

# Beloved: slavery and novel essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



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Thesis:

\* Morrison portrays an important part of Feminist criticism called patriarchy when Sethe takes a stand against the white men. “ Patriarchy is the systematic social, political, cultural and economic domination of women by men” (Oppermann). \* Sethe choices as a women character show that men cannot rule the lives of women or their children.

\* Beloved by Toni Morrison is a novel that contains many strongly depicted female characters and where their lives have taken them. \* The characters of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved are the most significant women throughout the story as the reader continually learns more about their lives. \* All three of them have been through traumatic experiences throughout their lives such as beatings, rapes, abuse, even death. \* The difficult lives that the women have lead make them the strongest influences on the outcome of the novel. The strong role that the women characters have on the novel Beloved makes it strongly subjected to feminist literary criticism.

\* Beloved tells us about whippings, rape, hard work, and escape. But, while portraying this historical story of enslavement and black culture, Morrison also tells the personal tales of a few very strong females’ slaves. \* Morrison’s novel focuses mainly on the female characters, Sethe, Baby Suggs, Beloved, and their relationships. If one defines feminism, as “ a major movement in western thinking since the 1960s, which puts particular emphasis upon the importance of women’s experiences”, Beloved can be seen as a feminist novel. \* Even though Beloved tells the story of many slaves, because of its focus on the proactive and independent women in the novel, it also makes a feminist statement.

\* Morrison portrayed Denver in a powerful way. She showed that a young, black woman could obtain a job and provide for a family, something that a male character usually does. Denver even became a stronger person than the only male in her life, Paul D. \* Morrison depicts the importance that society puts on the sex of a human being. Literary criticism explains that “ men and women should both be able to act in accordance with their desires, not limited to societal definitions of what it means to be a man or woman” (Progreba). The typical stereotype is that the men in the family must protect the women, but in this instance they were left to fend for themselves.

The prime and most important example of feminism in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison is the choice that Sethe, the protagonist, makes early in her life, years before the book’s opening. She lived as a slave at Sweet Home, a plantation, and decides to escape. Sethe had sent her three children, two boys and a girl, ahead to Cincinnati to be taken care of by her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Eventually, Sethe escapes and makes it to Cincinnati. Soon after, some of the people from the plantation arrive in Cincinnati to take Sethe and her children back to the plantation. Instead of allowing that to happen, Sethe attempts to murder all of her children. She only succeeds in killing her daughter, who is later named “ Beloved.”

\* To some, this act of murder is an act of compassion. In Sethe’s eyes, she was keeping her daughter from the miserable life of slavery that she had to endure growing up. \* This is an example of feminism because Sethe made a choice about whether to let her child live, and she chose not to. \* Many

feminists believe that the woman should have the choice about what to do for the best of her and her children. Another example of feminism is the fact that the women in the novel are the central characters. Sethe is an independent woman who is able to choose which men she wants to be with. She takes Paul D as her lover but does not marry him; a very feminist idea. Denver, Sethe's living daughter, is another central character who is fighting her own battles. The fact that these women, along with their issues and struggles, take center stage in this novel makes it a very feminist one indeed. \* The men and women in the novel work together to deal with their struggles and Morrison does not suggest that men are evil or to be mistrusted. \* Rather, it is the inhumanity of slavery and the horrors that were endured that are the true evil.

\* The reader learns about Sethe's story and what she has experienced from the past to the present throughout the novel. Sethe's past causes her to be a strong influence on the novel. Everything that happened to Sethe at Sweet Home made her a stronger person that refuses to run from any of her problems. \* Sethe starts a new life and has many children. She loves her children, in a way most black women didn't in that time period. Paul D even advised her to not love like that, " Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For used-to-be-slave women to love anything that was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love.

The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one" (Morrison 48). \* Sethe took

a big risk to love Denver the way she did, Paul D acknowledged that often. Sethe's love and strong will had large influence on the novel. She refused to let her children live as slaves. When her children's freedom was threatened, she went to an extreme extent to help them. \* In Sethe's mind she thought that her children would have a better life dead than as slaves. She knocked her two sons unconscious, slit one daughter's throat, and came close to throwing the other daughter against the wall. As a strong woman, Sethe took control of what was happening to her family.

Quotes:

\* “ Freeing yourself is one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another”- Page 95

\* “ She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order.”- Page 272-273

\* “ Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For used-to-be-slave women to love anything that was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one”-Page 48

\* “ In trying to make the slave experience intimate, I hoped the sense of things being both under control and out of control would be persuasive throughout; that the order and quietude of everyday life would be violently disrupted by the chaos of the needy dead; that the herculean effort to forget would be threatened by memory desperate to stay alive. To render

enslavement as a personal experience, language must first get out of the way.”-Toni Morrison

\* “ Let me tell you something. A man ain’t a goddamn ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every goddamn minute of the day. Things get to him. Things he can’t chop down because they’re inside.” – Page 69