



## Controversy and Resilience in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: An Exploration of Censorship and Literary Triumph

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### Article History

Received: 27/07/2023

Accepted: 02/08/2023

Published: 04/08/2023

### Vol – 1 Issue – 3

PP: - 12-15

### Abstract

*Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" has been both widely celebrated and vehemently challenged since its publication in 1987. This paper provides an analysis of the book, examining its themes, literary techniques, and historical context. It also delves into the reasons why "Beloved" has been one of the most challenged books in America, facing censorship attempts in schools and public libraries. The paper discusses the novel's portrayal of slavery, motherhood, and memory, showing how Morrison's powerful writing brings these themes to life. It also explores the use of magical realism and nonlinear storytelling, demonstrating how these techniques contribute to the novel's impact and depth. Furthermore, the paper explores the controversies surrounding "Beloved", including objections to its depictions of sexuality and violence. It analyzes the arguments made by those who have sought to ban or restrict the book and considers the broader issues of censorship and free speech. Ultimately, this paper argues that "Beloved" is a masterpiece of American literature, a work that confronts the legacy of slavery and the ongoing struggles of African Americans with unflinching honesty and grace. Despite the attempts to silence it, the novel remains a testament to the power of literature to illuminate the darkest corners of our history and our humanity.*

**Index terms-** *Illuminate, Vehemently, Literary, Historical, Motherhood*

### INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's was inspired to write *Beloved* after coming across the case of Margaret Garner, an escaped slave who murdered her own child to save it from a life of servitude. Because the case of Margaret Garner was not widely discussed, it was the most inspiring reason for writing *Beloved*. And to keep Margaret Garner in mind, Morrison has written *Beloved* which exposes the real history of slavery. In reality, *Beloved* brings to life what really happened physically as well as emotionally to African Americans during the times of Reconstruction and on. Many of the times, when the message is a direct reflection of historical occurrences, it can be difficult to find a way which will best bring forth the desired message. According to Darling, "Beloved, in its entirety, challenges us to visualize, contemplate, empathize, and comprehend the reality of 19th-century Black men and women". Many of the people who lived during the Civil War era do not want to recollect the memories from their past. Repressing memories, such as Sethe was repressing memories that were filled with guilt and regret, can prove to be harmful to one's body and mind as expressed in *Beloved*. "Beloved is

a prime example that there are ways, such as through writing, to confront the painful memories of the past and enlighten the world today with the truth of what really happened during the times of slavery"- Darling

### BELOVED-NOVEL

*Beloved*, which revolves around the incidents which happened on a slave plantation known as Sweet Home, revealed how slavery tore apart families. His wife, Sethe, is pregnant with his child when plans were made to escape. Sethe escaped, only by having to leave Halle behind. The way in which Morrison describes how white people see blacks during the time which *Beloved* took place is as follows, "White people believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin, was a jungle. After hearing the schoolteacher directly compare Sethe to a four-legged animal, it filled her with anger which she retained in her later life, still unwilling to open up to the power of healing. The fact that Morrison brought in the idea of how the white men found comparison between slaves and animals led to the development of a certain scene which could be seen as provocative and violent to parents whose children were reading *Beloved* in a scholastic environment.

The children should be exposed to the atrocities that the characters in Morrison's book were exposed to in order to begin to comprehend how Sethe, Denver, or Paul D felt. While working as an editor at Random House, Toni Morrison discovered the story of Margaret Garner who became her inspiration for the main character, Sethe. What drove Toni Morrison to write *Beloved* in the first place was the fact that the story of Margaret Garner was left untold.

For many people living during the time in which *Beloved* took place, it re-told their stories which they didn't have the courage to tell out loud. After her attempt to escape slavery, both Sethe and Margaret Garner escaped with plans to kill all of their children, Sethe only succeeded in killing one of her children, her crawling-already baby who was not given a name other than that which was carved into her headstone, *Beloved*. Although Sethe wished to write the words "Dearly *Beloved*," she could only afford one of the words. Sethe murdered her child by slitting its throat with a saw. This incident was what *Beloved* revolved around. *Beloved* was a reflection of the lasting impression of guilt and regret from this event and how Sethe was coping with it. Morrison stated in *Beloved*, "Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed, and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere in the ticking time the men spent staring at what there was to stare at the old nigger boy, still mewling, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arc of its mother's swing". There are instances such as the aforementioned one within *Beloved* which bring to life the horror of the situation. Then there are times where Morrison used her masterful way with words to see Sethe's perspective as poetry and an act of love. Within *Beloved*, Morrison writes, "I have felt what [slavery] felt like and nobody walking or stretched out is going to make you feel it too. Paul D, after learning what Sethe did to her baby, explained her love for her children to be "too thick." When a life of slavery is all a person has known, there is no possible way to wish that fate upon anyone, especially not children.

*Beloved* explained the reasoning behind why Sethe did what she did in an honest manner, and no book should be criticized for doing so. Speaking of making everything come to life within *Beloved*, it brings up discussion about the character of *Beloved* herself. *Beloved* is believed to be the spirit of Sethe's murdered child reincarnated. When *Beloved* came back to Sethe, it brought all of Sethe's repressed feelings and emotions to the surface for *Beloved* to feed off of. Most of all *Beloved* gets her enjoyment from making Sethe remember her guilt at how she killed her. Towards the end of the novel, right before her exorcism, *Beloved* seemed to be pregnant. Standing on the front porch of 124 Bluestone Road, *Beloved* smiles in her nakedness and fatness because she feels she has no guilt. *Beloved*, who was viewed as a demon, had a way, through reincarnation, to reincarnate the demonic acts committed during the particular time period.

The cherished individuals are attempting to demonstrate that they are a long way from arriving at a condition of exemption from all affliction and agony. The existence of a darling individual turned into a defining moment for the remainder of their family. Denver has been liberated from her mom's solid fortification and, because of her adoration for her mom, she made the principal stride towards recuperating, which is another normal topic across the darling. Morrison needed her perusers to concentrate on the positive perspectives and on the most proficient method to conquer bitterness and regret. In any case, the negatives that may emerge in darling individuals ought not to be disregarded. Another part of the book manages prejudice and its pervasiveness from the Civil War and Reconstruction to the present day. Morrison needed to uncover reality about bigotry and how it keeps on being a significant factor in individuals' lives.

Morrison took steps to illustrate the toll that racism takes on families and individuals. Various types of racism within *beloved* individuals have been identified, one of which is blatant racism against African Americans. Sweet Home was a slave plantation that inspired Sethe to escape first and ultimately resulted in her killing her own child. She placed blame on the white men for what she had done to her child but was rejected and left to live with the guilt for the rest of her life. Another type of racism is the animosity between Sethe and the African American community towards 124 Bluestone Road. After hearing what she had done to her child, the congregation excommunicated Sethe. She was forced to live in isolation with only her daughter Denver for companionship for eighteen years. Finally, Sethe's racism towards the white community is also present. Based on her personal experiences, she feels justified in treating whites harshly. However, she fails to understand that not all whites are the same. Sethe spends her life defending herself and justifying her actions by blaming those who had kept her captive in her previous years, even though not all white people were responsible for her suffering

## DISCUSSION

Toni Morrison's novel "*Beloved*" is a powerful and provocative work that delves into the complex themes of slavery, trauma, memory, and the resilience of the human spirit. Since its publication in 1987, the book has garnered both critical acclaim and controversy, making it a significant piece of literature in the modern literary canon.

### The Controversy:

One of the primary reasons for the controversy surrounding "*Beloved*" is its explicit and unflinching portrayal of the horrors of slavery. Morrison does not shy away from depicting the brutality, violence, and dehumanization that African American slaves endured. This raw depiction of historical trauma and its effects on individuals can be unsettling for some readers, leading to calls for censorship or banning of the book in educational institutions. Censorship attempts often arise from concerns about the appropriateness of certain content for young readers, particularly due to the novel's graphic depictions of violence and sexual assault.

However, proponents of the book argue that these elements are essential to the story's authenticity and to fully grasp the depth of the characters' experiences.

The novel's treatment of race and identity is another aspect that has generated controversy. Morrison's exploration of the psychological impact of slavery on the characters challenges traditional narratives and encourages readers to confront the lasting legacy of historical oppression. Some critics argue that the novel's complex narrative structure and use of magical realism make it difficult to grasp for certain readers, leading to further resistance to its inclusion in educational curricula.

### Literary Triumph

Despite the controversies surrounding "Beloved," it remains a triumph of contemporary literature for several reasons. First and foremost, Morrison's writing style is exceptionally powerful and evocative. She skillfully weaves together multiple narrative threads, blending history, memory, and supernatural elements to create a multi-layered and emotionally resonant story. The novel's characters are also masterfully crafted, each representing different facets of the African American experience during and after slavery. Sethe, the protagonist, is a woman haunted by the trauma of her past, while Beloved, the titular character, embodies the specter of history and the weight of memory. These richly developed characters contribute to the book's enduring impact. Moreover, "Beloved" is not just a historical novel but a timeless exploration of the human condition. Its themes of love, sacrifice, and the search for identity transcend specific historical contexts, making it relevant to readers from various backgrounds and experiences.

Toni Morrison's skillful use of language and her willingness to address difficult subjects without compromise earned her the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988 and solidified her reputation as one of the most important American authors of the 20th century. The controversy surrounding "Beloved" highlights the power of literature to provoke discussions about uncomfortable truths, historical atrocities, and the complexities of human resilience. As a work of art, the novel has the ability to challenge readers, encouraging them to confront the darker aspects of history while celebrating the strength and perseverance of marginalized communities. Ultimately, "Beloved" stands as a testament to Toni Morrison's literary prowess and her dedication to telling stories that demand reflection and examination of the human condition.

### SUMMARY

Toni Morrison's *Beloved: An Exploration of Censorship and Literary Triumph* delves into the intricate relationship between censorship and literary achievement in Toni Morrison's acclaimed novel, "Beloved." The book examines the controversies that surrounded Morrison's work and its subsequent resilience in the face of challenges. Toni Morrison's "Beloved" is a powerful and haunting novel that delves into the brutal history of slavery and its enduring impact on African Americans. Upon its publication in 1987, the book sparked intense discussions and debates due to its

raw and unapologetic portrayal of slavery's horrors. Some critics and institutions attempted to censor the novel, deeming it too explicit or unsettling for readers. Despite facing opposition and attempts at suppression, "Beloved" managed to triumph in the literary world. The book's resilience lies in its unflinching exploration of the human experience, tackling themes of trauma, motherhood, identity, and the search for freedom. Morrison's masterful storytelling and rich, complex characters have resonated deeply with readers, leading to widespread acclaim and recognition.

The novel's exploration of censorship intertwines with its narrative, mirroring the historical erasure and silencing of African American voices. Morrison's steadfast dedication to preserving and sharing this painful history exemplifies the importance of confronting uncomfortable truths and acknowledging the past's impact on the present. "Controversy and Resilience in Toni Morrison's *Beloved: An Exploration of Censorship and Literary Triumph*" celebrates the enduring legacy of "Beloved" and its author, highlighting the significance of unbridled artistic expression in addressing society's most challenging issues. By overcoming censorship and prevailing against adversity, "Beloved" stands as a testament to the power of literature to provoke thought, foster empathy, and serve as a catalyst for meaningful societal change.

### CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison's "Beloved" is a remarkable novel that explores the complexities of slavery, memory, and motherhood. Its use of magical realism and nonlinear storytelling create a haunting, unforgettable reading experience. Despite its literary brilliance, the book has faced numerous attempts at censorship, particularly in schools and public libraries. However, this paper argues that these challenges only serve to underscore the importance of the book's message. By confronting the brutal legacy of slavery and its ongoing impact on African American communities, "Beloved" exposes uncomfortable truths that must be acknowledged and grappled with. Moreover, the novel's resilience in the face of censorship demonstrates the enduring power of literature to challenge and transform our understanding of the world. As Morrison herself once said, "The function of freedom is to free someone else." By sharing the stories of those who have been silenced and forgotten, "Beloved" offers a path towards greater understanding, compassion, and ultimately, freedom.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

In Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved," the concept of conflict of interest is not a central theme; however, one can identify instances where conflicts of interest play a role in shaping the characters and their relationships.

#### 1. Sethe's Conflict of Interest:

One of the central characters, Sethe, grapples with internal conflicts throughout the novel. After escaping from slavery, she settles in Ohio and lives in a house haunted by the ghost of her deceased daughter, whom she named Beloved. Sethe's conflicting interests revolve around her desire to protect her

children from the horrors of slavery and her haunting guilt over a traumatic decision she made in the past.

When faced with the prospect of returning to slavery or allowing her children to be taken back into slavery, Sethe makes a heart-wrenching choice to kill her own child, believing death is a better fate than a life of enslavement. This act of infanticide is a clear conflict of interest between Sethe's love for her children and her determination to save them from suffering the same fate she experienced.

### 2. Paul D's Conflict of Interest:

Paul D, another significant character and Sethe's former fellow slave from Sweet Home, experiences his own conflicts of interest. Throughout the novel, he grapples with his desire for freedom and independence versus his longing for companionship and love. His internal struggle leads him to suppress painful memories and emotions, seeking stability and security instead.

When Paul D arrives at Sethe's house years after their time on the plantation, he disrupts the peaceful life she has built with Denver, her surviving daughter. His presence evokes memories of their shared past and the atrocities they endured, forcing him to confront his own feelings of vulnerability and pain. This conflict between Paul D's desire for connection and his fear of confronting his traumatic past creates tension in their relationship.

### 3. Community's Conflict of Interest:

The community in the novel also experiences conflicts of interest, particularly concerning the haunting presence of Beloved. The townspeople hold various opinions about Beloved's true identity, with some believing she is a lost soul or a reincarnation of the deceased child, while others view her as a malicious spirit or a representation of the past's painful legacy.

This difference of opinions within the community reflects the conflicting interests of its members—some are sympathetic and wish to help Sethe and Beloved, while others are skeptical or fear the disruptive influence of the supernatural presence. This divergence of perspectives adds complexity to the novel's exploration of memory, history, and community bonds.

While conflict of interest may not be a prominent theme in "Beloved," its presence in the internal struggles of the characters and the differing perspectives within the community contributes to the novel's depth and exploration of the human psyche in the aftermath of slavery.

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