

# Magical Realism and Supernatural Elements in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

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## Abstract

*Toni Morrison's Beloved is a profound postmodern tale that delves into the lasting emotional, psychological, and societal effects of slavery on African American individuals in the wake of the American Civil War. Focused on Sethe, a runaway slave tormented by the spirit of her late daughter, the novel examines how traumatic memories influence identity, relationships, and motherhood. Through its disjointed narration and elements of magical realism, Morrison reveals the intrusive and persistent impact of the past on the present. The idea of "re-memory" emphasizes that history is not just confined to what has happened but remains alive and can emerge unexpectedly at any time. "Beloved" is considered one of her most significant works. The story is inspired by the true tragedy of Margaret Garner, an enslaved mother who took her child's life to escape from slavery. The setting takes place in Cincinnati, Ohio, at 124 Bluestone Road in the year 1873. The spirit of Sethe's dead child haunts the residence shared by her and her daughter Denver. The past resurfaces with the unexpected arrival of a mysterious young woman named Beloved.*

**Keywords:** Dehumanization, Maternal Sacrifice, Reconstruction, Infanticide, Exorcism

Morrison looks at how the pain of slavery stays with people even after they are free. The book is set in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1873, during the Reconstruction era, when ex-slaves were striving to start over after the Civil War. Sethe, an escaped slave who lives at 124 Bluestone Road with her daughter Denver, is the story's primary character. The ghost of Sethe's dead kid haunts the house, making everyone feel anxious and stressed out. When a mysterious young woman named Beloved shows around, the past comes tumbling back into their lives. Morrison shows how the pain of slavery comes back in both obvious and subtle ways through this haunting, making it hard to ignore or bury.

One of the main themes in *Beloved* is remembrance. Morrison introduces the concept of "remembrance," which suggests that recollections of the past are a constant. Sethe's memories of the Sweet Home plantation continue to influence her life today. She is still psychologically impacted by her release from slavery. The ghost of Beloved represents the rebirth of suppressed trauma. Despite

Sethe's best efforts, her painful history haunts her. Paul D is equally traumatized; his "tobacco tin" heart contains his painful recollections. Morrison shows how trauma affects people profoundly in a variety of ways.

One of the central themes of the book is the concept of memory, particularly painful memory. Morrison presents the concept of "rememorize," which implies that the past is real and could reappear at any time. Sethe's current existence is often disrupted by memories of Sweet Home Plantation, where she suffered from physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and mental humiliation. Her past traumas have imprisoned her psychologically even after she managed to escape slavery. This eerie presence of history is symbolised by the ghost of Beloved. The psychological and emotional effects of slavery in America following the Civil War. Morrison examines how traumatic memory affects identity, relationships, and motherhood via the tale of Sethe, an escaped slave haunted by the spirit of her deceased daughter. The novel depicts the eerie presence of the past by fusing realistic aspects with eerie ones.

Morrison emphasises the terrible effects of slavery on Black families through themes of memory, trauma, and mother sacrifice. Additionally, he contends that healing might result from social and collective memory.

Motherhood is one of the book's most powerful topics. Sethe defines herself mostly as a mother. Her decision to kill her child rather than allow her to return to slavery was an example of extreme mother love formed by tragic circumstances. This action creates moral complexity. On the one hand, Sethe's actions are shocking and aggressive. But it's a desperate attempt to protect her child from the cruelty of slavery. Rather than providing a direct evaluation, Morrison invites readers to understand the emotional depth of a mother's suffering. Milk is a potent symbol of motherhood. Sethe's allegation that her milk was pilfered is an example of how her rights as a mother were violated. Slavery destroys the natural bond between a mother and her child in addition to controlling the body.

The most controversial act in the book is Sethe's decision to kill her baby daughter instead of allowing her to return to slavery. This act shocks the readers as much as the characters. But Morrison places it in the brutal historical background of slavery. Sethe appears to use death as a sort of defence. She believes that slavery is worse than death, and her acts are driven by a strong maternal love that was shaped by unbearable trauma. Rather than rendering a firm moral verdict, Morrison invites readers to understand the psychological desperation that drives Sethe's choice.

Toni Morrison's fascinating analysis of feminism in *Beloved* is based on the real-life experiences of Black women. Unlike traditional Western feminist narratives that often focus on white middle-class women, Morrison stresses the historical struggles, resiliency, and fortitude of African American women during and after slavery.

Through characters like Sethe, Baby Suggs, and Denver, Morrison highlights the connection between race, gender, and oppression, demonstrating how racial cruelty and patriarchal authority impact Black womanhood. Black women endured a specific form of oppression as a result of slavery. They were forced to perform physical tasks, denied control over their own bodies, and sexually abused. Sethe's time at the Sweet Home plantation serves as an example of this truth. Her mistreatment and the theft of her breast milk serve as a metaphor for how enslaved women's bodies were viewed as property. In this context, Black women were deprived of both personal freedom and maternity rights. Morrison describes how slavery destroyed traditional families and made women into labouring, reproductive machines.

Unlike Sethe, who is still stuck in the past, Denver eventually comes out of his isolation and seeks help from the community. Her development suggests that Black women will have a bright future free from silence and fear. Through Denver, Morrison argues that the secret to empowerment

is community connection and support. Furthermore, preconceptions are challenged by Morrison's portrayal of Black women. Instead of portraying Black women as timid or subservient, she presents them as ethically confused, emotionally complex, and intellectually strong. Phases of agony, love, anger, regret, and bravery pass through them. Their stories emphasise not just suffering but also identity formation and survival.

Toni Morrison's inventive storytelling style is one of *Beloved's* most notable features. Morrison employs non-linear narration, shifting perspectives, and fractured storytelling in place of a straightforward chronological order. The characters' psychological states, particularly their terrible recollections, are reflected in this intricate structure. The novel's fractured structure is intentional; it represents the shattered identities and lives brought about by slavery. The narrative alternates between the past and the present. Rather than being explained at the outset, events at Sweet Home Plantation are gradually revealed through memories and flashbacks. Morrison waits until later in the book to provide crucial details, such as the cause of the baby's death.

Morrison employs a range of perspectives as well. Instead of being recounted from a single point of view, the story switches between Sethe, Denver, Baby Suggs, Paul D, and even *Beloved*. Each character has a different emotional and psychological reaction to slavery. The fact that various people experience trauma in different ways is highlighted by the variety of viewpoints. By presenting a range of perspectives, Morrison creates a collective story that captures the collective suffering of African Americans. Another important literary device in the book is stream of consciousness. There are several instances where ideas are free to flow without adhering to strict grammatical norms, especially in Sethe, Denver, and *Beloved's* inner monologues. Repetition is another crucial narrative device. This repetition reflects the recurring nature of painful memories, which often return in cycles. It also makes these parts more symbolic. When everything is taken into account, Morrison's fragmented story reflects how slavery causes identity to break down. Shifting voices, lyrical language, and chronology interruptions create a narrative structure that represents pain itself. Morrison challenges traditional storytelling norms in order to completely engage readers with the emotional and historical depth of the book.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison emphasises that healing from trauma requires teamwork rather than individual effort. Even though a significant amount of the book focuses on personal recollection and suffering, it ultimately suggests that recovering from the psychological wounds of slavery requires group assistance. Instead of portraying the Black community as merely a backdrop, Morrison shows it as a powerful force capable of restoring identity, dignity, and hope. The family resides in an eerie home and is socially isolated from their neighbours. Sethe's trauma and remorse are made worse by this confinement.

After the horrific incident of her child's death, the community distances itself from her and condemns her actions without considering the depth of her suffering. Morrison shows how people become weaker and trauma worsens when they are isolated from the community. Baby Suggs is a noteworthy symbol of group recovery. She educates former slaves to accept their bodies and identities by gathering them in the Clearing. Her sermons often focus on self-acceptance and spiritual renewal.

Denver's character also highlights the importance of community. Unlike her mother, she seeks help when their situation becomes dangerous. Denver breaks the cycle of loneliness by walking outside and seeking assistance from neighbours. Her action represents growth and optimism for the next generation. Morrison believes that the younger generation may progress by making relationships rather than being silent. Through these events, Morrison presents community as a source of strength, understanding, and renewal. Mutual support, common experience, and collective memory all help to transform sorrow into resilience. The story illustrates how important it is to

repair the bonds that slavery destroyed in order to survive.

In her deeply moving and complex work *Beloved*, Toni Morrison examines the long-lasting psychological and emotional impacts of slavery. The book demonstrates through the experiences of Sethe, Denver, Paul D., and the greater Black community that being set free from physical servitude does not immediately alleviate the anguish of oppression. Instead, the past continues to remain in memory, impacting identity, relationships, and self-worth. Morrison demonstrates that slavery is a lasting legacy that affects future generations rather than merely a distant incident by transforming history into lived experience. *Beloved* explores the psychological ramifications of slavery in great detail. Toni Morrison uses pain, parenthood, memory, and paranormal elements to depict history as a dynamic and living entity. According to the book, freedom includes not only physical but also psychological and emotional components. Ultimately, Morrison argues that healing necessitates confronting the past, accepting responsibility, and embracing community. *Beloved* is a powerful and timeless piece that gives voice to the history of African Americans that has been suppressed.

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