

The voice of the city

anita desai



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Beloved is a novel by the American writer Toni Morrison. Set after the American Civil War (1861–1865), it is inspired by the story of an African American slave, Margaret Garner, who temporarily escaped slavery during 1856 in Kentucky by fleeing to Ohio, a free state. A posse arrived to retrieve her and her children under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which gave slave owners the right to pursue slaves across state borders. Margaret killed her two-year-old daughter rather than allow her to be recaptured.

Beloved's main character, Sethe, kills her daughter and tries to kill her other three children when a posse arrives in Ohio to return them to Sweet Home, the plantation in Kentucky from which Sethe recently fled. A woman presumed to be her daughter, called Beloved, returns years later to haunt Sethe's home at 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati. The story opens with an introduction to the ghost: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom." [1] The novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. [2] It was adapted during 1998 into a movie of the same name starring Oprah Winfrey.

During 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. [3] The book's epigraph reads "Sixty Million and more," dedicated to the Africans and their descendants who died as a result of the Atlantic slave trade. [4] The book concerns the story of Sethe and her daughter Denver after their escape from slavery. Their home, 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati, is haunted by a revenant, whom they believe to be the ghost of Sethe's daughter.

Because of the haunting — which often involves objects being thrown around the room — Sethe's youngest daughter, Denver, is shy, friendless,

and housebound, and her sons, Howard and Buglar, have run away from home by the time they are thirteen years old. Soon afterward, Baby Suggs, the mother of Sethe's husband Halle, dies in her bed. Paul D, one of the slaves from Sweet Home, the plantation where Baby Suggs, Sethe, her spouse Halle, and several other slaves once worked, arrives at 124. He tries to bring a sense of reality into the house. He also tries to make the family forget the past.

In doing so, he forces out the spirit. At first, he seems to be successful, even bringing the family, including the housebound Denver, out of the house for the first time in years. However, on their way back, they encounter a young woman sitting in front of the house. She calls herself Beloved. Paul D, suspicious, warns Sethe, but charmed by the young woman, Sethe ignores him. Paul D is gradually forced out of Sethe's home by a supernatural presence. When made to sleep outside in a shed, he is cornered by Beloved. While Paul D has sex with her, his mind is filled with horrific memories from his past.

Overwhelmed with guilt, Paul D tries to tell Sethe about it but cannot and instead says he wants her pregnant. Sethe is elated, and Paul D resists Beloved and her influence over him. But, when he tells friends at work about his plans to start a new family, they react fearfully. Stamp Paid reveals the reason for the community's rejection of Sethe. When Paul D asks Sethe about it, she tells him what happened. After escaping from Sweet Home and making it to her mother-in-law's home where her children were waiting, Sethe was found by her master, who attempted to reclaim Sethe and her children.

Sethe grabbed her children, ran into the tool shed and tried to kill them all. She succeeds only in killing her eldest daughter by running a saw along her neck. Sethe explains to Paul D, saying she was “ trying to put my babies where they would be safe. ” The revelation is too much for him, and he leaves. Without Paul D, the sense of reality and time moving forward disappears. Sethe comes to believe that the girl, Beloved, is the daughter she murdered when the girl was only two years old; her tombstone reads only “ Beloved”.

Sethe begins to spend carelessly and spoil Beloved out of guilt. Beloved becomes angry and more demanding, throwing tantrums when she doesn't get her way. Beloved's presence consumes Sethe's life to the point where she becomes depleted and sacrifices her own need for eating, while Beloved grows bigger and bigger. In the climax of the novel, Denver, the youngest daughter, reaches out and searches for help from the black community. Some of the village women arrive at 124 to exorcise Beloved. At the same time, a white man comes into view.

He is the man that helped Halle's mother, Baby Suggs, by offering her number 124 as a place to stay after Halle bought her from their owner. The man has come to pick up Denver, who asked him for a job. She got the job and he is picking her up on his way home, but Denver has not shared this information. Sethe, unaware of the situation, attacks the white man with an ice pick and is brought down by the village women; in the meantime Beloved disappears from 124. While Sethe is confused and has a “ rememory” of her master coming again, Beloved disappears.

The novel resolves with Denver becoming a working member of the community and Paul D returning to Sethe and pledging his love. At the outset, the reader is caused to assume that Beloved is a supernatural, incarnate form of Sethe's murdered daughter. Later, Stamp Paid reveals the story of "a girl locked up by a white man over by Deer Creek. Found him dead last summer and the girl gone. Maybe that's her". Both are possible by the text. Beloved sings a song Sethe believes to be known only to her and her children; elsewhere, she speaks of a pair of earrings and asks Sethe what happened to them.

The second section of the novel, however, contains memories of Beloved's that seem to corroborate the possibility that she is the escaped girl from Deer Creek. Major themes[edit] Mother-daughter relationships[edit] The maternal bonds between Sethe and her children inhibit her own individuation and prevent the development of her self. Sethe develops a dangerous maternal passion that results in the murder of one daughter, her own ? best self,? and the estrangement of the surviving daughter from the black community, both in an attempt to salvage her ? antasy of the future,? her children, from a life in slavery. However, Sethe fails to recognize her daughter Denver's need for interaction with this community in order to enter into womanhood. Denver finally succeeds at the end of the novel in establishing her own self and embarking on her individuation with the help of Beloved.

Contrary to Denver, Sethe only becomes individuated after Beloved's exorcism, at which point Sethe can fully accept the first relationship that is completely ? for her,? her relationship with Paul D. This relationship relieves

Sethe from the ensuing destruction of herself that resulted from the maternal bonds controlling her life. [5] *Beloved* and *Sethe* are both very much emotionally impaired as a result of Sethe's previous enslavement. Slavery creates a situation where a mother is separated from her child, which has devastating consequences for both parties. Often, mothers do not know themselves to be anything except a mother, so when they are unable to provide maternal care for their children, or their children are taken away from them, they feel a lost sense of self.

Similarly, when a child is separated from his or her mother, he or she loses the familial identity associated with mother-child relationships. Sethe was never able to see her mother's true face (because her smile was distorted from having spent too much time ? with the bit?) so she was not able to connect with her own mother, and therefore does not know how to connect to her own children, even though she longs to. Furthermore, the earliest need a child has is related to the mother: the baby needs milk from the mother.

Sethe is traumatized by the experience of having her milk stolen because it means she cannot form the symbolic bond between herself and her daughter. [1] Psychological impact of slavery[edit] Because of the experiences of slavery, most slaves repressed these memories in an attempt to forget the past. This repression and dissociation from the past causes a fragmentation of the self and a loss of true identity. Sethe, Paul D. and Denver all experience this loss of self, which could only be remedied by the acceptance of the past and the memory of their original identities.

Beloved serves to remind these characters of their repressed memories, eventually causing the reintegration of their selves. [6] Slavery splits a person into a fragmented figure. [7] The identity, consisting of painful memories and unspeakable past, denied and kept at bay, becomes a “ self that is no self. ” To heal and humanize, one must constitute it in a language, reorganize the painful events and retell the painful memories. As a result of suffering, the “ self” becomes subject to a violent practice of making and unmaking, once acknowledged by an audience becomes real.

Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs who all fall short of such realization, are unable to remake their selves by trying to keep their pasts at bay. The ‘ self’ is located in a word, defined by others. The power lies in the audience, or more precisely, in the word – once the word changes, so does the identity. All of the characters in Beloved face the challenge of an unmade self, composed of their “ rememories” and defined by perceptions and language. The barrier that keeps them from remaking of the self is the desire for an “ uncomplicated past” and the fear that remembering will lead them to “ a place they couldn’t get back from. “[8]