

# [What do we learn about paul d’s character](https://assignbuster.com/what-do-we-learn-about-paul-ds-character/)

[](https://assignbuster.com/)[Literature](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/literature/)

Paul D, " the last of the Sweet Home men," is waiting on the porch of 124 when Sethe comes home from work one afternoon. Sethe has not seen Paul D in eighteen years, since they were both slaves at the Kentucky plantation called Sweet Home. He has had, in total, a 24-year relationship with Sethe, or 'Halle's girl' as she was called back on the plantation. He not only saw her as a friend but as the lady of his sexual fantasies.

To fully understand the character of Paul D it is necessary to understand his past: slavery. It can be denoted from the absence of Site's murdered third child that as an institution, slavery necessarily shattered its victims' traditional family structures or stopped bonds from ever forming. Slaves were thus deprived of the foundations of any identity apart from their role as servants. The actual 'identity' of Paul D is unknown because that wasn't his real name; his owner, Mr. Garner, gave it to him.

Not a lot is revealed about him in the first couple of chapters but many questions arise from snippets of information that is given such as where was he 'locked up and chained down for eighty-three days in a row'? Toni Morrison uses several literary techniques, with particular reference to stream-of-consciousness narration. As a result of this, the narrative is not always logically or chronologically ordered, for a present moment may trigger unrelated thoughts or past memories such as the story of Sixo. From delaying full narrative explanations Morrison accomplishes several things.

First, the delay builds suspense in the reader. More importantly, the technique plunges the reader into a world where everything in not known, where explanations do not come easily, and where the significance of present realities lies in a past that has been long since buried. In reality, the narration is intentionally structured as an imitation of the psychological mechanism of repression. It is obvious Paul D has tried to repress the details of his past as he doesn't go into a great depth of explanation as to his whereabouts over the 18 years.

Eighteen years... and I swear I have been walking every one of them. " Morrison presents Paul D in the first chapter as a troubled man. One of Paul D's problems has to do with his manhood. Lacking access to a culture that provided him with rituals of transition from boyhood to adulthood and living under a system of slavery, Paul D was deprived of properly growing into manhood. As a result, he lacks certainty and dignity. He feels that he is not truly an individual for he still sees himself as a slave: " The truth is I go anywhere these days... nywhere they let me sit down. "

The story is set in the reconstruction era of 1873, the period after slavery had been abolished. It is obvious Paul D would be feeling insecure with being 'free' after being a slave for all of his life but his inability to settle down: to be a man. Paul D is obviously an empathetic man. He shows this particularly when he talks about Sethe's 'merciful eyes' - if they looked like everything she had been through they would be unbearable to look at. Sethe finds it very easy to talk to him about life.

Denver notices how her mother changes from a woman into a childish girl when Paul D is there. It is as if there is something about him, a sense that he will understand everything. It could be his wisdom from his 18 years of wandering, his eyes or his life. " There was something blessed in his manner. " The transformation of the scars on Sethe's back into the chokecherry tree transforms her story of pain and repression into survival. Her scars become and poignant and beautiful symbol.

Paul D reinforces this more positive interpretation when he kisses them: he saw the sculpture on her back had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display. " Paul D feels he is the 'man of the house' as he is the only male figure present in 124 for a number of years. He feels it is part of his duty of his sex to 'protect' the women and he also sees it as an opportunity get closer to Sethe: " Still... if her boys were gone... " He rids the house of the ghost to the disgust of Denver. He threatens her exclusive hold on Sethe's affections and also reminds her about the existence of a part of Sethe that she has never been able to access.

She has lived in relative isolation for her entire life, and she is angered and disturbed by Paul D's sudden intrusion. At the start of the second chapter Paul D and Sethe are about to make love. Paul D is overwhelmed that he has found Sethe after 18 years and is also excited about making love to her after longing for her intensely so many years ago. Paul D is almost breathless with anticipation whilst Sethe is a little anxious for it has been a long time since she has experienced sex.

The experience is quick. They don't undress and afterwards they feel awkward and shy. It was over before they could get their clothes off. Half-dressed and short of breath, they lay side by side resentful of one another... " Paul D fantasised about this moment for the past 18 years and it was over in a manner of minutes. He has romanticised the whole event in his head, and when it happened it didn't live up to his expectations. He now sees Sethe in a different light: " Paul D saw the float of her breasts and disliked it. " He follows this by describing how the scars on her back are in fact a revolting bunch of scars.

The contrast between horror and beauty, the idea of it being a tree and now a bunch of scars leads him to a flashback of his own tree called 'Brother'. Paul D introduces us to a new character called Sixo who had to walk for over 30 miles to be with his lover and had idealistic plans of how they would spend their time but in the end it was a quick 'session' on the floor and it meant everything to them both. Paul D walked for 18 years, experienced what he wanted and was disappointed. To Sixo making love meant everything but to Paul D it was just fulfilling a fantasy.

Paul D is a complex character but Morrison only chooses to reveal certain bits of information about him through different narratives throughout these two chapters to increase the mystery surrounding him. In both chapters she uses an omniscient point of view where she can see into the minds of all characters. She fluidly moves from the thoughts of one character into the thoughts of another. As Sethe thinks about Halle's gentle lovemaking in the cornfields (in contrast to the unsatisfactory lovemaking that has occurred with Paul D) Paul D remembers watching the couple with jealously.