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## The Dehumanizing Effects of Slavery on the African-American Slaves in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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التأثيرات اللانسانية للعبودية على العبيد الأفرو-أميركيين في رواية  
(المحبوبة)

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### Abstract

Toni Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988 upon publishing her novel *Beloved*. It was adapted in 1988 into a film of the same name starring Oprah Winfrey. In 2006 a New York Times survey of writers and literary critics ranked it as the best work of American fiction of the past 25 years. This research intends to show that Toni Morrison makes the reader become aware of the physical and psychological damage done to the African American people by the brutal inhumanity that constituted American slavery. Because of the painful nature of slavery, most slaves repressed their memories in an attempt to leave behind a horrific past. This repression and

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dissociation from the past caused a fragmentation of the self and a loss of true identity. In this sense, slavery splits a person into a fragmented figure.

In this novel, Toni Morrison frees herself from the bonds of traditional narrative and establishes an independent style, just as her characters have freed themselves from the horrors of slavery and escaped from Kentucky to Ohio. Rapes, beatings, murders, and mutilations are recounted in this novel. Indeed, it is a dense, complex novel that yields up its secrets one by one. As Morrison takes us deeper into Sethe's history and her memories, the horrifying circumstances of her baby's death start to make terrible sense. *Beloved* can be considered a slave narrative of the twentieth century, since, from the unfolding of the story, we follow Sethe's journey from enslavement to freedom. Sethe, is an escapist, a slave and mother of four children. The slavery could not tear her away from her heritage and the past is more real and powerful than the present. In this respect, she lives in a community where the effects of her past are still being felt in the present, and she continues to be haunted by them.

### **The Biography of Toni Morrison**

Toni Morrison, the second of the four Wofford children, was born to Ramah and George Wofford in February 18, 1931, and grew up on the western fringe of Cleveland, which sits on the South shore of Lake Erie. Morrison lived in the multicultural environment of Lorain, Ohio. In spite of the fact that she lived in an educational milieu that ignored the contributions of non whites, Morrison wrote, told stories, and read poetry.

At Lorain High School, Morrison completed four years of Latin and graduated at the top of her class. Then, she surprised her family by insisting

on leaving Lorain to obtain a college degree, which her father paid for her by working three jobs. She entered Howard University in Washington D.C. She immersed herself in the Howard unity players, playing to black audiences during the unsettled pre-civil rights era. Morrison graduated with a B.A. in 1953 and completed a master's degree in English at Cornell two years later with a concentration on the work of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner.

Depending on the fact that Morrison was brought up in a religious environment, she asserted that "we were taught that as individuals we had value, irrespective of what future might hold for us."<sup>1</sup> Truly, she was a faithful novelist who still considered the woman of the black community as a liberated woman of the world.

The novelist was regarded as an unflinching champion of her race and its heritage. She was the genetic offspring of a Southern tradition. Morrison's father had suffered from racial oppression in Georgia. For this reason, Wofford, an embittered racist, still found reasons to distrust "every word and every gesture of every white man on earth."<sup>2</sup> Ramah Willis, Morrison's mother, hold another point of view toward race relations. She used to offer her family a gentler, less destructive or vitriolic point of view.

In her Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *Beloved*, she explored madness, rape, seduction, regret, tyranny, infanticide, passion, wisdom, powerlessness, alienation and the supernatural. She, indeed, was a bold novelist who dramatized the fact that black people, the center of her microcosms are not marginal racial anomalies, but a genuine human society. Throughout her life, she held her credo: "we are people, not aliens. We live, we love, and we die."<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, this credo affects us so much because it reflects the true humanity of black people. One must respect and repudiate the notion that black people are savage and they are created only to be slaves. In this

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sense, the focus will be on the plight of those black people especially, Sethe, and Paul D., to reflect their unflinching determination to save their lives from the tyranny of the white people.

### **The Effects of Slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved***

The novel presents a black community unwilling to confront their past, and thus haunted by the embodiment of it. The author does not protest slavery, but is rather concerned with its effects on the African American psyche. *Beloved* demonstrates Toni Morrison's skill in penetrating the unconstrained psyches of numerous characters who shoulder the horrific burden of a slaver's hidden sins. The novelist dedicates this novel to "sixty million and more," the estimated number of blacks who died in slavery. Moreover, she strongly insists that her literary context is essentially African-American and *Beloved* overtly invokes slave narrative as its precursors. In 1873, slavery was abolished in Cincinnati, Ohio for ten years. This is the setting in which Morrison places the characters for her powerfully moving novel. Sethe, a black woman of extraordinary power, is the heroine of this novel who is willing to sacrifice not only to gain her own emancipation, but also to prevent her children from falling under the yoke of forced servitude. Sethe, 13 year old child, who seems older than her age, of unnamed slave parents, arrives at Sweet Home, an idyllic plantation in Kentucky operated by Garner, an unusually humane master, and his wife, Lillian.<sup>4</sup>

Sethe mentions the fact about her mother who was a slave too who worked in indigo field from dawn to nightfall. In fact, her mother was hanged. She recalls that many slaves were killed along with her mother, and that Nan, a one-armed black governess, took over the role of parent and

taught Sethe her mother's native dialect. In this respect, Morrison reveals that Sethe has lost the sense of motherhood. During this period, Sethe selected Halle Suggs to be her mate. They got married while she was 18, and bears him three children: Haword, Bulgar and Denver.

The slaves Paul D., Paul A, Sethe and Sixo lived in a farm ruled by the benign Garners, a childless couple. After the death of Garner, his wife turns control of the plantation over to her brother-in-law, the school master, who proves to be a brutal overseer. The situation has been described by the writer to reveal the unbearable case of their lives. She expresses:

There had been four of them who belonged to the farm, Sethe the only female. Mrs. Garner, crying like a baby, had sold his brother to pay off the debts that surfaced the minute she was widowed. Then school-teacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke three more Sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe's eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, the harmony of the farm was destroyed by the inhumane behaviour of the schoolteacher who forced the slaves to desperate measures of flight and rebellion. Hence, Sethe, tries to reveal the cataclysmic situation of torture, horror and bad memories for trying to escape the plantation.

Sethe and her daughter, Denver, reside in a haunted two-storey house at 124 Bluestone Road outside Ohio. As a matter of fact, her house was once a way station. Historically, the way station was a treasured salvation for ex-slaves who lacked food, clothing, and safe passage among the whites. The way station also served as a postal centre, and message drop. Chance meetings with other wayfarers sometimes reunited them with friends and loved ones. In addition, the way station provided a warm, dry and safe rest stop a long the wearying road away from slavery. In that house, Denver is a reclusive 18 years old daughter who once upon a time lived with her two brothers: Buglar, Howard, and her infant sister, Beloved. Now they are "all

by themselves in the gray and white house on Bluestone Road” (p.3). Morrison exposes the plight of the young woman Denver in that house that she cannot stand anymore: "I can't no more. I can't no more.... I can't live here, I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks, comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either. (p.14).

Thus, Sethe and Denver lived in an isolated place and their piece time was ruptured by the unexpected or unforeseen arrival of Paul D., a survivor of Sweet Home: the Kentucky slave farm where Sethe, her husband, Halle, and their children were also enslaved. Sethe divulged to Paul D the catastrophic events that caused her to run away from Sweet Home, then she surrendered her sons and daughter to a woman in a wagon because she was worried about the family's future under the schoolmaster's reign. Her description of the assault was straightforward; she told Paul D very succinctly the roughness and cruelty of those white people especially the two white boys--the schoolmaster's nephews who beat her while she was pregnant with Denver injuring her so badly that her back skin had been dead for years. She refers to the station as follows:

Those boys came in there and took my milk, that's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it.... School-teacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still. They used cowhide on me and they took my milk they beat me and I was pregnant. And they took my milk. (p.17)

Moreover, they sucked out her breast milk and lashed her with rawhide whips. She repeatedly used the words “they took my milk” to describe her violation. Of the act itself, we learn only the fact that the two teenaged white boys hold her down and suck her breast milk. Sethe, the most prominent of the novel's many sufferers who bears the physical scars of slavery's terrible violence upon her back, was still continuing to wander the

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past to Paul D. In this sense, she recalled that she reported to Mrs. Garner that schoolmaster's nephew attacked her while he watched the atrocity.

It is worth mentioning that Morrison uses the technique of stream of consciousness because we are travelling throughout Sethe's mental journey. She, in a flashback, mentions the barbarity of those four white men: schoolmaster, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff. Under the fear that her children would be slaves, she, in the wood, had murdered her daughter, Beloved. She killed her so that no "gang of whites would invade her daughter's private parts, soil her daughter's things" (p.251).

According to her, death is a kinder alternative than rape; that "anybody white could take your whole self... and dirty you, dirty you so bad you could not like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forget who you were and couldn't think it up" (p.252). She had killed her own child with a handsaw. The foursome wounded Buglar and Howard threatened to bash Denver's brain. Stamp paid, a former slave who ferries Sethe and Denver across the Ohio River, tried to take Beloved's corpse from the mother's clinging hands and give Denver to her. A mother killing her own child is an act that subverts the natural order of the world. A mother is expected to create life, not destroy it, but with Sethe's case, she was insane and out of control at that specific moment when she imagined that her child might face the same assault in future. Thus, she prefers to put an end to this situation.

On the other hand, we notice that she was very anxious about the feeling of Beloved, her murdered child. She stated "Do you forgive me? Will you stay? You safe here now" (p. 170). But later on, it seems to us that Sethe tries to justify her deed by saying or declaring that "If I had not killed her, she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (p.175). As a matter of fact, a mixture of motherhood images roils in

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Sethe's tangled internal monologue. Being the victim of slavery, Sethe often thought about her daughter and had lived with her daughter's ghost for years.

Being inferior to others, Sethe thinks that this feature is the best way to save her child from slavery, from being treated just like an animal. For her, it is a natural right to protect her child from the apparition of slavery, while on the other hand, it is something against the law of nature. Hence, Morrison alludes to an important idea at that time when Sethe's picture appeared in a white newspaper. News about blacks does not normally appear in white papers unless something terrible enough has occurred to capture the white reader's interest. Just as it is unnatural for the white community to acknowledge any blacks, it is unnatural for a black community made up of ex-slaves not to protect their own from white slave catches. That is what happened on the day Sethe tried to murder her child.<sup>6</sup>

In that place, the beating she received for freeing her children cost her a piece of tongue that she bit off when the lash opened the skin on her back. She recalled her humiliation at hearing the schoolmaster instructing his nephews to catalogue her human traits and her animal traits. The author mentioned that "the picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard. Nor was there the faintest scent of ink or the cherry gum and oak bark from which it was made. Nothing. Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed toward water"(p.6). The realization that Buglar and Howard would soon be larger enough for schoolmaster to sell disturbed her sleep. She, in turn, congratulated herself for managing to save her children from slavery. In place of harmony, Sethe rewarded herself with the satisfaction that she succeeded in rescuing her children from whipping, lynching, starvation, and

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sale. Then she managed to escape from Sweet Home while she was pregnant with her fourth child. She and her newborn arrived at 124 Bluestone Road.

Because Sethe actively worked to repress the rape and infanticide, rather than remember, mourn, and there by heal, she was trapped by her memories: “her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hunger for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day” (p.70). We can ponder Sethe as a tragic heroine of this story. Because of her outrageous act of self-sufficiency, her neighbours rescind the sympathy and camaraderie usually extended to ex-slaves, and they exile her in the land of freedom that she risked everything to attain. After Baby Sugg’s death, Sethe’s mother-in-law, mourners refuse to enter 124 or partake of Sethe’s food. As a result, she had lost harmony. In turn, she suffered from blame and alienation. Before Beloved’s death, Sethe’s infant child, the community of ex-slaves shared their miseries in the warmth of Baby Sugg’s house and shared spontaneous bursts of revelation and rejoicing in the cleaning.

Not only was Sethe the victim of the brutal white society, but also the victim of her husband. She suffered from her husband who was supposed to be her protector from the external world. Here, Halle, the husband, mistreated her. He, to a certain extent, let the schoolmaster’s nephew to steal her breast milk while he was hidden in the barn loft. Traumatized by his wife’s suffering, Halle eventually lost his mind because “it broke him” (p.69). Being a victim of slavery, Sethe was deprived even from a natural right as a living human being when she naively requested a marriage service to honour her union with Halle. Here, it is worth mentioning that slaves do not have the same type of marital conventions as white. Finally, she enjoyed her brief honeymoon in Mr. Garner’s cornfield.

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The plight of slavery will shift from Sethe to Paul D Garner, a former slave from Sweet Home who survived the horrors of slavery and had evolved into a resourceful, contemplative man. He pondered his servitude after schoolmaster took over the management of Sweet Home, the slave realized that they had nurtured a false sense of security. Paul D. has undergone terrible, dehumanizing experiences which had toughened him and made him nearly impervious to hardship and pain. Morrison reminds us of his toughness when she describes his working conditions at the slaughter house. Paul D., we know by now, is not a man who is easily shocked. He is horrified, terrified by the nature of Sethe's crime and by her inability to comprehend why her actions were wrong. His entrance into Sethe's life represented the potential for a happier future for her and Denver.

The writer reflects the ill-treatment and the dehumanizing of those black people especially Paul D. who relives the savage treatment that he endured while shackled to ten other slaves and transported to a brutal prison for the crime of threatening to kill Brandywine, the man who bought him from schoolmaster after the attempted escape from Sweet Home . Eighty-six days into his sentence , Paul D. and the other prisoners, chained together and threatened with suffocation under a mud slide, dived beneath their cell's restraining bars and escaped. The prisoners fled to a Cherokee Camp, where native Americans fed them mush and released them from their leg irons.

Those black people could comfort each other by applying fingers and hands as a kind of tangible blessing. As a matter of fact, those characters were incapable of obliterating the hurtful memories of enslavement. Here, we notice that Paul D. suffered from the bad memories of his experience that he was stifled by an iron bit as he waited for transportation to Camp in Alfred, Georgia. Paul D. informed Sethe that the worst of his humiliation

after being captured by schoolmaster was the glare of mister, the deformed rooster that he helped hatch from his shell. He declared confession of pain and degradation.<sup>7</sup>

The bestial image of mister, the regal rooster, smiling from his tub, destroyed Paul D's remaining sense of humanity as he waited to be carted off to prison. He was stripped of his human dignity and treated like an animal. He mourned the man of Sweet Home, "one crazy, one sold, one missing, one hurt, and me licking iron with my hands crossed behind me" (p.195). He questioned the reason for human suffering and the extent to which a man must bear the burden.

The novelist makes it clear in this novel that the victimization of former slaves does not stop with their escape from slave states. The brutality of the schoolmaster is unbelievable in the sense that he indicated that he would sell paul D. for \$900 and replace him with two young male slaves so that "Sweet Home would be worth the trouble it was causing him" (p. 77). Schoolmaster struggled to take Paul D. alive but eventually determined that Sixo was of no use to Sweet Home. He, in a very savage way, lit a fire and roasted Sixo who was tied at the waist to a tree, then the schoolmaster shot Sixo to quiet his singing to his unborn child;

They came to capture,... By the light of the homing fire Sixo straightens. He is through with his song. He laughs.... His feet are cooking; the cloth of his trousers smokes. He laughs. Something is funny. Paul D. guesses what it is when Sixo interrupts his laughter to call out, "Seven-O! seven-O!" (p. 226).

Both of them, Sethe and Paul D., were dehumanized during their slave experiences; their responses to the experience differed due to their different roles. She suffered a lot, her separation from her husband and the trauma of a severe lashing caused her to be a miserable woman. Hence, the

arrival of Paul D. offered a serious challenge to the permanence of Sethe's suspended life, for within hours of his arrival, his presence had inspired Sethe not only to recite details of her traumatic past, but also to mourn that past: "may be this one time she could remind the baby girl Sethe killed come in the form of a mirror shattering, tiny handprints appearing on a cake, and a pool of red light undulating in front of a door" (p. 204).

Beloved herself is the traumatic past in bodily form. Morrison links her not only to the murdered baby, but also to the other experiences of trauma that Sethe as well as the other community members, lived through during slavery and middle passage.<sup>8</sup> Once Sethe believes that Beloved is her baby returned to flesh, she thinks she has been freed from the pain of that trauma " I couldn't lay down nowhere in peace, back them" (p. 79). She thinks, recalling her daughter's death "now I can, I can sleep like the drowned, have mercy. She came back to me, my daughter, and she is mine" (p. 204). Because she is living with the embodiment of her catastrophic past, Sethe is being smothered; her life revolves entirely around her past.

Not only does Sethe suffer from the nightmares of her past life and what she did, but we see that her living daughter, Denver, suffers from the same trouble or effect. Denver, a solitary child-woman, takes refuge in a circle of box-wood shrubs and inhales the fragrance of cologne. Sethe makes plain to Paul D. that Denver is the centre of her life and the sole concern of her daily existence. Her brief comment that the jail rats "bit everything in there but her" (p. 224), delineates the extent of Sethe's protection. Although Denver has never been lived as a slave, she suffers from the ramification or complication of her mother's experiences and the magnitude of discovery caused her to withdraw from the community and to retreat into the sheltered but unhealthy 124. Denver; after the death of Baby Suggs, she lost her trust,

even in herself because Baby Suggs played an important role to lead Denver to the right path. Baby Suggs, the spiritual guide, taught her to appreciate and love her own body. Now, the hope of Denver's future is Beloved, who returns to fill the emptiness left by Sugg's death. It is worth mentioning that the intrusion of Paul D. helps Sethe and Denver to forget their terrible life, but that visitor who is the embodiment of Sethe's daughter, Beloved, destroyed their harmony. In this respect, Beloved embodies not just the spirit of the child Sethe killed but also all of the past pain and suffering from which Sethe and Denver have never been able to escape.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Beloved is their voice and their experience. Here, Morrison shows us that Beloved is a multifaceted character: she is the ghost of a child, the ghost of the nameless slaves, the ghost of a terrible but inescapable past. Sethe and Denver will have to learn to overcome Beloved's power, the power of the past- before they can create a life for themselves in the future. Like Sethe, Denver examines her seclusion which is made bearable now by the company of her ghostly sister. Isolated and longing for sisterly communion, Denver loves this visitor saying that " she is mine, Beloved. She is mine" ( p.125).

Serving a self-imposed sentence of nameless fear, alienation, and yearning, Denver retreats to the "secret house," the green chapel that shuts out the hurt. Denver prefers to cling to the presence of the ghost of Beloved and resenting Paul D.'s intrusion into her and her mother's lives. In this sense, Paul D, the intruding male figure in a female-dominated environment, disturbs Denver. So, after three days, she demands to know whether Paul D intends to stay or not. Paul D. knows enough of the past-slavery era to realize that it is dangerous for "a used to- be slave woman to love anything that much "(p.272).

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After Beloved disappears, Sethe becomes immersed in her mourning. Paul D reminds her that there is life beyond their pain: “Me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow” ( p.273). She refocuses on herself by asking “me?, me?” Knowledge is the path toward recovery; thus Morrison focuses the end of the novel upon the possibilities of healing and future happiness for the black community, and in particular, for Sethe and Paul D.

### Conclusion

Throughout the novel, the characters have been emotionally crippled by their pasts. The mental and the spiritual wounds caused by slavery are still fresh and have not been allowed to heal. They endure severe indignities, degradation, dehumanization and suffering under the law, and are consistently victims of prejudice from American society.

Sethe, the heroine, cannot overcome her outrage and sense of violation from her Sweet Home experiences, nor can she work through the guilt she feels about her daughter's death. Although Sethe and Paul D. are both dehumanized during their slavery experiences by the inhumanity of the white people, their responses to the experience differ due to their different role. Sethe managed to create her own family with Paul D. Within her psyche, she is a new and a different woman. Thus, Sethe's process of healing in *Beloved*, her process of learning to live with her past, is a model for the readers who must confront Sethe's past as part of our own past, a collective past that lives right where we live. On the other hand, we have Paul D. who initially appeared to be a normalizing force in Sethe's and Denver's lives. His entrance into their private lives signaled the beginning of a healthy relationship for Sethe and the introduction of a father figure for Denver.

Here, Toni Morrison posits that the black community as a whole must attempt to heal from the trauma of slavery and the middle passage by mourning the past. Moreover, she believes that community can heal the spiritual crisis of individuals. The end of the novel also emphasizes that happiness may be found in looking towards the future, rather they remained mired in the past.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Schapiro, “ *The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison’s Beloved*”, Contemporary Literature, Vol. 32, NO. 2, University of Wisconsin Press, Summer 1991, pp, 194-21.

<sup>2</sup> A.O Scott, “ *I Search of the Best*,” The New York Times, May 21, 2006. P.20.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Kastor, “ *Toni Morrison’s Beloved Country: The Writer and Her Haunting Tale of Slavery*” Critical Essays on Toni Morrison’s Beloved E.d. Barbara H. Solomon( New York: G.K. Hall and Co, 1988), p.53-58.

<sup>4</sup> Ron Vavid, "*Toni Morrison Explained: A Reader's Road Map to the Novels*"(New York: Random House, 2000), p105.

<sup>5</sup>Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), p.9.All Subsequent quotations will appear parenthetically in my text, showing page numbers.

<sup>6</sup>Laurie Vickroy,*Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*(Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press , 2002) , p.111.

<sup>7</sup>Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical views: Toni Morrison*(New York: Chelsea House Publisher, 1990), p.90.

<sup>8</sup>Susan Bowers" Beloved and the New Apocalypse", in *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 18, no.1, Spring, 1990, pp.59-77.

<sup>9</sup>Harold Bloom, *Novelists and Novels* (New York: Chelsea House, 2000), p.515

### التأثيرات اللانسانية للعبودية على العبيد الأفرو-أميركيين في رواية (المحبوبة) المستخلص

لقد حصلت رواية (المحبوبة) على جائزة بلترز للأدب الروائي في العام 1988، وفي العام نفسه تم إنتاجها فلم يحمل العنوان نفسه تنصدر نجوميته أوبرا ونفري. وفي العام 2006 قد أشار إليها النقاد وكذلك جريدة نيويورك تايمز على إنها أفضل عمل روائي اميركي في الخمس وعشرين سنة الماضية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى عرض الكاتبة توني موريسن على إنها قادرة على جعل القارئ أكثر إدراكا للضرر الجسمي والنفسي الذي أصاب الشعب الأفرو-اميركي بسبب الوحشية اللانسانية المتمثلة في الاستعباد الأمريكي. وبسبب الطبيعة المؤلمة للاستعباد فأن الكثير من العبيد قد كبجوا ذكرياتهم في محاولة منهم لطمس الماضي المروع الذي تعرضوا له. إن هذا الكبح وكذلك الانفصال عن الماضي قد تسببا بتمزيق النفس وفقدان الهوية الحقيقية، ووفقا لذلك فأن العبودية قد قصمت ظهرالفرد وأدت به إلى أن يكون شخصية ممزقة.

تحرر توني موريسن نفسها في هذه الرواية من قيود السرد التقليدي مكونة اسلوبا مستقلا، كما ان شخصياتها حررت أنفسها من قيود العبودية والترويع وذلك بهروبها من ولاية كنتاكي إلى ولاية أوهايو. وقد تمت الإشارة في هذه الرواية الى الاغتصابات والضرب المبرح وجرائم القتل والانتهاكات الجسدية فإنها حقا رواية مكثفة ومعقدة نفسي

عن اسرارها الواحد تلو الآخر. فعندما تأخذنا موريسن لسبر أغوار تأريخ الشخصية (سييد) وذكرياتهما، فإن الظروف المروعة لحادثة موت طفلتها أفضت إلى مشاعر مفاجئة. يمكن أن تعد رواية (*المحبوبة*) سردا لعبد عاش في القرن العشرين، فمن خلال قراءة الرواية يقوم القارئ بتتبع رحلة (سييد) من العبودية إلى التحرر. تعد (سييد) امرأة هاربة وإنها ام لأربعة أطفال ولم تتمكن العبودية ان تفصلها من تراثها حيث كان ماضيها أكثر واقعية وقوة من الحاضر. وضمن هذا السياق فأنها تعيش في مجتمع تكون في مؤثرات الماضي ما تزال تشعره بتأثيرات الماضي التي استمرت (سييد) تتذكرها دائما.

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