


Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture – 12
Gender-Blurring in Toni Morrison's Novels II

Good morning and welcome dear friends. In the previous module we had started the discussion of Gender-Blurring in Toni Morrison. In this module we would continue with the same discussion.

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- Gender-blurring involves conventional characteristics and dispositions of women and men: a man behaves as it is traditionally and culturally expected of a woman and a woman's behavior conforms more to the male characteristics than to her own.
- The concept of Gender-Blurring in Morrison's novels generally attributes weak female character traits to men, and strong male character traits to women; consequently impairing manhood and opposing conventional restrictions for women characters.
- Drag. Queer. Presages postmodernist theories of power.
- Foucault's idea of force relations: effect of difference, inequality or unbalance that exists in unconventional forms of relationships, such as sexual or economic. Force/power is not limited to something that a person/group "holds" over others as within institutions.
- Instead power is a complex group of forces that comes from "everything" and therefore exists everywhere.



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As we have discussed previously, gender blurring involves conventional characteristics of women as well as men. It suggests that as per the traditional and cultural perceptions there are certain characteristics, which are normally associated with masculinity as well as with femininity.

So, when a man behaves in such a manner which is conventionally expected to be that of a woman and vice versa, we understand this to be an instance of gender blurring. In the novels of Toni Morrison, we find that the concept of gender blurring normally attributes weak female character traits to men and a strong male character traits to women. Consequently, impairing manhood and also opposing conventional restrictions for women characters.

In the previous modules we have looked at parallels with the drag as well as with the queer theory in the context of gender blurring. We can also say that the concept of gender blurring also presages postmodernist theories of power. And here I would like to refer to Foucault the famous French postmodernist, who has been hugely influential in shaping our understanding of power in contemporary discourse.



We find that Foucault has shifted away from the theoretical discussions of power, not only from those actors who have used power as instruments of coercion, but also he has shifted away from those discrete institutions and structures within which such actors operate. So, according to Foucault, power is everywhere, it is diffused and embodied in discourse knowledge and what he has termed as regimes of truth.

Foucault has remarked that power is not episodic rather it is dispersed as well as pervasive. Similar ideas can be seen when we look at Toni Morrison's novel, in the context of gender blurring and her depiction of the slavery as an institution in erstwhile USA. In his idea of force relations Foucault has looked at power as an effect of difference, inequality or unbalance that exists in unconventional forms of relationships for example, sexual or economic relationships. So, force of power is not limited to something that a person or an institution or a group holds over others, instead power is a complex group of forces that comes from everything and therefore, it exists everywhere.

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***Sula* (1973)**

- Morrison's second novel *Sula* beautifully interprets female relationships – of mother and daughter (Eva and Hannah Peace), and of friends (Sula Peace and Nel Wright).
- In a circular structure and with an evocative language, Morrison presents the texture of these women's lives; and describes how they face societal challenges, adopting different and separate gender-characteristics.
 - The major predicament that Morrison considers in this novel is two-fold – the effect of racism upon black identity formation and the effect of racism and sexism upon the identity formation of the black female.
- Set in a small Ohio town during 1919-1965, it chronicles the fortunes of women in two matriarchal households within the black community whose lives represent the range of choices possible for black women in white America.



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In the previous module we have looked at how Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eyes* looks at the phenomena of gender blurring. We now begin our discussion of *Sula* as an illustration of this concept. *Sula* is Morrison's second novel which was published in 1973. It primarily interprets female relationships of mother and daughter in the instance of Eva and Hannah Peace and also of two women friends by illustrating the relationship between Sula and Nel.

The novel has a circular structure and using evocative language, Morrison has presented the texture of these women's lives and experiences and describes the manner in which they have faced societal challenges, adopting different and separate gender characteristics in order to eke out their independent lives.

The novel is set in a small Ohio town during 1919 to 1965. During these decades of change it chronicles the fortunes of women in two matriarchal households within the black community whose lives represent the range of choices which were possible for black women in contemporary America.

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- Morrison proposes that the pressures and false values forced upon blacks by white society hamper the stability of the black family in general and women in particular.
- She depicts in the novel how the institution of marriage, for instance, is regarded by male and female alike under the influence of white culture.
 - Regardless of social or economic standing, all the residents of the Bottom share the common belief that a woman alone is an incomplete and that she can find respectability and fulfillment only in the role of some man's mate.
- At the book's heart is the tale of the friendship between Nel Wright and Sula Peace. Beginning when they are adolescent girls and continuing as they mature, the friendship changes in nature but remains the deepest attachment and most profound influence on both of their lives.



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One of the primary suggestions of Morrison in this novel is that, the pressures and the false values which have been forced upon black people by the dominant white society, hamper the stability of black family in general and of women in particular. She also depicts how the institution of marriage for instance is regarded by male and female alike under the influence of white culture.

Regardless of their social or economic standing, regardless of their own backgrounds of a different culture, all the residents of the Bottom that is the locality which is depicted in the novel, share the common belief that a woman is incomplete and is able to find respectability and fulfillment only when she becomes the mate of another man particularly within the institution of marriage.

The trope of friendship which is a fundamental one in this novel between Nel Wright and Sula Peace begins when they are adolescent girls and continues as they mature. Their friendship also changes in nature, but remains the deepest attachment and a most profound influence on their lives.

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- Although the two girls share dreams of adventure and unfolding selfhood, their approaches to the task of maturation are diametrically opposed.
 - After high school, Nel chooses to marry and settles into the conventional role of wife and mother. Sula follows a wildly divergent path and lives a life of fierce independence and total disregard for social conventions.
- On Nel's wedding day, Sula, with an amused smile, leaves town, returning ten years later. Her quest for knowledge and experience is described only in retrospect. Her years at college, her travels and romantic liaisons are mentioned parenthetically; she remembers most as boring. She finds people following the same dreary routines elsewhere, and returns to the Bottom and to Nel.
 - She embodies freedom, adventure, curiosity and passion. her life is like an open rainbow for experimental freedom that often touches the edges of danger. Faced with a racist world and a sexist community, she defends herself by creating a life, however bizarre, that is rich and experimental.



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In terms of unfolding selfhood, these two girls had commonly shared dreams, but they approach this task of maturation indifferently.


After high school, Nel has decided to marry and settle down in a conventional role of a wife and mother whereas, Sula has followed a wildly different path. Immediately after Nel's wedding, Sula leaves town and she returns after a gap of 10 years. Her quest for knowledge and experience, she must have experienced during these 10 years is described only in retrospect.

Her experiences at college, her travels as well as her romantic liaison are mentioned in parenthesis and she remembers them mostly as boring and unalluring. She finds people

following the same dreary routines everywhere and therefore, she returns to Bottom and we can also say that she returns to Nel, who is the central focus and attachment in her life. Sula has embodied freedom, adventure, curiosity and passion unlike her friend Nel.

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- While her negation of conventional bonds renders her an outcast in the eyes of her community, Sula perceives herself as free, and therefore able, as none of the other women are, to be honest and to experience life and self fully.
 - Her journey is the enactment of that freedom. She refuses to settle for a woman's traditional lot of marriage, child raising, labor, and pain.
- The women of the Bottom hate Sula because she is a living criticism of their own dreadful lives of resignation.
- By rejecting Sula people in her community strangely unite together against her. She unifies her community by objectifying its danger.
- Society's conviction that Sula is evil changes them in unaccountable and mysterious manner. They begin to cherish their relationships, repair their homes and in general, band together against the evil in their midst.
- Contrary to expectation, bad luck follows her death.



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Sula perceives herself as free and she thinks that she alone is capable to be honest towards her life, to experience it fully, to experiment with her own self also independently. In comparison to other women, she finds that her journey is an enactment of this freedom.

However, her negation of these conventional bonds of matrimony has rendered her an outcast in the eyes of her community. The women of the Bottom hate her because for them she is a living criticism of their lives which are full of resignation. Interestingly, by rejecting Sula people in her community unite together in their criticism of her.

Society's conviction that Sula is an evil, changes them in a mysterious manner. They begin to cherish their relationships, take care of each other, repair their homes in general, band together against the evil in their midst, and have a more fulfilling life in general. Contrary to expectation, when Sula dies bad luck follows.

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- However, the wisdom she has attained is that of a cynic's. While the heroic journey and sexual conquests in patriarchal narratives are typically a source of power, this is not the case for Sula. She is free but directionless.
 - For a male hero, sexuality and marriage are often depicted as "ultimate adventures", representing an increase of power and attainment; Sula's sexuality breeds only boredom and despair.
 - Described as an artist without a medium (p. 105), dangerous because undirected, lacking discipline or aim, Sula is free but empty.
- She never makes the existentialist's commitment, the surrender of freedom through attachment to an idea or person that de Beauvoir and others see as the truest hallmark of human freedom. Her one human relationship of significance, the friendship with Nel, provides her with a center, a place she can call home.
- Nel reproaches her: "You can't do it all. You a woman and a coloured woman at that. You can't act like a man" (142).



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However, the wisdom which Sula has attained is that of a cynic. Even though Toni Morrison has depicted her as an independent character, somehow the independence is not at par with the independence of a male protagonist who is presented in patriarchal narratives and herein we can say that there remains a lacuna in the characterization of Toni Morrison. While the heroic journey and sexual outcasts in patriarchal narratives are typically a source of power for men, this somehow is not the case for Sula.


We can say that she is free, but directionless. For a male hero sexuality, sexual conquest and marriage are often depicted as ultimate adventures, representing an increase in his power and attainments whereas, Sula's sexuality breeds only boredom and described. She has also been depicted as an artist without a medium, dangerous because undirected, lacking discipline or aim.

We can also say that she is free, but empty. She also never makes the existentialist commitment, the surrender of freedom through attachment to an idea or a person that critics like Simone de Beauvoir and others see as the truest hallmark of human freedom. Her one human relationship of significance, is her friendship with Nel, which provides her with a center, a place she can call home.

Nel has reproached her in the beginning and I quote from the text, "You cannot do it all. You a woman and coloured woman at that. You cannot act like a man" unquote.

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- Still, Sula keeps herself outside the sex, race, and class definitions of the society. She does not have any material ambitions.
- When Eva asks her about the possibility of marriage and having children, Sula retorts: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92).
- Sula "extracts choice from choicelessness." (34). She rebels against the role she is assigned to take within the black community. As she confesses to Nel: "I got my mind. And what goes on in it" (43). Her determination to achieve self-fulfillment allows her "to live in the world" (43), but not be caught up in the spiderweb-like life of the Bottom.




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Still, we find that by keeping herself outside the sex, race and class definitions of the society, Sula does not aim to have any material ambitions. When Eva asks her about the possibility of marriage and having children, Sula suggests that she does not want to make somebody else, she wants to make herself. She has "extracted choices from choicelessness" as Morrison has remarked in her text. She rebels against the role, she is assigned to take within the black community. She has confessed to Nel that she has got her mind and what goes on in it.

Her determination to achieve self-fulfillment has allowed her to live in the world, but not to be caught in the spider web like life of women in Bottom.

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- She inherits her courage and rebellious nature from her grandmother, Eva.
- An influential character, she survives alone when she is deserted by her husband. A complex hard working individual, she decides to survive to save her children from starvation and death. Eva's matriarchal personality makes people respect her.
- Eva's love for her family gives her courage to sacrifice everything for them. When Eva sees that her son, Plum, sinks into addiction and is unable to save him from sinking further she takes a dramatic decision to relieve him from his addiction by killing him.
- She burns him in his sleep, explaining that she could not tolerate seeing her son behaving like an infant again due to drug addiction,
"I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he couldn't and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man" (72).
- Out of her maternal love, she saves him from his misery, thinking that his death is better than his addiction.



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The concept of gender blurring is also evident in the portrayal of Eva, who is the grandmother of Sula. We can also say that Sula has inherited her courage and rebellious nature from her grandmother Eva. Eva is an influential character who is respected by people in general for having a patriarchal personality.


After she has been deserted by her husband, she has decided to survive alone despite the hardships because she wanted to save her children from starvation and sure death. Her love for her family has given her courage to sacrifice everything for her children. When she sees that her son sinks into addiction and she is not able to save him from sinking further. She takes a dramatic decision to relieve him from his addiction by killing him.

She burns him in his sleep, explaining that she could not tolerate seeing her son behaving like an infant again due to drug addiction. And I quote from the text, "I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man, but he could not and I had to keep him out. So, I just thought of a way he could die like a man, not all is scrunched up inside my home, but like a man" unquote.

Out of her maternal love, she saves him from his misery thinking that his death is better than his addiction. Killing of one's own child by mothers is a thematic trope which has repeatedly been used by Toni Morrison in her novel. At this point I would only comment that it is an illustration of gender blurring. Later on, when I shall be concluding my discussion on Toni Morrison, I would take up this motif in detail again.

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- Nel is another major character in the novel. Early in her life, she had to watch her mother's humiliation by a train's white, racist conductor. She determines never to lose her own individuality, to gather power and joy, and to possess "me-ness".
- To a certain extent, Nel accomplishes this goal through her friendship with Sula Peace, a friendship which her mother does not approve of. Still, in contrast to Sula, Nel comes across as a traditional and conventional lady who lives with limited self-expression of gender-identified roles.
 - After marriage she solidifies into her wifely role, becoming one of the women who had "folded themselves into starched coffins" (122).
 - Her "me-ness," the qualities she vowed to hold onto forever, begins to erode when she marries Jude. In marrying Jude, she is chosen; she does not do the choosing.
 - Acquiescing to his marriage proposal, she hopes that Jude's dreams will become hers. In reality, though, she gives up her own dreams by adopting and authenticating her mother's — and the black community's — traditional ideals about happiness: marriage, motherhood, and religiously sanctimonious piety.



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Another major character in the novel is Nel, earlier in her life she had to watch her mother's humiliation by a white, racist train conductor. After having witnessed this episode, she had determined never to lose her own individuality, to gather power and joy and to possess what she terms as her "me-ness".

To a certain extent, she is able to accomplish this goal through her friendship with Sula, a friendship which her mother does not approve of it. Still in contrast to Sula, Nel comes across as a traditional and conventional lady who lives with limited self-expression of gender identified roles.

If we quote from the text, we find that Morrison has used strong terms to depict it. After marriage she solidifies into her wifely role, becoming one of the women who had quote, "folded themselves into starched coffins" unquote. Her "me-ness", the qualities she had vowed to hold on forever, begin to erode when she marries Jude.


In marrying Jude, she is chosen, she does not do the choosing and we find that the lack of agency is transparent in the description of the details of her marriage. She hopes that by agreeing to the marriage proposal, she hopes that the dreams and hopes of her husband would also become hers.

However, we find that ultimately, she ends up giving up her own dreams, we can also say that she has adopted and also authenticated the dreams of her mothers and in a way

of the black community for women also. Traditional ideals of happiness through marriage, motherhood and religiously sanctimonious piety are also displayed in her character depiction by Toni Morrison.

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- Friendship of Sula and Nel is an example of bonding which has always been there among Black women as a skill for barest survival. It encourages them to find courage to create themselves. Sula is passionate and sexual, while Nel is 'good', conventional and controlled.
- Black women are devalued in their societies. But Morrison portrays them as being able to survive without the help of men by assuming masculine roles.
- Another example of gender blurring can be seen in the portrayal of Shadrack – a World War I combat soldier in one of the all-black units. He had volunteered to do combat in the war, but he returns to the Bottom a mental cripple.
- He does not return to the US as a hero. He does not participate in the famous parade up New York City's Fifth Avenue, celebrating the return of the "Fighting 369th."
- So terrified of swift, unanticipated death that he creates a day dedicated to the monster he fears most: sudden, unexpected death, the death that comes without warning. Unable to mingle and lonely, he is unable to face the society.



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The friendship which has been depicted in the novel between Sula and Nel is also an example of bonding which has always existed amongst black women. It also provides them skills for bare survival in a difficult world. Sula is passionate and sexual, while Nel is good, conventional and controlled. Still, they are two independent human beings.


Black women have been devalued in their societies, but Morrison has portrayed them as being able to survive without the help of men by assuming masculine roles. It is particularly evident in the character portrayal of Sula and her grandmother. Another example of gender blurring is seen in the portrayal of Shadrack, a World War I combat soldier in one of the all-black units.

He had volunteered to do combat in the war, but he returns to the Bottom as a mental cripple. His masculinity has been systematically deconstructed by his own experiences and also by his inability to challenge them. He does not return to the US as a war hero, he also refuses to participate in the famous New York parade celebrating the return of the "Fighting 369th."

He is terrified of a swift, unanticipated death that he decides to create a day, and dedicate it to the monsters he fears most and that is the sudden unexpected death that comes without warning. He is unable to mingle and therefore, lonely and he is unable to face the society, his portrayal can be contrasted with the character sketch of Sula and her grandmother.

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- Shadrack believes that people and things need boundaries to provide order in an otherwise disordered world. After he is released from the boundaries of the military hospital, he begins to experience panic — pain, fear, and the hysteria of helplessness.
- Morrison's characters behave differently from what may be expected of them within conventional gender norms.
- With very few exceptions, Morrison's female characters are firmly independent and subvert the traditionally assigned roles of dutiful wife, mother, and daughter. Of this category, Sula and Eva are the most prominent.
- Nel, who is raised by her mother to accept without question the passive roles of wife, mother, and daughter, comes to recognize the power of womanhood by the novel's end, although it remains unclear just what she will do with this newfound knowledge.



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Shadrack believes that people and things need boundaries to provide order in an otherwise disorderly world.

After he is released from the boundaries of the military hospital, he begins to experience panic, pain, fear and the hysteria of helplessness and decides to cut himself off from the society. We can see by this discussion that Morrison's characters behave differently from what may be expected of them within conventional gender norms. With very few exceptions, Morrison's female characters are firmly independent and subvert the traditionally assigned roles of dutiful wife, mother and daughter.


Of this category Sula and Eva are the most prominent. Nel who like her mother has accepted the passive role of wife, mother and daughter without questioning them also comes to recognize the power of womanhood by the time the novel ends. Although it does not become clear to the reader just what she will decide to do with this newfound knowledge.

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Beloved (1987)



- *Beloved* is a successful challenge of Morrison to remember the sixty million Africans who gave away their lives in the transatlantic slave trade journey.
- The fifth marvellous work of fiction, was a triumph for which Morrison received the “Pulitzer Prize” in 1988.



<https://iithub.com/75-covers-of-toni-morrison-beloved-from-around-the-world/>

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Another novel which is often quoted in the context of gender blurring is Morrison’s 1987 novel *Beloved*. It is a successful challenge by her to remember the sixty million Africans who gave away their lives in the transatlantic slave trade journey. It is a fifth work of fiction by her and for it, Morrison had received the 1988 Pulitzer Prize.

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Thomas S. Noble's 1867 painting 'The Modern Medea' was based on Garner's story.

- Inspired by a true event of a fugitive black slave Margaret Garner, who killed her daughter when she was about to be caught under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 by her white master.
- Morrison also wrote the libretto for the opera 'Margaret Garner' (2005), composed by Richard Danielpour.

- Other fiction writing inspired by Garner's story include, John Jolliffe's *Belle Scott* (1856), N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* (2015) and A. K. Simpson's *A Coven's Lament* (2017).
- Also a poem by Frances Harper "Slave Mother : A Tale of Ohio" (1859).



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This novel has been inspired by a true event of a fugitive black slave with the name of Margaret Garner. Margaret Garner had killed her daughter when she was about to be caught under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 by her white master.

This incidence has inspired several works of art. On the left-hand side of this slide, we can look at an 1867 painting by Thomas Noble which is also based on Garner's story. Some other fictional works have also been inspired by Garner's story for example, *Belle Scott* by John Jolliffe in 1856, *The Fifth Season* by Jemisin in 2015 and *A Coven's Lament* by Simpson in 2017.

In 1859, a poem was also composed by Frances Harper with the title "Slave Mother: A Tale of Ohio". Toni Morrison had also written the libretto for the opera *Margaret Garner* in 2005 which was composed by Richard Danielpour.

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- *Beloved* is divided into three sections. Each section begins with a description of the house in which the main characters live. Through a series of flashbacks and dialogues in the present, readers learn about major events in the lives of people, who have all been ruined by slavery.
- Part I of the novel begins with a short and pithy statement, "124 was spiteful". The ghost of a dead baby is haunting this house at 124 Bluestone Road in the outskirts of Cincinnati.
- Sethe, a former slave, and her daughter Denver live with the ghost, who has become part of their lives.
- Baby Suggs,, Denver's grandmother and Sethe's mother-in-law, has died.
- Paul D, a former slave who used to work at Sweet Home plantation with Sethe, arrives at 124, drives out the ghost, and moves in.



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The novel *Beloved* is divided into three sections, each section begins with a description of the house in which the main characters live. Through a series of flashbacks and dialogues in the present, readers gradually learn about major events in the lives of people who have all been ruined by slavery.

Part 1 of the novel begins with a short and pithy statement, "124 was spiteful". The ghost of a dead baby is haunting this house at 124 Bluestone Road in the outskirts of Cincinnati. Sethe, is a former slave, who lives in this house with her daughter Denver and also the ghost who has now become a part of their lives. Denver's grandmother and Sethe's mother-in-law Baby Suggs had died.

Paul D, who was a former slave who used to work at the same plantation where Sethe used to be, also arrives at this house drives out the ghost and moves in.

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- Just as they all are getting used to the new family arrangement, a strange woman arrives at 124. She doesn't know where she is from, but she tells them her name is Beloved.
- Sethe and Denver are drawn to Beloved, feeding her and caring for her as if she were an infant. Sethe begins to answer Beloved's strange questions, which contain details of the past that only Sethe knew.
- Denver comes to believe that Beloved is the ghost of her dead sister. Paul D is irritated with Beloved's presence and leaves.
- Through a flashback, the reader learns how their former master had arrived at 124 to capture Sethe and her children to take them back to Sweet Home in Kentucky. Rather than face that despicable life again, Sethe had tried to kill her children and herself.



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Just as all of them are getting used to the new family arrangement, a strange woman arrives at this place. She does not know where she is from, but she tells them that her name is Beloved. Sethe and Denver are immediately drawn to this strange woman. They feed her and care for her as if she were an infant.

Sethe begins to answer certain strange questions which are asked by Beloved, questions which contain details of the past that only Sethe knew about. Denver therefore, comes to believe that Beloved is the ghost of her dead sister.

Paul D feels irritated with his presence and leaves the house. Through a flashback, in this section, the reader learns how the former slave master had arrived at 124 to capture Sethe and her children to take them back to sweet home the plantation in Kentucky. Rather than face the despicable life again, Sethe had tried to kill her children and herself.

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- Part 2 begins with “124 is loud”. Sethe is content with her life inside 124 with Denver and Beloved. She no longer minds talking about her horrific past.
- Beloved tells Sethe that she has come from the other side, and Sethe understands that the strange girl is her dead baby who has come back to her. She tries to explain to Beloved that she had killed her as an act of love.
- Part 3, the last part of the novel, states that “124 was quiet”. Sethe has stopped working at the restaurant, and everyone in the house is starving. They have squandered their meagre savings on ribbons and colourful clothes that delight Beloved.
- Denver has been shunned, and Sethe now spends all her time with Beloved.



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Part 2 begins with the statement that “124 is loud”. Sethe is content with her life inside 124 with Denver and Beloved. She no longer minds talking about her horrific past. Beloved tells Sethe that she has come from the other side, Sethe interprets it in the manner that this strange girl is a dead baby who has come back to her.

She tries to explain to Beloved repeatedly that she had killed her not out of malice or ill will, but as an act of love. Part 3, which is the last part of the novel states that 124 was quiet. Sethe has stopped working at the restaurant and everyone in the house is starving, as whatever meagre savings they had; they had squandered on colorful clothes and decorations that delight Beloved.

Denver has been shunned and Sethe now spends all her time with Beloved.

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- Denver's boss, Mr. Bodwin, also approaches the house to pick up Denver for work. Sethe sees him and mistakes him for her former master.
- She attacks him with an ice pick but is stopped by Denver and other women, whereupon Beloved vanishes, never to return.
- Sethe loses her mind and lies down to die, as Baby Suggs had. Denver has a good job and is working toward attending college.
- Paul D returns to Sethe to tell her that he wants a future with her, getting her back up on her feet to walk again. The members of 124, along with the community, have been released from the tragedy of Beloved so that they can move forward into a better life.




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It is at this juncture that mister Bodwin who is Denver's boss, approaches the house to pick up Denver for work. Sethe sees him and mistakes him to be the former master who has come back again to take her and Beloved back to the plantation.

She attacks him with an ice pick, but is stopped by Denver and other women. At this moment, Beloved vanishes never to return. Sethe loses her mind and lies down to die as her mother-in-law Baby Suggs had. Denver has a good job now and is working hard towards attending college. Paul D at this moment returns to Sethe to tell her that he wants a future with her getting her back up on her feet to walk again.

The members of this house along with their community now have been released from the tragedy and trauma of Beloved and they are now able to move forward towards a better life. This novel is often quoted as an example of gender blurring.

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RARE Toni Morrison interview on "Beloved" (1987)

- Morrison explains the idea behind writing the novel *Beloved* and expresses her sympathies towards the mother who had to sacrifice her children in order to save them from slavery.

Source- Manufacturing Intellect. <https://youtu.be/2ixN3oTSD34>


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Before going further to a detailed illustration of examples of gender blurring, I would introduce an interview of Toni Morrison in which she explains the idea behind writing the novel *Beloved* and expresses her sympathies towards the mother who had to sacrifice her children in order to save them from slavery.

Toni Morrison what inspired this theme.

I read an article in 19th century newspaper about a woman whose name was Margaret Garner who had indeed killed or tried her children, she was a fugitive slave.

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RARE Toni Morrison interview on "Beloved" (1987)

- Morrison explains the idea behind writing the novel *Beloved* and expresses her sympathies towards the mother who had to sacrifice her children in order to save them from slavery.

Source- Manufacturing Intellect. <https://youtu.be/2ixN3oTSD34>

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And rather than have them go back, she decided to take them all into a place of oblivion and it was an article that stayed with me for a long long time and seemed to have in it an extraordinary idea, that was worthy of a novel which was this compulsion to nurture this ferocity that a woman has to be responsible for her children and at the same time the kind of tensions that exist in trying to be a separate complete individual.

You have said that she has no she had no right to do it, but I would have done the same thing I mean.

It was the right thing to do, but she had no right to do it. I think I felt the claims, you see those women were not parents they could they were the people insisted that they have children, but they could not be mothers because they had nothing to say about the future of those children, where they went they could make no decisions they frequently could not even name them.

So, that they were denied humanity in a number of ways, but they were denied that role which is early I mean has nothing to do with history, it is what women do and so, she claimed something that she had no right to claim which was the property her children and claimed it. So, finally, that she decided that she could not only dictate their lives, but end them and when one knows what the life, what their future would be, her decision is not that difficult to understand.

You talked about previous accounts of slavery being simplistic and not probing the interior being of the characters is this how difficult was it for you to probe the interior being of characters or be a black still from long long time ago.

Exactly well my disappointment in some of the accounts was based on the fact that this is so, large you see and then the big problem is that slavery is so, intricate, so immense and so long and so, unprecedented that you can let slavery be the story the plot and we know what that story is and it is predictable and then you do the worst thing which is you the center of it becomes the institution and not the people. So, if you focus on the characters and their interior life it is like putting the authority back into the hands of the slave rather than the slaveholder.

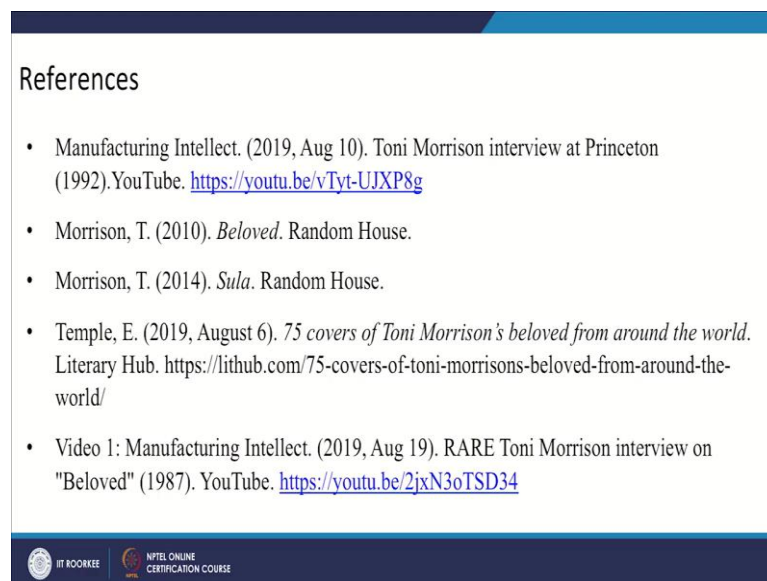
What is the rationale for the ghost?

First of all, I really wanted her past, her memories, her haunting memories not to be abstract, I wanted her to actually sit down at the table with the thing she is been trying to avoid and explain away which is this past this terrible thing that happened to confront it.

As a way of saying that is what the past is it is a living thing, there is this relationship between ourselves and our personal history and our Racial history and our National history, that sometimes gets made you know sort of distant, but if you make it into a person, then its inescapable to confrontation, the other was that it was part of the milieu of black people to think in terms of a very intimate relationship between the living and the dead they did not have that you know sort of modern dismissed they did not dismissed those things.

We would continue our discussion of *Beloved* in the next module.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:08)



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Thank you.