"(16). Others argue that she is a normal woman who suffers from mental instability. But the widely shared interpretation of the character of Beloved is that she is the spirit of Sethe's dead child. As Carmen Gillespie states: " The name Beloved comes from the word that Sethe had engraved on her dead daughter's sparkling pink tombstone and that name comes from the only two words Sethe hears the preacher say when the baby is buried: "Dearly Beloved." "(36-37) She represents also the legacy of slavery and the inescapable, horrible power of slavery's past: "Beloved represents the past and the slaves of the Middle Passage "(Bloom14).

Beloved wanted to know what happened with Sethe in her past so she was all the time asking Sethe about the past: "Beloved has a craving for sugar and loves to ask Sethe questions about the past, like what happened to Sethe's earrings, which she thinks are diamonds"(Gillespie 37). She is not only Sethe's dead daughter but her mother as well:

"Sethe seems to become the child while Beloved becomes the mother"(Gillespie 37). Since Sethe's mother came from Africa, Beloved remembers also the experience of Sethe's mother because she is a supernatural woman and she represents the injured souls of multiple African people: "In a broader sense she represents the return of the painful past for African Americans: the traumatic history of slavery which they struggle to come to terms with"(McDonald 91).Her character was not considered and developed as individual. Sethe made a song and she used to sing it for her children, but Beloved knows it so she sings it to let Sethe believe that she is her dead daughter. Beloved feeds herself from Sethe's love; she was always by her side; her actions were a mixture of anger and confusion; she was trying to make Sethe suffer. It was a kind of revenge for her, when she looked at Sethe losing her force slowly. She was behaving and acting like a wise woman and an innocent child at the same time: "While at 124, Beloved both cuddles Sethe and attempts to make her suffer.

Denver's unfailing loyalty goes unnoticed. Beloved vacillates between behaving like a woman and acting like a child. Her actions are filled with anger and confusion"(Gillespie37).

### **4.3. Denver:**

Denver is Sethe's second daughter; she gave birth to Denver on a boat on the borders of the Ohio River while running from schoolteachers. Sethe gave her the name of the girl who helped her when escaping to her child. As it is said by Carmen Gillespie in her book *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* "Sethe is pregnant with Denver when she escapes Sweet Home. Amy Denver helps Sethe give birth to Denver on a leaky boat on the edge of the Ohio River. Sethe names the child after the woman who helped her escape"(37).

Denver is the most dynamic character in the novel; she experiences the most positive personal growth in *Beloved* and represents the African American hope for the future. According to Gillespie, Denver was yet a little baby when Sethe killed her older daughter, so her life was like to grow up with the shadow that dominated the life of her family: " Denver was a tiny baby when Sethe killed her older sister so she never knows what it is like to grow up without that shadow hanging over her family's life " (37-38). Though intelligent, introspective, and sensitive, Denver's emotional growth has been weakened by her isolation from society for years. Her isolation was a direct consequence of her brothers' running away and her grandmother death; she was so lonely; she has not left the square of 124 by herself for twelve years: "She is lonely at Bluestone Road and gravitates toward Beloved when she arrives"(McDonald 92).

In her life, Denver didn't see many people, she was living just with her family except for Stamp Paid who was a former slave who helped Sethe, her children and others to cross the Ohio River to freedom: "...Denver grows up rarely leaving her own yard and seeing few people outside the family except for Stamp Paid. Since she is so lonely after her grandmother, Baby Suggs, dies and her brothers run away" (Gillespie 38). Her innocence was destroyed when she discovers what Sethe did to her sister and attempts to do with the rest of her children. Even as a young adult, her attitude is still very childlike. Beloved's arrival at 124 marks the starting of Denver's transformation, Denver becomes so happy because of the relation that exists between her and Beloved; she has a possessive need for Beloved. When Beloved gradually takes over the house and weakens Sethe, Denver recognizes that her family needs her for its survival.

By the end of the novel, Denver begins her own life with the outside world, far from Sethe's one, with understanding the reasons that pushed her mother do act the way she did in the past, as said by McDonald "Initially fearful of her mother, Denver comes to understand

more about her in the latter stages of the novel"(92). When she became a part of a larger community, Denver learns to go outside into the world and communicate with her community's people; "Denver breaks free from the trance that Beloved has cast over 124 Bluestone Road"(Gillespie 38). With all this she became a strong and a more confident woman, and even Paul .D said that now that she has grown up a little Denver reminds him of her father Halle.

### **Conclusion:**

The era during which the story of the novel takes place has greatly affected Toni Morrison. She lived those times through what her grandparents told her. The narratives she has been told were part of her heritage and the source of influence for her. One can say that slavery is one of the major topics that African American literature deals with. *Beloved* is a story that offers hints and images about life during and after slavery. Furthermore, its main female characters namely: Sethe, Beloved and Denver represent different aspects of the novel that are primal suffer from slavery, guilt incarnated in a mysterious person and finally second-hand experience of slavery through mother-daughter relationship. This connection to slavery creates a psychological impact upon them, and that is what formed their personalities. In the coming chapter a psychoanalytic study will be done to understand more how the female characters were affected by slavery and what consequences did it left on them.

**Chapter Two:**

**Psychoanalytic Study of the Female**

**Characters and the Quest for Identity in**

*Beloved*

## Introduction

The era where and when the novel was written, the writer's biography and the description of the characters are elements that one cannot omit while analyzing a novel. The description of the female characters is not sufficient to understand their attitude toward what they are living. So the present chapter is a psychological study of the characters of Sethe, Beloved and Denver and the way they were affected by the legacy of slavery.

### 2.1. Sethe

The novel presents the emotional effects of enslavement, but at the same time it shows the consequences of slavery on the psyche of the characters, mainly Sethe. As Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu states in her book *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*: "Beloved, as it depicts the emotional costs of enslavement, shows the psychic consequences of the slave owner's denial of the slave's status as a human subject"(36). Through *Beloved* one can deduce that slavery seriously hurt slaves' feelings and emotions. Slaves were considered like beasts or worst as things that slave owners can buy and sell as they want. This was hurting for the slaves, knowing that they lost their identity.

From all the slaves in the novel Sethe is the most influenced one by the past, she caused pain to herself and to the ones who surround her. Sethe's life is a big struggle; in the past she was struggling against slaveholders, now she is struggling against the society, which looks at her as a savage mother and accuses her of murder.

But the struggle that hurts her the most is the one with herself. Her mind calls to the memory of her dead baby, though she knows that she killed her for her own sake. In the book *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism*, Kenneth W. Warren states; "... a mother could cut the throat of one of her children in an attempt to kill them all to avoid having them returned to slavery"(79). All this gives to Sethe an instable personality. The external environment influences her personality; she is no more a slave but what she lived is

kept in her mind. She is still living in her memories, each time she reflects her present life to the previous one.

### **2.1.1 Sethe's Relationship with her Children**

Sethe is extremely devoted to her children; she considers them as a part of herself: "... Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children, waving away flies in grape arbors, crawling on her knees to a lean-to"(168). This former slave woman is an example of a rebellious mother, who murders one of her four children to avoid her physical and emotional dread of a life spent under slavery; "While Sethe, who is excessively invested in motherhood, asserts her position as subject in the discourse of the good mother, she also treats her children as part of herself, not as separate, and thus makes life and death decisions for them"(ctd in Beaulieu 37).

Sethe is given the role to speak about the past. She is speaking about the act she commits when she attempts to cut the throats of her daughter. Bhaskar A.Shukla argues that; "Sethe eventually confronts the memory of her daughter's death"(89). That hurts her but she had no choice, for her that was the best and the only way to protect her baby. Sethe was sure that if her daughter is taken back to slavery, she will suffer like her mother. She will die under the harsh rules of slavery or she will be killed by the masters; "if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear happen to her"(142). Sethe's experience of slavery was the cause that encouraged her to murder her daughter. She knows that pity doesn't exist in the hearts of the masters. She declares that even though she regrets what she did to her daughter, she preferred that rather giving her to slave owners; "I couldn't let all that go back to where it was, and I couldn't let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher"(116). Her act of killing can be understood as Sethe's excessive love for her children. Adriana Zühlke in her book *Toni Morrison's Novel "Beloved" An Analysis* states: "Sethe, the protagonist of *Beloved*

fits into that scheme: she is a woman, she is a slave, she is black. These are the three circumstances which determines and nearly destroy her life. But there is still another fact, which determines her life-her motherhood"(5). As a comment, one can say that it is true that Sethe have psychological troubles because of her past as a black woman slave, but the most powerful force which pushes her to do so with her daughter is her maternal instincts.

Her act can also be justified by her life during slavery «It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that» (117). She remembers all what she lived, and she imagines what if her children experienced that.

### **2.1.2. Sethe's Relationship with her Daughters**

Sethe never experiences her mother's love "My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don't remember. I didn't see her but few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo"(44). So this can explain her attachment to her children. She maybe is trying to do with her children what her mother didn't do with her. She wants to protect them.

The relationship between son and mother is clearly seen in the novel. Zita Rarastesa states in her book *Love and Motherhood in Toni Morrison's Beloved*: "For a while, her position as a mother made her lose her individuality. It meant that she only considered herself a mother and extended much energy to fit in the role of mother for her children, especially for the daughter she killed"(chapter three). Sethe is so close to her daughters, mostly Beloved, she wants to get back all the lost time when Beloved was far from her. Sethe's regrets about her murdered daughter pushes her to believe that this woman who came to her home is her daughter, so she offers all her life and time to Beloved, just to serve her whenever she wants; "We'll smell them together, Beloved. Beloved. Because you mine and I have to show you these things, and teach you what a mother should"(143).She killed her daughter, but she is so

obsessed by the returned ghost. Later on she was persuaded that it is her dead daughter who came back and now haunts the house. Sethe's relation with Beloved is a deep one. Zita Rarastesa states: "The relationship between Sethe and Beloved is not simply a mother-daughter relationship, but it is the relationship between Sethe's present and past"(chapter three).

Beloved made Sethe remember always the past and live it in the present. Shelby Larrick explains that: "Sethe brings Beloved into her home, believing she is the daughter killed out of love and protection so many years before. Beloved becomes a haunting figure that feeds off of the lives of those around her"(2).

The basic element to form a strong personality is the family, but Sethe didn't have a family; she didn't even see her mother; "By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks—that's the way the others did"(44). Sethe's miseries during her enslavement formed her troubled personality.

A mother is supposed to love and take care of her children. The maternal instincts create a very strong force beside Sethe. Johanna Wising wrote an article entitled *Motherhood and the Heritage of Slavery in Toni Morrison's Novels Sula and Beloved* in which she speaks about Sethe and says: "Sethe is a woman of tremendous, inner strength who has survived the brutality which was a common aspect of slavery. As a result of having experienced the evils of slavery her greatest fear is that her children will suffer this as well"(10-11).

Sethe's strange and instable acting up reflects her psychological distress. Her conscious experience in the past controls her present life, she could not forget it; "She repressed the memory of the attack, causing her to never fully move on with her life, but live, instead, constantly trying to subdue the memories that threaten to haunt her every day"(Larrick2). She is so scared of slave holders, because she knows that if they find her they

will take her back to slavery. She got the trauma because of what she lived, and she doesn't want to experience that anymore. A child is supposed to have a happy infancy, but Sethe spent her childhood in slavery.

It is true that being a slave for Sethe is hurting because she suffered much, but it wasn't an obstacle for her to make a new beginning. She became much stronger: she is able to confront anything.

Her relation with Denver was so close, because she is the only one who stayed with her. She tells her something about her past "You never told me what happened. Just that they whipped you and you run off, pregnant. With me"(27).Denver had always been alone: her mother relived her past for herself. Her mother's decisions caused her solitude. "Sethe's daughter, Denver, also suffers because of Sethe's decisions. Denver has always been alone in the world, her older brothers having run away, and Beloved being killed at such a young age"(Larrick 3).

### **2.1.3. Sethe's Relationship with Men**

Sethe's relationship with her husband Halle is strong because they loved each other when they were at sweet Home, but now she hates him because he was absent when she needed him, because if he was by her side, those horrors that Sethe lived wouldn't happen.

"What Halle ever do to you? Halle stood by you. He never left you"

"What'd he leave then if not me?"

"I don't know, but it wasn't you. That's a fact"

"Then he did worse; he left his children"

"You don't know that"

"He wasn't there. He wasn't where he said he would be"

"He was there"

"Then why didn't he show himself? Why did I have to pack my babies off and stay behind to look for him" (49)

She considers her husband the only responsible for her act of killing her daughter and for her two boys running out from home. She was alone with no protection neither from her family nor from her husband. As Tiya Miles states: "Sethe learns later that her husband, who disappeared, had witnessed her humiliation and could not survive the fact of it"(62). But she was proud of what she did to protect her children "I did it. I got us all without Halle too"(Morrison 115).

Contrary to Halle, she loved Paul. D. They experienced slavery together, so they know many things about each other; "Almost from the moment of Paul D's arrival, Denver is threatened by his relationship with her mother and by the memories that they share but she does not"(Gillespie 20). Sethe was very happy when Paul. D told her that he wants to have a baby with her; "I want you pregnant, Sethe. Would you do that for me? Now she was laughing and so was he"(Morrison 92). One can say that Paul. D appeared at the moment when Sethe needed someone to share her pain with.

#### **2.1.4. Sethe's Quest for Identity**

Sethe's background limits her actual thinking and understanding of things. She is never going to pass on her bad memories. Her life as a slave took an important part in her life story.

I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him say, "No, no. that's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line

them up". I commenced to walk backward, didn't even look behind me to find out where I was headed (Morrison 137).

Slaves were considered like nonhumans, their masters used their power upon them to gain much more benefits. They imposed their rules and forced them to work as much as possible. Injustice and inhumanity were the principles of the slave owners.

Slave masters beat Sethe until they formed a kind of tree in her back "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk—it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches"(Morrison 57).

This body full of scars and wounds show the frightening experience of the past, both physically and psychologically. Sethe's body is not the suitable place, where identity could be recognized in a positive way; "One of the aspects of slavery which resulted in negative effects on the slaves' self image was the fact that they were sold. Slaves were regarded as not being human; they were products with a price"(Wising5). Sethe's past full of misery and cruelty shapes her life to the extent that she is not able to recover her identity; she loses her personality.

The horrible act of cutting the throat of her daughter made Paul. D think about her real feelings towards her children, as Harold Bloom states; " Sethe's professed lack of regret scares Paul D and leads him to question her humanity ("You got two feet, Sethe, not four")" (8). Paul. D was also a slave, but he cannot accept what Sethe did to her daughter. He considered that act as inhuman and this made him fear because Sethe did not regret it.

Identity can be formed by the family, the society, and the environment, but for Sethe she could not have an identity because she is separated from her family and then neglected by the society, and the most important aspect is the environment where she lived. Slavery forbids blacks to have an identity. They were not even considered human beings; they were seen as

animals. Mohit Kumar Ray and Rama Kundu argue that; "Her humanity has been so violated by the slave master, and her entire experience as a slave woman, she kills her daughter to save her from psychic death"(93).

Sethe's identity is lost in all the pain she lived in the past. She was treated badly and inhumanely, knowing that she was pregnant. She was not respected; she feels she is like an animal; "I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms"(Morrison 11),

Beloved's appearance played a crucial role in forming Sethe's identity. Thanks to the character of Beloved, a powerful symbol of the link between the present and the past is created. Beloved reminds Sethe about all her past, so Sethe tells everything about the hidden past; "Beloved took every opportunity to ask some funny question and get Sethe going.

Denver noticed how greedy she was to hear Sethe talk"(Morrison 46). She tries each time to let Sethe speak about the past, and tell her how she lived and what she did with her dead baby.

The feelings that she is a mother who protect her children makes Sethe feel that she is a human being; "To return to the question of gender roles, Sethe may at the end move somewhat from defining her humanity in terms of motherhood"(Bloom's 12). One can say that for Sethe, her children represent her identity. She had babies and she did her best to keep them safe so she is a human.

## **2.2. Denver:**

It is evident that Denver did not live during slavery's period. But she experienced it through the eyes of her mother. She hates slavery; "Denver don't like for me to talk about it. She hates anything about Sweet Home except how she was born"(Morrison 144). The trauma that Sethe endured in the past is transmitted to her daughter Denver, through the

psychological status of her mother. Silvia Castro-Borrego states; "Denver's storytelling, overlapping with memory, is desire-ridden. The fleshing out of her mother's story nurses Beloved's interest; alternatively, it endows Denver with a history and ability to connect to the other"(89).

### **2.2.1. Denver's Solitude:**

After her grandmother's death and her brothers running away, Denver stood alone. Even children of the community refused to play with her. This environment caused her a psychological harm; she suffered from loneliness; "Because their house is haunted by the spirit of Beloved, before she returns, no children have ever dared to seek closeness with Denver. Such solitude can cause severe psychological damage, and Denver struggles to find a sense of meaning and purpose in her life"(Larrick 3).She wanted to go outside but she was scared of slavery, of what can happen to her:

I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too. (Morrison 145)

All what Denver fears is the return of the past. She thinks that if she went out, the slave catchers would come and will try to take her. Denver thought that her mother would kill her just to keep her far from slavery.

Denver takes Beloved's return as a pleasing event. Carmen Gillespie states; in her "Since she is so lonely after her grandmother, Baby Suggs, dies and her brothers run away,

Denver actually enjoys the company of the ghost who haunts the house"(38). All what Denver thought about was that, now since Beloved is there she will never feel alone again.

### **2.2.2. Sisterhood:**

Denver was very lonely that the coming of Beloved made her so happy "Beloved looked at the sweet bread in Denver's hands and Denver held it out to her. She smiled then and Denver's heart stopped bouncing and sat down—relieved and easeful like a traveler who had made it home"(40).

One can say that Beloved's arrival at Sethe's home is a gift to Denver. She feels that she will be able to build new relations. And maybe it's time for her to get out of her solitude and discover the outside world. "Beloved's arrival serves as test of Denver's worth and her ability to connect with another"(Larrick 3).

One can notice that the coming of Beloved had an influence upon Denver's attitude, but at the same time it isolated her from her mother. Sethe and Beloved share the same past, in which Denver was not a part of. Rebecca Hope Ferguson in her book entitled *Rewriting Black Identities: Transition and Exchange in the Novels of Toni Morrison* states:

The intensity that characterizes the relationship between Denver and Beloved, then lies in a shared need and a mutual feeding-in Denver's desire to know about the place Beloved came from, and of course to have a companion, and in Beloved's desire to find out from Denver about the shape of things in the world and the history of the living (155).

Both Denver and Beloved need each other. Denver needs her to be with her since she has always been alone. Beloved needs her to know more about the earthly life, since she is not a normal person.

Denver loves Beloved and enjoys her friendship, but at the same time she is frightened of what Beloved can do to her mother; "Walking toward the stream, beyond her green bush house, she let herself wonder what if Beloved really decided to choke her mother"(75).

### **2.2.3. Denver's Quest for Identity:**

Denver had never gone outside the house. She was obsessed by the idea that all the community's people hate them and do not want them there. She was also affected by the idea that her mother will kill her if she went out and the slave catchers came to take her; "Because their house is haunted by the spirit of Beloved, before she returns, no children have ever dared to seek closeness with Denver"(Larrick 3).

Denver did not have an identity. She was all the time at home, no friends, no family rather than her mother who was most of the time silent. By the end of the novel, Denver decided to go out and ask for help; "Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (170).

She didn't want to wait anymore. She felt that it was time for her to start her own way in protecting her mother; "Waiting for me. Tired from her long journey back. Ready to be taken care of; ready for me to protect her. This time I have to keep my mother away from her. That's hard, but I have to. It's all on me"(146). Denver wanted to make a new beginning, starting from keeping her mother away from danger. It is clear that she wants to make a new starting and to build a new identity far from fear and loneliness "She ventures out into the

world and learns to get along and communicate with her community. She becomes a more confident and strong woman"(Gillespie 38). One can argue that Denver created her identity through strengthening her own personality. She gained confidence and this helped in building her individuality.

### **2.3. Beloved:**

Beloved is the mysterious character in the novel. She is not only the past and memories of Sethe, but also the spirits of all the dead slaves; "Beloved becomes more than just a repressed memory, but also a representation for the entire community"(Larrick 4). Beloved represent all the African Americans dead during slavery.

Beloved's return can be understood as the need for taking revenge. Caroline Rody claims that; "In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) a murdered baby girl returns from death in passionate longing for the ex-slave mother who killed her, and in the ensuing drama nearly strangles her to death"(3). One can view that Beloved couldn't bear what her mother did to her. She wanted to drive her up to death.

Beloved return was to take revenge from Sethe, she wanted to make her suffer; "She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have. Her eyes stretched to the limits, black as the all night sky" (54). One can deduce that the one and only objective of Beloved's coming was to take Sethe with her: she wanted her dead.

### 2.3.1. Beloved Representing Past and Present:

Beloved couldn't accept the idea that she is dead. She wished that she is still alive, and to live with her mother. In her book *Toni Morrison's Beloved and the Apotropaic Imagination* Kathleen Marks states; "Beloved wants to be kept alive, but Paul. D's protective use of the lard can thwarts her"(89). Beloved was obsessed with her mother. She was all the time trying to spend all her time with her.

«Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side?

Yes. I was on the other side.

You came back because of me?

Yes.

You rememory me?

Yes. I remember you.

You never forgot me?

Your face is mine. (Morrison 151-152)

Beloved was a tiny baby when her mother killed her, but she still remembers her. It is understandable that Beloved couldn't forgive her mother.

Beloved know things about Sethe. She knows many secrets about her; "Beloved begins to hum a song that only Sethe's children know"(Marks 93). Beloved lives in the present with them but knows things which happened in the past:

"I made that song up," said Sethe. "I made it up and sang it to my children.

Nobody knows that song but me and my children"

Beloved turned to look at Sethe. "I know it," she said. (Morrison 123)

According to these quotes it seems that the personality of Beloved is really ambiguous and mysterious. She lived in the past and she is living in the present.

Beloved remembered many things Sethe did; "She went there. She was getting ready to smile at me and when she saw the dead people pushed into the sea she went also and left me there with no face or hers. Sethe is the face I found and lost in the water under the bridge"(Morrison 151). One can say that her existing in different places and different moments is the proof that she is Sethe's baby girl who came back home.

Beloved's familiarity of the past makes Sethe more aware about whom she is; "And so Beloved agitates memory, explicitly in Sethe, from whom she seeks, even while still a stranger, stories from Sethe's past"(Bloom's 17). One can argue that it is evident that Beloved is Sethe's dead daughter. She was present in many events in the past.

### **2.3.2. Beloved's Quest of Identity:**

Beloved lost her life and identity when her mother cut her throat. Pamela B. June claims that; "Most obviously, Beloved's scar on her neck reveals her identity as the daughter murdered by Sethe"(24). One can argue that Beloved lost her identity when her mother gave up on her. But she regained it now since she is back to life even it is just as a ghost.

For Sethe Beloved had never died, she believed that she was always with her. She gave her an identity through her thoughts; Beloved had always been alive in the memories of her mother; "The "click" is something recalled because Sethe had already pre-created Beloved as well as her place in the world, and only now when she no longer has even to speak words can the join truly begin"(Marks 93). One can view that Sethe was the responsible of Beloved coming back to life. It is understandable that Beloved felt her mother accusing herself because she killed her daughter. Also she knew that her mother missed her, so she decided to come back.

Through her return Beloved is manifesting her identity and her existence; "Beloved's return first as a spirit and then as a body indicates the continuing physical presence of historical wounds, but it also emphasizes the body's role in identity and recognition"(June 30). One can understand that Beloved was not satisfied by her spiritual presence: she wanted to regain her identity. And to do so she came back as a body.

### **Conclusion:**

Slavery's horrors had a psychological impact upon the female characters of the novel. One can say that Sethe's mental troubles came from her past. Sethe had psychological troubles due to her life in slavery. She also hurt Denver's psyche by letting her imagine how slavery hurts. But for Beloved it is not the same. She experienced the terrors of slavery by

herself, and the result was that she lost her life. The psychological damage of the female characters made them search for their identity so this quest for identity will let them recognize their status as human beings.

# **General Conclusion**

In *Beloved* Toni Morrison employs narrative expressions of the body life, of the time and memory through a feminine notion. Sethe is narrating her life and the life of other blacks who experienced slavery with her. In fact she is telling how their bodies survived the harsh conditions of slavery. In *Beloved*, Morrison tends to give a voice to the black history, the history denied by the whites, because it shows the savagery of the slave owners, and the terrifying conditions that surrounded the slaves. She recreated the past to keep the reader remember what happened to African Americans.

The present work has shown to the reader what African Americans endured in an institutionalized slave system. By focusing on the dehumanizing effect of slavery we were able to shed light on the sufferings of slaves and how they managed to resist such kind of life. Each one of the major female characters had been touched by the effects of that traumatic way of living under such conditions.

Sethe committed a crime when murdering her older daughter. Her life as a slave influenced her psychologically. She was tortured, raped and mistreated. As a consequence she has mental troubles. Her experience as a slave made her fear that her children will have the same fate.

Beloved as Sethe's killed daughter lost both her life and her mother. She is representing the consequences of slavery. Though she was not a slave, she lost her life because of slavery. One can say that she experienced slavery indirectly.

Denver also is suffering from the effects of that horrible past. She does not have any relation with her community because of her mother's act of murdering her daughter. She is living alone far from society in a dark world that was haunted by the ghost of her sister. Her behavior is strange, as she is isolated from the outside world and created her own world only with her ghost sister as a companion. She is living the effects of slavery through her mother.

Consequently, one can argue that the female psyche in this novel is affected in a negative way by slavery, it destroyed their souls and their identities. For Sethe, slavery forced her to feel like she is seen like a beast. The mistreatment she had from the schoolteacher made her think that even others believed in her dehumanization.

The novel shows us what happened to Sethe, her family and other slaves working on the plantation. Sethe was mistreated and raped. Afterward she tried to escape from the plantation. As a result of her miserable life, she killed her baby and attempted to kill the rest of her children. Her husband went mad when he saw what happened to his wife and he could do nothing to protect and save her.

In the novel, even though slaves became free, they had never forgotten about their horrific past. They are still living in the past through their traumatic memories. They have even the feeling that they have lost their identities, Sethe's past full of cruelty shapes her life to the extent she is not able to recover her identity and thus remains wounded. The slave holders made their victims such as Sethe feel that they lost their identities through their harsh treatment. So later on each one of the female characters tends to quest for her identity, and each one of them did that in her own way.

Sethe considers her children as her identity. She believes that since she could protect them from becoming slaves, she is seen by the others as a human, who can feel and love, also as a protective mother who care for the well being of her children.

For Beloved, she wants to regain her identity through her coming back to life. Slavery made her lose her life as well as her identity. So she thought that with her return to life she is going to have an identity.

Denver's quest for identity is different. She thinks that since she is living with just her mother and without having any contact with the outside world, she cannot form her identity. Therefore, she feels that she acquired her identity when she succeeded to get free from her

solitude and make herself a part of her community, where she feels like she is free and does not depend on her mother's help. Denver creates her own personality and identity.

Toni Morrison's skillful writing has vividly depicted the horror of slavery and its consequences on female characters. One can say that it is very obvious in the novel that slavery threatens the psychology and spiritual world of individuals especially Sethe's one, and causes horrific and brutal consequences.

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## Résumé

Cette dissertation intitulé L'Esclavage et la Reconstruction d'Identité des Personnages Féminins du roman de Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, a pour but de démontrer la manière dont l'esclavage a établi un système qui encourage les esclavagistes à traiter leur esclaves noirs comme des bêtes, en leur imposant des règles d'aucun être humaine ne peut supporter. A partir de là, les esclaves ont été affecté psychologiquement par l'esclavage, et cela les a obligés à croire vraiment qu'ils avaient perdu leur identité à cause du traitement qu'ils avaient eu. Dans le roman, les personnages féminins sont les plus affectées par cet état d'esprit. Cela leur a inspiré la peur de tout, plus précisément en ce qui concerne le personnage de Sethe. Son passé l'a traumatisé : l'esclavage lui a causé des troubles psychologiques. Le roman représente l'histoire de Sethe et sa vie tragique pendant l'esclavage. Pour cela, ce travail de recherche explore et analyse la position sociale de l'esclavage dans le roman de Toni Morrison *Beloved* (1987). Cette analyse met en évidence les effets de l'esclavage sur les personnages féminins, et comment il a contribué à leur faire croire qu'ils ont perdu leur identité et qu'il été nécessaire de la reconstruire.