

# Love as Leading Force in "Beloved" by Toni Morrison

---

Jelovčan-Bulatović, Dimitrij

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2018

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet u Rijeci**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:186:592296>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#) / [Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-05-13**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences - FHSSRI Repository](#)



**University of Rijeka  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department of English Language and Literature**

**LOVE AS A LEADING FORCE  
IN “BELOVED” BY TONI MORRISON**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and Literature  
and Croatian Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka**

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. sc. Tatjana Vukelić**

**Student: Dimitri Jelovcan  
Course: African American Literature  
Course Instructor: dr. sc. Tatjana Vukelic  
Ac. Year: 2017/2018**

**Rijeka, September 2018**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

1. Introduction
2. Beloved as a symbol of slavery
3. Love as a leading force in “Beloved”
4. Different types of love in “Beloved”
  - 4.1. Sethe's love
  - 4.2. Denver's love
  - 4.3. Paul D's love
  - 4.4. Beloved's love
5. Beloved and its importance today
6. Conclusion
7. Bibliography

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Love as one of the strongest emotions that a living being can experience, sensation which is an integral and vital part of life, an unique emotion which often manifests itself as a magnificent force, in Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" is presented as almost palpable magical force, more precisely, energy, that drive and shape characters and their lives in many different ways, forming them, healing, destroying and taking them deep into their own inner selves. Deep-set psychological issues underline love as a feeling in Toni Morrison's "Beloved", which makes this emotion and state of mind even more interesting subject for a reader to investigate.

In many ways, love and its constructive and destructive energy as well as its power are overtaking characteristics of living beings, good and bad entities, therefore, taking in consideration love as a driving force that ignite string of events that bring to crucial changes in characters' lives, its importance for the novel is enormous.

As people, we logically tend to connect a feeling of love with positive and constructive feelings, while events such as death and passing away are often connected with negative and tragic feelings of losing our dear ones. Still, these two inevitable elements of our everyday reality are something that Toni Morrison uses in her novel "Beloved" to depict how both feelings can serve in two completely different ways: as good and constructive as well as extremely bad and destructive. For Morrison, "death" as such does not exist: in the novel "Beloved", there is a thin line between reality and supernatural world and death is merely a transition to another universe, while line between material everyday world and something outside of our logical knowledge becomes almost blurred, which results with their collision.

For some people, falling and love and loving another human being is one of the highest expressions of spirituality, freedom and personal achievement, while the others claims that loving somebody can be a limitation, even block our individuality and our ability to be realistic. These two different poles and understandings of love is something that constantly intrigues readers of the novel.

At the same time, love in its different forms and quantities, definitions and ideas about it, is a force that saves as well as destroys life itself and through Morrison's characters, we witness its incredible force. "Beloved" could be interpreted as a novel about redemption and atonement as well as a story about characters who constantly fight their own inner demons. Events which are described in the novel often result with a question: are experiences depicted in the novel characters' reality or are they just a manifestation of their inner psychological worlds fulfilled with fears, insecurities, guilt, loneliness and pain.

Written in 1987, Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. It follows a tragic story of Sethe, former slave who in year 1873 lives with her daughter Denver in their humble house on 124 Bluestone Road, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Sethe is a former

slave who lives a simple isolated life in poverty, literally haunted by ghosts, not just metaphorical ones which emerge from our subconscious and tragic past experiences, but malicious ones from present as well. Sethe is a tired and exhausted woman with a daughter and they abandoned by everybody, including Sethe's two sons, Buglar and Howard, who left their home following a string of unexplained supernatural phenomena. From the very start of the novel, starting from its first page, a reader is introduced to this ominous setting which resembles classical novels by authors such as Henry James and Shirley Jackson about haunted houses.

The facts which makes this setting even more tragic and horrific is that “Beloved” is a novel set in a harsh and inhumane times that occurred immediately after the American Civil War (1861 – 1865), and that it is partially inspired by a true story of a slave Margaret Garner. Sethe's story, Denver's story Paul D's story as well as stories of love and death of all Toni Morrison's characters are voices of dozens of millions of people who lost their lives and suffered inhumane and unspeakable treatment by their Caucasian neighbours during four long centuries of slavery.

Due to the fact that many Europeans are not quite familiar with this period of American history, of one the most horrific periods of human history in general, a genocide named slavery, it is emotionally difficult to explore this subject, especially personal experiences of former African American slaves such as Margaret Garner's.

As a reader, I was under impression that Toni Morrison wanted to pay respect to all those who suffered great loses during the period of slavery. In several interviews, Toni Morrison stated that not only this novel, but her other works as well, serve as a reminder of all those enslaved Africans, from those who were deprived of basic human rights as early as in 16th century, until this practice officially ended with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States of America Constitution in 1865.

This extremely difficult period for African American community is presented through eyes of Sethe, a former slave, who struggles with life, ghosts of the past as well as harsh reality long after her liberation. Sethe is survivor who fights not only for herself, but for her family as well.

Taking in consideration that Sethe was only one of dozens of millions of people who suffered unspeakable treatment not only as slaves, but long after ratification as well, novel “Beloved” presents an unique story about unconditional love as well as death and its impact on African American community. “Beloved” can also be seen as a tool that Toni Morrison uses to remind society of importance and enormous sacrifice that African American victims of slavery endured. Captured, discriminated, tortured and violently forced into slavery regardless their age, treated like animals and completely dehumanized, African American people and their tragedy should not be forgotten, and that is a strong message that “Beloved” tries to convey.

*“Morrison revisions a history both spoken and written, felt and submerged. It is in the coalescence of the known and unknown elements of slavery – the events, minuscule in significance to the captors but major disruptions of black folks' experience in nurturing and loving and being – where Morrison's reconstruction of the historical text of slavery occurs. Morrison's reformulation propels a backlog of memories headlong into a post-emancipation community that has been nearly spiritually incapacitated by the trauma of slavery”<sup>1</sup>.*

What makes this novel even more poignant and harrowing is a fact that through different narrative approaches that Toni Morrison uses – flashbacks, constant shifts between past and present, resurrected memories, series of fragmented pieces of puzzle which are presented throughout the novel, different perspectives, constant shifts from one point of view to the other and many other narrative techniques we tend to witness and experience atrocities and unfair treatment of one group of people towards another on a basis of their skin colour. Moreover, we get to understand and appreciate enormous spirit and drive to survive which managed to preserve African American community.

Past and present intersect through series of complex flashbacks, and readers, from page to page, get to unlock small details hidden in characters' past, which leaves an impression that we are unlocking hidden memories simultaneously along with our characters who are trying to put together pieces of their shattered souls.

Multilayered novel “Beloved” could also be read as a ghost story because the main story takes place in a ominous house haunted by an angry and disturbed ghost of an infant who died violently. Handprints, different voices, shattered mirrors, unexplained noises and other phenomena are some of the elements of the supernatural in the novel “Beloved” which contribute to Toni Morrison's unique world.

Toni Morrison's poetic narrative style is often in complete opposition with harsh reality and tragic settings and horrific tragedies are sometimes described with almost documentary approach. By combining two different energies, one of love, hope and survival and other of suffering, injustice and death Toni Morrison creates unique world and passes on strong message about forgiving, but never forgetting.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bloom's Guides Toni Morrisn's Beloved, Edited and with and Introduction by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, Philadelphia, USA, 2004, page 49.

## 2. "BELOVED" AS A SYMBOL OF SLAVERY

During a creative process before she started writing her novel "Beloved", Toni Morrison came upon statistics which show that approximately sixty million African Americans died during the period of slavery. Toni Morrison dedicated her novel to "Sixty Million and More" and with "Beloved" the author wanted to draw attention to sacrifice of all those forgotten people who died during this horrific period of human history.

*"They love and hate, sin and forgive, are heroic and mean, self-sacrificing and demanding. They endure incredible hardships to sustain relationships, but the inconceivable brutality and degradation which they experience fractures their communities and inflicts both physical and perhaps irreparable psychological damage on individuals"*<sup>2</sup>.

Toni Morrison wanted to pay respect and remind us all of victims of racial genocide by giving them faces, voices and transforming them in people of flesh and blood, in people with positive and negative sides, individuals like all of us.

Slavery, its horrific and dehumanizing effects as well as its influence on a African American community is embodied in the character of Beloved herself. Who is actually Beloved? At the beginning of the novel, a reader finds himself in a eerie setting, in a modest house infested by an angry malevolent ghost of a baby, whose presence is taken for granted by Sethe and Denver. Later on, the baby manifests itself in a physical shape as a character of Beloved, fully grown young lady who cannot remember who she is nor her past.

Paul D, upon arrival, immediately senses that dark presence in Sethe's house and manages to force it out of the house. *"With a table and a loud male voice he had rid 124 of its claim to local fame"*.<sup>3</sup>

Paul D's love and determined spirit manage to push aside negative force, Beloved herself, from Sethe's house, although not everybody is happy with such development of events. Arrival of Paul D, immediate physical attraction between him and Sethe as well as passion they share for each other, Denver's acceptance of Paul D on carnival after initial distrust, show us that love as well as determination can bring peace and harmony even to most troubled souls. Seemingly gone, Beloved's spirit still lurks on this family. Emotional blockade of dark memories and traumas, which presents Sethe's biggest burden, thanks to Paul D's love show possibility of improvement and Sethe, who passed through hell to gain liberty for her and her children, shows Paul D a "tree", scar from the whip which she received as a punishment for trying to escape the farm.

Although Sethe opens up to Paul D, he is revolted by her scars and her calm approach to her beatings.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bloom, Harold, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, Philadelphia, page 102

<sup>3</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, UK, 2005, London, page 45

Sethe's horrific whip scars are one of strong symbols of slavery and its inhumane treatment of African American community whose most important symbol in the novel is character of Beloved herself. Growing out of terrible tragedy and inhumane treatment, Sethe's wounds resemble cherry tree in its full bloom.

*“Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to as he frequently did since way back when he took the midday meal in the fields of Sweet Home”.*<sup>4</sup>

“The tree“ or more precisely, horrible markings on Sethe's back, are just one of the symbols of slavery in the novel. Many affluent white masters, who owned slaves, practiced brutal physical punishments and often slaves would be punished by whipping, torture, mutilation, branding, killing and imprisonment. Master had complete control over slaves' lives, and punishments would be often carried merely to demonstrate master's power. The tree on Sethe's back is one of strong symbols of slavery, and her acceptance of the “tree“ is a symbol of acceptance of all tragedies and traumas of the past.

The novel itself takes place during the Reconstruction Era, when Southern United States finally abandoned economy based mostly on slavery, which among other political changes resulted with liberation of slaves. Still, life of former slaves was far from easy. Brutalities and violence against African American community continued, human rights for former slaves were neglected and African American continued to have inferior treatment in comparison with their white neighbours.

The story of “Beloved“ is set during that hard period when former slaves, through free, lived in complete poverty, in rural areas, while the initiative of Republicans in Congress to offer parts of land to former slaves failed. The reason why former slaves lived in complete poverty and misery is the fact that former slaves and their families were never properly compensated for all atrocities they had to endure.

Especially interesting is first appearance of Beloved, a character who is literally born out of nothing, out of water, a young girl of flesh and blood, with flawless skin, new shoes, and main characters of the novel, as well as readers, ask themselves logical question: how did this young lady appear and why, what is her purpose?

Beloved from the very start of the novel is a mysterious and enigmatic character, and reader can be easily drawn to her puzzling energy, and so are main characters of the novel.

Beloved constantly transforms herself throughout the novel, from shy, innocent and simple girl to a menacing force which threatens to destroy everything in front of it. Born out of nothing, without memories, recollections, without any knowledge who she really is, using communication skills of a child and reacting instinctively, Beloved is a symbol of all those souls who lost their lives in the Middle Passage, people who everybody forgot and put aside, souls that are gone without any trace, millions of slaves of all ages, from infants to adults.

---

<sup>4</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, London, UK, 2005, page 25



Those are people whose names are forgotten and whose bodies were never properly buried. Beloved, as a girl with fragmented memories, shattered recollections and confused mind, represents all those people who were caught into cruel web of slavery.

During the period of slave trade, which lasted for almost four centuries, white slave owners gained a big wealth on misery of people whose names are today largely forgotten. In a largest forced migration in human history, millions of African American families were broken, dozens of millions people lost their lives and their legacy is often forgotten. Those who survived this terrible genocide, had to face many psychological issues and traumas caused by slavery. Toni Morrison wants to remind us all that lives of those people are not lost in vain and that they are more than just a number.

*“Beloved is actually a physical manifestation of Sethe's killed daughter. But Beloved is much more than Sethe's resurrected daughter. She is the embodiment of the collective pain and rage of the millions of slaves who died on the Middle Passage and suffered the tortures of slavery. Therefore, her unconscious knows the desperately crowded conditions of a ship of the Middle Passage”<sup>5</sup>.*

On one hand, Beloved is a innocent young girl that needs protection and shelter, obviously tormented soul without any history, still, as the novel progresses, we witness fascinating transformation of Beloved, who in many ways, manifests extraordinary powers, constructive and destructive ones, as well as vast knowledge.

Beloved, as a character, struggles to remember who she really is, tries to put all the pieces together in her head, connect and unite all her fragmented memories, serving as a symbol for all those lost, forgotten, killed, tortured and abducted people who never stood any chance to have a normal life that everybody deserves. Surely, Beloved is a symbol of victims that had to lose their human self due to the greed and hunger for power.

*“What Morrison creates is far from harmless. She knows how painful it is to remember the horrors she presents. She has said in an interview that she expected Beloved to be the last read of all her books because “it is about something that the characters don't want to remember, I don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember. I mean, it's national amnesia”<sup>6</sup>.*

Beloved is a symbol of unsuccessful attempts of trying to bury the past, and since people in general are forgetting quickly, with her novel as well as her character of Beloved, Toni Morrison wants to demonstrate what can happen if we fail not to learn lesson of the past or if we try to neglect it.

---

<sup>5</sup> Bloom, Harold, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, USA, page 34

<sup>6</sup> Bloom, Harold, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, USA, page 43

Although at beginning *Beloved* shows great fascination with Sethe and Denver, as well as other way around, *Beloved* is much more than she appears, which our heroes soon learn. “*What Beloved suggests is that tomorrow is made possible by the knowledge of yesterday, a knowledge that for contemporary African Americans can be gained from imagining what it was like to walk in the flesh of their slave ancestors.*”<sup>7</sup>

“*Beloved*”, as a novel as well as a character, is a strong mirror and symbol of society which often tries to neglect the past by constantly repeating the same mistake. Unfortunately, we are still living in time when our planet and its people are divided into different social groups based on religion, sex, political opinion, economic success or race, and still, in many parts of the world, individuals and groups are trying to find differences so that they could ignite hatred among themselves instead of trying to find similarities.

“*Beloved*” is a reminder that we should never stop fighting against this kind of behaviour and that in many parts of the world human rights are still neglected.

---

<sup>7</sup> Bloom, Harold, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, page, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, USA, page 43

### 3. LOVE AS A LEADING FORCE IN “BELOVED”

*“For Sethe, whose pain and mourning over her murdered child recall Demeter's pain in losing Persephone to the underworld, Beloved's presence evokes an obsessive love. For Denver, Beloved becomes a cherished possession to be guarded greedily.”*<sup>8</sup>

These are just some of manifestations of love in Toni Morrison's novel. Healing, forgiving and forgetting through love, as well as destructive, unhealthy and obsessive love, are strong motifs of Toni Morrison's novel. For example, love, which should be warm, kind and nourishing in this novel manifests itself in its worst form: by causing infanticide, or murder of a child which in the novel is also a result of obsessive and insane mother's love.

In attempt to prevent return of her children to horrific life of slaves, Sethe, who ran away from her cruel master so that she could secure liberty for her and her children, rather murders her daughter who she loved the most by slaughtering her with a saw, then allowing her master to claim her and take her back to life of slave.

Sethe's act, committed in a state of mental instability, is a result of Sethe loving her daughter too much, as she later on explains. For Sethe, killing an own child in order to save her from slavery is a highest expression of mother's love. On the other hand, strong physical attraction and passion is a force which drives Sethe and Paul D, who enters into her life causing a string of flashbacks and repressed memories which unveil and disclose.

Pure mother's love through eyes of Sethe, sister's love through Denver's eyes, Beloved's passionate emotions and love as destructive and fatal force, Paul D's determined and unconditional love are just some of manifestations of one of leading human emotions and vital energies: love. Romantic claims that everything is driven by love, in this novel, proves itself in many ways.

*“That Sethe kills her infant daughter to prevent her from being defined as racially inferior and animalistic – and thus from being dirtied – underscores the historical shaming of African slave women that Morrison is intent on exposing in “Beloved.”*<sup>9</sup>

When it comes to love, from the very start of the novel, we witness very interesting dynamics between Sethe and Paul D. Both of them meet after approximately twenty years, and the tension between two characters is more than obvious. Paul D and Sethe were slaves of Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky where they worked for Mr and Mrs Garner. Arrival of Paul D, for a small family that consists of Sethe and her daughter Denver, brings many changes, and it opens many Sethe's repressed memories.

---

<sup>8</sup> Marilyn Sanders, *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings* in Sarah Orne Jewet and Toni Morrison, New York, USA, page 174.

<sup>9</sup> Bloom, Harold, *Toni Morrison's Beloved*, Chelsea House Publishers, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, 1982, page 92

The arrival of Paul D liberates Sethe and Denver from ominous force which haunts their home and Paul D manages to liberate their humble house of spirit.

Also, from the very start of the novel, we witness Sethe's rebirth of long forgotten passion and need for human touch and physical contact with another human being. Sethe seems closed in her own prison of hurtful emotions that locks her away from the rest of the world.

Paul D, in many ways, through his devotion as well as love, ignites crucial changes in Sethe's heart and mind, and the novel which opens with Paul D's and Sethe's encounter, with their passionate reunion, ends once again with Paul D's unselfish love and dedication. On the other hand, love that gives Sethe courage during her escape and pursuit for a freedom makes her vulnerable and weak to Beloved's vicious manipulations.

Sethe herself, as an evidence of cruel and inhuman slavery policy, is her mother's only child given a name and allowed to live since she was produced in a loving union, which signifies that circle of life always repeats itself.

On the other hand, Denver's love toward her long lost sister and her mother, her growth through love from a shy innocent and timid girl to a young lady who takes things in her own hand in order to preserve her mother is also fascinating motif of the novel. Eponymous character, Beloved, as well as her own set of feelings which range from love to hate, from devotion to destruction, is fascinating to follow throughout the novel, especially her transformation from a innocent soul who needs protection and love, to an emotional vampire who tries to drain Sethe's vital energy.

Motifs of our characters are sometimes hard to determine, acts of love are sometimes not what they appear to be, love as a force can be more then deadly and love and death are constantly intersecting.

Love as an energy does not know limits of time and space in Toni Morrison's novel. For example, during an conversation with Paul D, when Paul D scolds her for being overprotective towards Denver, Sethe openly and clearly states how she comprehends love.

*“You can't protect her every minute. What's going to happen when you die?”* asks Paul to which Sethe responds: *“Nothing, I'll protect her while I'm live and I'll protect her when I ain't.”*<sup>10</sup> Obviously, for Toni Morrison, love is one of the energies which does not agree with laws of physics as well as natural laws. Sethe does not doubt that she will protect and love her children even from the other world.

---

<sup>10</sup> Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, Page 54

Through love, loving each other and trying to make up for all the mistakes of the past by loving, Toni Morrison proves that love, although it does not have to manifest itself every time in its positive and noble way, is a strong catalyst for all painful and hurtful events. Love as an energy opens up characters of "Beloved", as well as brings many dramatic changes so that they could overcome all their inner obstacles, fears and traumas.

With Paul D's strong and poignant emotional statement directed towards Sethe towards the end of the novel, in which he states that she is the best thing, clearly indicating that he loves her and always did, Paul D shows tormented Sethe that there is always a hope and if there is a love that there is a bright future and possibilities even for tormented souls such as theirs.

## 4. DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOVE IN “BELOVED”

### 4.1. Sethe’s Love

In the first part of the novel, we partially get to understand horrific tragedy which Sethe, as a former slave in search for liberty for her and her children, had to endure in order to reach her goal: freedom. Definitely, Sethe is a character driven by iron will, strong principles and strong will to survive. Novel “Beloved” starts with her perspective, her point of view, and Sethe as a character fascinates with her calm and exceptive approach towards tragedy and negative circumstances which are burdening her and her daughter Denver. From the start of the novel, Sethe is portrayed as a determined, honest and straight-forward character which is driven by her love towards her daughter and later, after Beloved's rebirth, her extended family.

Sethe is, in many ways, representative of all those mothers who had to sacrifice everything due to genocide called slavery, mothers whose only purpose was to give birth to children, future slaves themselves. Often, children would be taken away from their mothers, which caused many psychological and emotional traumas. Not only mothers, but children suffered emotional consequences as well.

*“In large part, Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning fifth novel is about the atrocities slavery wrought both upon a mother's need to love and care for her children as well as children's deep need for family“.*<sup>11</sup>

Although she states several times during the novel that her children are everything, Sethe lives lonely life, her sons left her, and her only company is a vengeful ghost and her daughter.

Although haunted by many tragedies and not knowing where her husband Halle is, Sethe is depicted as a woman of great passion, a lover who is capable to love again and to start something new. Still, in many ways, Paul D can not compare himself when it comes to mother's love. Paul D can not accept Sethe's uncompromising approach towards love, but for Sethe, love has no limits nor boundaries whatsoever, loving is not a choice, even when it comes to living or dying.

Also, Sethe makes clear that she loves her children so much that she would never allow them to experience treatment which had to endure as a slave.

*“They ain’t at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain't got em“. “Maybe there's worse.“ “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“.*<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Icon Critical Guides – Beloved, Edited by Carl Plasa, London, UK, page 66

<sup>12</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 194

Sethe's love is without compromise, and when it comes to her children, she shows great deal of logical thinking based on experience. Also, Sethe shows determination which is, especially for a parent, sometimes hard to understand. Stripped of dignity, treated like an animal, Sethe learns never to trust society in general, especially white community. 28 days of her liberty, when she lived in harmony with local community, when she felt loved, filled her with positive energy, but the arrival of her master who comes to take her back, forces her to commit horrific act of infanticide. Paul D can not understand how one can kill out of love, how mother can kill her child in order to save her from slavery. For Paul, such amount of emotions is overbearing.

*“How fast he had moved from his shame to hers. From his cold-house secret straight to her too-thick love”<sup>13</sup>.*

It is obvious that mother's love can not be tempted even by a lover himself, even if he represents a possibility for a new life, a chance to start over again. Although her love and devotion to Paul D is unquestionable, her children are of much bigger importance. Sethe's does not idealize mother's love, for her love is everything or nothing. Even when Paul D suggests the possibility that they could have a child of their own one day, Sethe's is aware of all risks of being a mother. She knows that being a mother and loving a child is an enormous task.

*“Needing to be good enough, alert enough, strong enough, that caring – again. Having to stay alive just that much longer. Oh Lord, she thought, deliver me. Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer”<sup>14</sup>.*

Although their love gets stronger, it is more than obvious that Sethe and Paul D have big differences between them, especially when it comes to how they perceive love. Paul D, as a character, does not get easily attached, when it comes to love he is much more realistic and cautious, while Sethe represents his opposite pole. Her love, which knows no limits, can be overwhelming and interpreted as clingy.

Through Sethe's eyes and her experience as a mother, we follow destinies of many mothers and children who were born in slavery. Plantation owners across United States had freedom to do everything they wanted with their slave families. State laws did not offer legal protection to slaves and husbands and wives as well as children could be easily separated by their owner. “Beloved“ is also a novel about rape of millions of African American slave women who were constantly sexually abused by their owners. Forcing to give birth as many times as they could so that they could provide new labour force, such women were often forced to watch their children taken and sold away.

It is obvious that Sethe had to do everything by herself, she even had to teach herself how to become a mother. Through an example of Sethe's mother, Toni Morrison gives us a picture of everyday life of children of slave women who did not even get to know their

---

<sup>13</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 194

<sup>14</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 190

parents properly. A big number of those children did not know names of their parents which were cruelly used only as a labour force, from dawn till dusk.

*“My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don't remember. I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. She didn't even sleep in the same cabin, right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin“.*<sup>15</sup>

Although she does not know much about her mother, she is aware of the fact that her mother decided to keep her out of love. Sethe's father was a black man whom her mother chose to be her partner, while other children that she gave birth to were sent away. These women, as well as millions of other enslaved African American women, are true examples of fatal impact of slavery on the capacity for love and destructive effect on African American family.

Beloved, as a ghost of the past and Sethe's resurrected daughter, raises many questions and puts mother's love and devotion on a test. Appearance of Beloved, who Sethe takes in her house without a question, puts not only Sethe's love, but life and health itself, in question not only because of Beloved herself, but because of Sethe's unhealthy obsession with idea of trying to make up for the past. Beloved's return gives us opportunity to investigate traits of Sethe's character as well as her weaknesses.

*“As resilient as she is, she is also vulnerable, and her strength and weakness emanate from the same stream of love. “It is peculiar to women“, Morrison believes, that “the best thing... in us is also the thing that makes us sabotage ourselves“. The love that gives Sethe courage in the woodshed and bitter triumph over Schoolteacher and slavery makes her vulnerable to the manipulations of a ghost child. She had been willing to die with and for that child to keep her from slavery: years later, she willingly enslaves herself to the incubus whom she continues to believe is her best thing. The love that sustained her threatens to consume her. Perhaps this is retribution; even righteous crimes such as Sethe's have a reckoning”.*<sup>16</sup>

Sethe's unconditional love and immediate acceptance of Beloved in her home, signifies a wish to make up for things of the past, undo what was done and transform it into something positive unexpected. For Sethe, Beloved's return is a divine chance and possibility to alter the past. After Paul D's departure, Sethe creates a seclusion for three women, herself, Beloved and Denver, a little universe isolated from the outside world, with its own rules, and Toni Morrison uses elements from magical realism to depict this world situated somewhere between present and past.

Alone with her daughters, Sethe can seemingly finally overcome all tragedies of past and work on future. Still, Beloved is not what she seems to be and as she starts reveal her own hidden traumas, she becomes more and more obsessive and demanding.

---

<sup>15</sup> Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 138

<sup>16</sup> Furman, Jan, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, USA, 1996, page 82



Slowing descending into madness and obsession, Sethe is transforming herself from a determined strong character to a weak exhausted woman who would do anything to make up for a biggest mistake of her past. Her love for her dead daughter is limitless, and she does everything to become a different kind of mother for her newly born daughter. From strong, independent and determined woman, Sethe slowly, due to her love for her daughter, becomes permissive, weak and indulgent.

Not capable of working any more, Sethe becomes a prison of her own home, of her daughter Beloved who constantly seeks attention. Sethe even neglects her daughter Denver, who witnesses her mother's decline and destruction. Even in her state of complete obsession with Beloved, who transforms herself from innocent soul to supernatural entity that threatens to claim Sethe's soul. For Sethe, death as an option is something that is completely irrelevant when it comes to loving a child.

She even admits that she loved Beloved so much that she even considered killing herself after murdering her. *"When I put that headstone up I wanted to lay in there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you warm, and I would have if Buglar and Howard and Denver didn't need me, because my mind was homeless then"*.<sup>17</sup>

In many ways, Sethe's overwhelming love, obsession and attempt to make up for the past threaten to destroy not only her life, but lives of all in her vicinity.

Sethe represents all the victims of rape during the slavery as well as all those mothers who suffered unimaginable treatments but still managed to give life and to preserve it for future generations. *"While Morrison depicts myriad abuses of slavery like brutal beatings and lynching, the depictions of and allusions to rape are of primary importance; each in some way helps explain the infanticide that marks the beginnings of Sethe's story as a free woman"*.<sup>18</sup>

Sethe, survivor of slavery, raping and beating, through her relationship with Beloved demonstrates that she can survive everything and live through it all, even allowing her daughter Beloved to drain life energy out of her like a vampire.

Sethe as mother proves that her life, in comparison with her children's, is unimportant and that they are the ones who actually give meaning to her existence. Sethe's embodies pure motherly love: unconditional, limitless and without any boundaries or moral dilemmas, love which is unaffected by any known law.

---

<sup>17</sup> Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 241

<sup>18</sup> Bloom, Harold, *Toni Morrison's Beloved*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, page 70

### 4.3. Denver's love

Denver, throughout the novel, as many characters do, constantly shift and grows in many ways. At the beginning, she is represented as a shy, timid and unsecure teenager, strange and timid, whose only friend is ominous presence which haunts her home. Denver is clearly very sensitive and emotional human being who feels world around herself little bit differently.

Being isolated from outside world for the most of her life, she develops connection with supernatural entity that haunts her home. *“None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but knowing the things behind things. Her brothers had known, but it scared them; Grandma Baby knew, but it saddened her. None could appreciate the safety of ghost company. Even Sethe didn't love it. She just took it for granted – like a sudden change in the weather”*.<sup>19</sup>

After disappearance of a haunting presence from her home, especially fascinated by appearance of Beloved is Denver who finds a new friend and sister, and soon she grows strong protective feelings towards her. The arrival of Beloved creates a rift between Denver and Paul D, still, Denver would not let anything stand between her and her sister. Throughout the novel, Denver often shows signs of jealousy for her mother's affection, but devoted and fascinated by Beloved as well. Throughout the novel, we witness Denver's personal growth from insecure isolated girl to a woman who through her love for her mother as well as her sister manages to obtain confidence and strength to take action in her own hands. Denver definitely stands as a symbol for future generation, generations who yet have to gain knowledge and experience to ignite necessary changes.

Denver is also a symbol of future generations of African American people who could manage to overcome ghosts of the past and improve their own destiny.

*“BELOVED is my sister”*<sup>20</sup> is a title of a chapter in which we witness true and innocent love between sisters, love which is sometimes bitter, sometimes difficult, but nevertheless, deep and unbreakable. Denver is more than thankful for Beloved's presence, her only friend and hope, who was with her all her life, keeping her company. Denver, as well as her mother, repeats constantly a statement *“She's mine”*, demonstrating her obsession and unhealthy devotion to Beloved.

*“I just had to watch out for it because it was a greedy ghost and needed a lot of love, which was only natural, considering. And I do. Love her. I do. She played with me and always came to be with me whenever I needed her. She's mine.”*<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 45

<sup>20</sup> Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 242

<sup>21</sup> Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 247

As well as her mother, Denver is paying debts to ghosts of the past, being shunned by members of their community due to her mother's infanticide. Partially, Denver is paying her mother's debts from the past, which leads to her isolation. Charmed child, as her mother calls her, Denver grows strong bond with Beloved, believing that she is incarnated baby that kept her company for the most of her life.

As well as her mother, Denver is overtaken and perplexed by Beloved and her presence, her puzzling energy and mysterious past. Through her relationship with Beloved, which is often destructive, Denver grows and matures, watching her mother losing her mind over her attempts to reconcile with her past. *“Over the course of the novel, Denver transforms from an isolated and sheltered girl into the outgoing heroine of the novel. She takes responsibility for herself and her family: it was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve”*.<sup>22</sup>

Through the character of Denver, Toni Morrison makes readers ask themselves questions about their own set of values. Living in constant fear that her own mother could kill her, just as she murdered her daughter Beloved, at the end of the novel when Sethe is almost completely drained out of her body fluids, Denver has to make big changes in order to save herself as well as her mother.

From protector of Beloved, Denver transform to protector of her own mother, driven by her love and devotion. Denver, through her relationship with Beloved, grows emotionally realizing that her mother's love towards Beloved will destroy her completely.

*“This objectification of the relationship between Sethe and Beloved clarifies for Denver toward whom her sympathies should be directed. Though she may have wished fervently for Beloved's presence, any power strong enough to reduce her mother to such obsequiousness does not need further assistance from her.”*<sup>23</sup>

Due to her devotion and love for her mother, Denver decides, for the first time in her life, to act alone by stepping out of her home and getting in touch with local community. Denver, as a character, symbolizes a hope of future generations to overcome obstacles from the past, bearing in mind lessons they had learned from their ancestors.

---

<sup>22</sup> Bloom, Harold, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, USA, page 43

<sup>23</sup> Bloom's Guides – Toni Morrison's Beloved, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, USA, page 80

#### **4.4. Paul D's love**

From the very start of the novel we witness interesting dynamics between Sethe and Paul D. Arrival of male energy or “father figure“ in Sethe's and Denver's home brings many changes, some for better, some for worse. Still, Paul D's return to Sethe's life can not pass without drastic changes: Paul D is the one who manages to clean their home of poltergeist. Paul D's and Sethe's relationship is full of passion and sexual energy, acceptance and understanding of their tragic past as well as need for a new beginning. The arrival of Paul creates a rift between mother and daughter, still, Paul D shows big interest in Denver, her nature and personality.

It is obvious that Paul D as a character is dedicated to all those male slaves who endured harsh conditions while they had to serve and oblige their masters. Not only for female characters of the novel, but for male ones as well, Toni Morrison wanted to draw attention to their sexual abuse, cruel treatment and unbearable living conditions. Paul D has survived it all: through his eyes, readers do not only follow his horrible experience on Schoolteacher's farm, but destinies of his friends and companions who were mutilated, victimized and burnt alive. All through the novel, Paul D wants to prove his manhood to Sethe, for him, Sethe represents new lease of life.

Paul D's strong and decisive attitude towards events as well as people is a result of his emotional shield. In order to hide all things which broke him as well as damaged him as a man, Paul D, unlike Sethe, built persona which is strong and fearless on the surface with many insecurities and fears.

Sethe's act of killing her own child is something which is incomprehensible for Paul D. Although he denies it at beginning, he comes to terms with the fact that Sethe actually did kill her baby, as an act of love.“ Also, Paul D demonstrates his unforgiving side when it comes to loving – he can not understand Sethe's actions, Sethe's decisions, and he is comparing them to animals' behaviour. Paul D can not accept the truth that Sethe would rather choose killing her own kin than to accept horrible reality, in spite of the fact that slavery is a part of the past.

As the novel progresses, as idyllic relationship between Sethe, Denver and Beloved develops, and Paul D starts to be an intruder not only in the eyes of Denver, but in the eyes of Beloved who easily manipulates and seduces him. Paul D, a symbol of manhood and big strength, proves himself to be weak and powerless in front of Beloved.

Paul D, as a main male character of the novel, is a result of his surrounding. African American slaves, during their hard lives on farms, had to endure terrible conditions in order to survive. That kind of life completely destroyed their physical and mental health. For example, one of descriptions of horrible ordeals that slaves had to endure is described by Paul D himself when he thinks about white men who attacked him in muddy water.

*“Paul D thought he was screaming; his mouth was open and there was this loud throat-splitting sound-but it may have been somebody else. Then he thought he was crying. Something was running down his cheeks. He lifted his hands to wipe away the tears and saw dark brown slime. Above him rivulets of mud slid through the boards of the roof“.*<sup>24</sup>

Paul D can not accept Sethe's actions because he wants to hide and conceal his own weak and powerless side. He wants to be in control of everything, even his own feelings. Being held most of his life in captivity, Paul D learned what losing control really means. He can not accept the fact that woman who he idealized is capable of performing infanticide since being in control of one's own behaviour and emotions is, according to Paul D, a key to civilized behaviour.

Sethe's reaction to Paul D's departure is interesting as well. When Paul D leaves, Sethe is grateful for that because she realizes how Paul D is not her true partner since he could not accept her truth about the power of love. *“Too thick, he said. My love was too thick. What he know about it? Who in the world is he willing to die for?.”*<sup>25</sup>

Still, Paul D proves himself to be a man who does not give up so easily, and his return, after Beloved's disappearance, is a sign that there is a possibility of a new beginning. Once again, Toni Morrison proves how love and affection can bring necessary changes. Although Paul D finds Sethe in very sensitive condition, he accepts her state of mind and shows great deal of patience for her. *“Sethe“, he says, “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.“*<sup>26</sup> Paul D is aware that he belongs with Sethe, stating that actually she is the best thing.

---

<sup>24</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 130

<sup>25</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, London, UK, 2005 page 241

<sup>26</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, London, UK, 2005 page 322

#### 4.5. Beloved's love

Beloved, as a character, is definitely the most enigmatic and puzzling one. The birth of Beloved, or more precisely, her coming back to life, is described in the novel as a miracle of the nature.

*“A fully dressed woman walked out of the water. She barely gained the dry bank of the stream before she sat down and leaned against a mulberry tree. All day and all night she sat there, her head resting on the trunk in a position abandoned enough to crack the brim in her straw hat. Everything hurt but her lungs most of all. Sopping wet and breathing shallow she spent those hours trying to negotiate the weight of her eyelids. The day breeze blew her dress dry; the night wind wrinkled it. Nobody saw her emerge or came accidentally by”<sup>27</sup>.*

Her birth is presented as a miracle of nature, Beloved basically comes out of nowhere. It is interesting to follow Beloved's development due to the fact that reader is not sure whether she is a supernatural entity or just some poor lost soul, one more victim of slavery. Beloved is a girl without a past who is born out of water, a soul who does not remember anything. Even characters are not sure who this person is, still, they are strangely attracted by this mysterious guest and enigmatic girl. Denver is especially fascinated by Beloved in whom she once again finds friend and sister. The only information which she provides is her first name, Beloved, she is poorly fed girl with flawless skin. Beloved, from the start, shows great capacity of attracting attention when it comes to main characters and from very beginning, Denver grows strong and deep bond with the newcomer. At the same time, Paul D's and Sethe's love is put on test by this new arrival.

But Beloved's plans are sometimes hard to determine and Paul D as well as Denver start to suspect that Beloved has more than one face which is soon manifested when she attempts to strangle her mother. At the same time, Denver's love and loyalty towards her mother are put to test by Beloved, who constantly shifts from innocent and sweet girl, to a destructive and uncontrolled force. House 124 one more time gains characteristics of live person due to Beloved's presence.

*“Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable to Stamp Paid, were the thoughts of the woman of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken. When Sethe locked the door, the woman inside were free at last to be what they liked, see whatever they saw and say whatever was on their minds”<sup>28</sup>.*

For Sethe, Denver and Beloved, house 124 becomes a shelter, an universe isolated from the outside world, with its own rules, where reality and fantasy interfere. For the first time, main characters of the novel feel free and can finally embrace all the things that happened to them in the past, no matter how hard or difficult they were. Past becomes unimportant, while today and now as well as love for each other is the only thing that matters for three women.

---

<sup>27</sup> Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, London, UK, 2005, Page 60

<sup>28</sup> Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, London, UK, 2005, Page 235

The concept of love is explained by three women who share different perspective on events. Sethe begins her story with *"BELOVED, she my daughter"*. Sethe finally and calmly accepts her actions and completely dedicates herself to Beloved. *"I will explain to her, even though i don't have to. Why I did it. How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her"*.<sup>29</sup> While Sethe promises that she will take care of her endlessly, her reincarnated daughter's view on events is little bit different.

Beloved's confession starts with *"I AM BELOVED and she is mine"*<sup>30</sup>. For the first time reader is completely in the head of eponymous character, in the centre of Beloved's mind, in the middle of her fragmented memories, but also, a reader is constantly reminded of importance of sacrifice and unconditional love. Beloved describes hell that she had to survive in order to come back to life, and afterlife which she describes differs from earlier descriptions. *"We are not crouching now we are standing but my legs are like my dead man's eyes I cannot fall because there is no room to the men without skin are making loud noises I am not dad the bread i sea coloured I am too hungry to eat it"*<sup>31</sup>.

Her rebirth had one goal and one single mission – for her to be reconnected with her mother, as well with her sister. *"Sethe's is the face that left me Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile her smiling face is the place for me it is the face I lost she is my face smiling at me doing it at last a hot thing now we can join a hot thing"*<sup>32</sup>.

The following chapter, once more begins with *"I AM BELOVED and she is mine"*. This time, Beloved sounds much more logical, there is firm structure of her confession, and more serious approach to the subject of love and her return. She recounts how she lost her mother three times. *"Once with the flowers because of the noisy clouds of smoke, once when she went into the sea instead of smiling at me, once under the bridge when I went in to join her and she came toward me but did not smile. She whispered to me, chewed me, and swam away. Now I found her in this house."*<sup>33</sup> Beloved's love becomes obsessive, unhealthy, childish, without any boundaries and constrictions.

Beloved is described as a succubus, a female demon that takes away life energy out of people. *"The succubus figure, which is related to the vampire, another sexualized figure drains a vital fluid, as incorporated into African American folklore in the form of shape-shifting witches who "ride" their terrified victims in the night, and Beloved embodies the qualities of that figure as well."*<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 236

<sup>30</sup>Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 248

<sup>31</sup>Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 249

<sup>32</sup>Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 252

<sup>33</sup>Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 253, 254

<sup>34</sup>Bloom's Guides – Comprehensive Research & Study Guides, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, USA, page 70

Beloved is a symbol of past that can not stay buried and forgotten, of force and energy that can not be stopped and tamed, of all those souls that had been destroyed during slavery. Even when Beloved, as an entity, is finally gone, her presence can be felt as a constant reminder how past can return to haunt the present.



## 5. BELOVED AND ITS IMPORTANCE TODAY

Unfortunately, we are still living in times where our planet and its people are divided into different social groups based on religion, sex, political opinion, economic success or race, and still, in many parts of the world, individuals and groups are trying to find differences so that they could ignite hatred among themselves instead of trying to find similarities. Among other discriminatory behaviour, we still witness racism which primarily affect people of different skin colour and other different types of injustice. On everyday basis, we are informed of hate crimes often committed not only by members of gangs and criminal groups, but by representatives of law and governing bodies as well. “Beloved” as a novel reminds us that genocide and discrimination such as slavery was present in our society not long time ago, and that its remains are present. Also, “Beloved” is a novel about other type of prejudice as well, about sexism, because it serves as a testimony of millions of humiliated and abused slave women.

Like a character of Beloved, who comes back to life after many years as a harsh reminder that past and our mistakes can not be easily forgotten and that everything that we want to left buried behind us will haunt us in the future. Some cultures could describe this type of events as “karma”. Similar case is a period of slavery: although Thirteenth Amendment was signed by 1865, African American community had to pass a long journey so that they could be considered equal by their white counterparts. Unfortunately, that long and exhausting journey, not only for members of African American community, but for other minority groups as well, is not finished yet. In today's society divided by political establishments, political parties, during the times when we witness refugee crisis and many wars all across the Globe, the importance of novel such as “Beloved” as well as its message is more than important.

There are many surveys conducted over years which prove thesis that racism is still dominant in many parts of the World. For example, recently PEW Research Centre conducted a survey to investigate whether Americans think that racism is still strong in USA. The results of the survey showed that 88 percent of African Americans and 57 percent of Caucasian American believed that discrimination against African American community in the United States of America still exists.

*“Statistics, provided by governmental research bodies, reveal that people of colour are still struggling for their basic rights. The most basic civil services are not available to the African American community, and black Americans continue to deal with more social justice issues than their white fellows.”<sup>35</sup>*

“Beloved”, as a novel, serves not only as a testimony of love, death and slavery, but it is also an important historical document of slavery and repression of African American community as well as a reminder to all future generations not to repeat mistakes from the past. As this novel teaches us, one can not escape hers or his own past and all unsolved things that we did during our lifetime come to haunt us sooner or later. According to the novel, learning

---

<sup>35</sup> <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/4440/Demography-of-Blacks-in-the-U-S-What-do-statistics-tell-us>

lessons from the past, without neglecting knowledge and sacrifice of our ancestor, should be a path to a brighter future.

Although “Beloved” cover events following long anticipated abolition of slavery in the 1864, when former slaves finally gained their freedom, Sethe's as well as other former slaves' lives was not easy and prosperous at all, since overt racism was still omnipresent and they did not own same human rights as their white neighbours did. Although governing bodies like Congress did a huge task by abolishing slavery, African American community had to face many another challenges, one of which were Jim Crow Laws, a series of racist laws which degraded and limited human rights of African American community. Basically, throughout first part of 20th century, although they were liberated, members of African American minority had to face enormous challenges and overcome many obstacles, while inequality and mistreatment became their everyday reality. Simply put, Black community did not possess the same quantity of human rights as white community nor the same level of social security. For example, African American community did not have right to vote, same rights to education or employment and often activities considered normal by white community such as visit to certain public spaces would be limited to them.

Not before civil rights movements of the 1950's and 1960's did African American community started obtaining same rights as White community, so we can conclude that a big progress has been made, still, as we witness through media, total and complete eradication of racism and discrimination should be continuous task and mission because it is obviously still present.

Novel “Beloved” serves as a historical document and reminder to use knowledge and learn from mistakes that we did in the past in order to improve our world for future generations. Toni Morrison reminds us that knowledge and legacy of our past generations, such as for example rich African American slaves' tradition, should not be forgotten. Therefore, “Beloved” as a novel in some parts resembles a literary piece with its origins in oral tradition, direct and unpolished story told first hand.

*“Through the matrix of myth and folklore Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison tell the stories we have not heard, the ones we need to hear and the ones we need to hear again. Narrative has the dual role, therefore, of being something told and of being a way of knowing. It not only teaches us to value our ancestors but the value of nommo – the power of the word – to help us name ourselves and shape our lives in the tradition of our ancestors.”*<sup>36</sup>

In her essay “Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison“, author Marilyn Sanders Mobley comments that by telling the stories of women across generations, Toni Morrison's fiction not only offers us roots to know our history, but wings to pass it on. Those wings are her narrative skills and unique approach to the subject, leaving a huge impact on reader by using a combination of realistic and naturalistic approach to storytelling and traditional elements as well as innovative elements such as magical realism.

---

<sup>36</sup> Marilyn Sanders Mobley, Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison, page 175, 176.

*“Through her assertion of the transformative power of ritual and the incorporation of rituals of healing into her narrative, Morrison invests the novel with the potential to construct and transform individual consciousness as well as social relations.”<sup>37</sup>*

One of objectives of Toni Morrison's novel “Beloved” is paying respect to all the knowledge, tradition, stories and heritage given to us by our ancestors. Toni Morrison teaches us to evaluate traditional values, cultural roots and oral folklore in order to have meaningful present, as well as give her contribution to one of last examined aspects of the slavery – death of slaves during their transport through Middle Passage.

*“One of the questions which “Beloved” asks is whether it is possible to transform unspeakably horrific experiences into knowledge. Is the magnitude of their horror too great to assimilate?”<sup>38</sup>*

The novel, as a reminder of horrific period of American history, invites us to ask ourselves questions not only about people and human spirit, but also those dilemmas which makes us uncomfortable, about our own set of feelings and prejudices, fears and limitations, constantly reminding readers about importance of human spirit and survival instinct. Resilient spirit of African American community, which managed to overcome and surpass all obstacles, is a driving force of “Beloved”. Also, the novel serves as a reminder of all those who suffered due to their skin colour as well as those who perished during the slave route from Africa to the West Indies, through the Middle Passage. The character of Beloved itself, a physical manifestation of Sethe's dead daughter, represents physical manifestation of history, signifying the ways in which past can invade the present as well as influence future.

Descriptions of horrible practice preformed by four slave owner's horsemen which, clearly, symbolize Four Horsemen of Apocalypse, in the novel seem more brutal and harsh then descriptions of death itself. Brutal and barbaric practice of catching runaway slaves, which resemble hunting of animals, was their profession for profit. Their indifference toward slaves' life is more than obvious, while catching a live runaway slave for such bounty hunters was obligatory for only one reason: so that they could be returned to their owners so that they could further use and abuse them. *“Unlike a snake or a bear, a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coin.”<sup>39</sup>*

Objectification of African American women is also one of important topics that novel deals with. For slave owners, who treated slaves as cattle, mothers were considered to be only breeders, and their infant children would be quite often sold away in another parts of the country. Economic and sexual exploitation of slave woman, who were often used and abused, continued throughout many centuries of slavery. “Beloved” is full of shocking confessions

---

<sup>37</sup> Bloom, Harold, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Chelsea House Publishers, 1982, Langhorne, Pennsylvania , page 57

<sup>38</sup> Bloom, Harold, Modern Critical Interpretations – Toni Morrison's Beloved, Chelsea House Publishers, 1999, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, page 30

<sup>39</sup> Morrison, Toni: Beloved, Vintage Books, 2005, London, UK, page 175

and reader feels like a part of community and witness to tragic personal confessions – for example, the story of Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother in law, whose years as a slave completely destroyed her health and faith in mankind, or Ella's, another former slave, who spent great deal of her life in a house where she was constantly violated by a father and his son.

With a mission to speak on behalf of more than sixty million African American slaves which lost their lives during the period of slavery, intent to leave a strong message for future generations, Toni Morrison confessed that process of writing this novel required a great emotional sacrifice.

*“A process of writing ‘Beloved’ required a modicum of emotional risk for Morrison. Recovering truth was sometimes ‘very intense’, she says. She would ‘write a sentence and... jump up and run outside or something’. This kind of story ‘sort of beats you up’. But during the difficult times she reminded herself ‘All I have to do is to think about the people who lived there, who lived through it. If they could live it, I could write about it’. This is the way Morrison works – with an intensity and focus that can be isolating”.*<sup>40</sup>

Toni Morrison wants to express a cultural legacy and preserve it for future generations by staying loyal to her African American roots, tradition and culture, at the same time, with her literary work, Toni Morrison is strongly connected with her people of present and past, serving as their leading voice.

---

<sup>40</sup> Furman, Jan, Toni Morrison's Fiction, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, USA, 1996, page 80

## 6. CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" imposes lot of questions about our own set of moral values as well as make us think about resilient and unbreakable human spirit. It is obvious that Toni Morrison wants to emphasize the importance of love and its energy, which is a driving force that leads "Beloved" as well as its characters. It is not hard to understand why a reader could be shocked by realistic and candid approach towards many subjects like murder of a child and suffering of slaves, but it also makes us think important questions about our own set of moral values and about what kind of person is capable of performing such acts.

Also, the story proposes one very important sociological question: what kind of environment influences such person and how many victims slavery claimed before it was finally abolished.

Therefore, fine line between inner and outer world is almost non-existent, main characters' outer world is reflection of their own doubts, fears and traumas. "*Sethe is haunted by the ghost of the child she has killed; Beloved's return to life corresponds to the return of many of Sethe's painful repressed memories of her enslaved past. Memory is figured as a menacing force in Sethe's life – it seems to stalk her – and she works hard to avoid it*"<sup>41</sup>.

Superstition and belief in other words are some of practices that people use to deal with serious situations such as death, loss, sickness, pain and other unpleasant and incomprehensible things around it. As a writer, Toni Morrison wants to remind us of things which can be felt and seen around us, and which we clearly neglect. Also, the author wants to emphasize the importance of tradition, heritage, culture and roots.

"Beloved" is a novel about spiritual healing and moving forward towards better and brighter future. And one of the ways which Morrison suggests with her novel is through process of acculturation. "*Morrison's novels have a vital role to play in the process of acculturation. They cannot replace the village, but they can summon its spirit. Folk culture, as revealed in maxims, beliefs, attitudes, and ways of speaking, walking, and thinking, permeates Morrison's fiction and inspires its identifiably lyrical style. In her work mythic truths are revived, examined, and passed on, keeping the individual in touch with black American and African traditions.*"<sup>42</sup>

Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" serves not only as a document of one of the worst periods of human history, but also a reminder that love, as an energy, a vital force in the life, can be devastating and destructive, but can also lead to a better and brighter future as well as healing. Love towards children, love towards a lover as well as being in peace with yourself is

---

<sup>41</sup> Icon Critical Guides, Beloved, Edited by Carl Plasa, London, UK, page 75

<sup>42</sup> Furman, Jan: Toni Morrison's fiction, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, USA, page 9

a key for a progress, which Morrison demonstrates with her novel that should serve as a reminder for future generations.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Morrison, Toni: *Beloved*, Vintage, Random House, London, UK, 1987.
2. Furman, Jan: *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, USA, 1996.
3. Bloom's Guides – Comprehensive Research & Study Guides, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Chelsea House Publishers, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, USA, 2004.
4. *Modern Critical Interpretations*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Edited and with an Introduction by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, Langhorne, Pennsylvania, USA, 1999.
5. Duvall, John N., *Identifying Fictions by Toni Morrison*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, UK, 2000.
6. Marilyn Sanders Mobley, *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings* in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA, 1991.

## **INTERNET**

1. <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/4440/Demography-of-Blacks-in-the-U-S-What-do-statistics-tell-us>