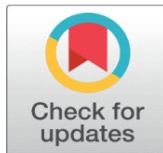
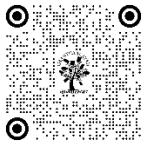


# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FEMALE CHARACTERS RUTH AND ESTHER IN BIBLE'S OLD TESTAMENT AND SETHE AND DENVER IN TONY MORRISON'S BELOVED

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## ABSTRACT

This work presents a comparative analysis of 'Beloved' of the poem by the same name by Toni Morrison and the main female characters of the Old Testament found in the Holy Bible. Analyzing the themes, character development, and social ramifications in both-Beloved and the Old Testament stories helps the article to study the intersections and divergences in the representation of women, notably in the framework of suffering, resilience, and atonement.

One cannot easily ignore the widespread influence of the Bible. Notable writers such as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Toni Morrison either center their whole works around the Bible or make clear use of Biblical references. Beloved by Toni Morrison has several references, mostly to the Bible. Her epigraph, a passage from the book of Romans, helps her to capture the whole of her story. The comparative study would highlight the comparison of pain, agony and fate shared by the women in Old Testament of Bible and that of Beloved.

**Keywords:** Allusion, Testament, Divergent, Resilient, Atonement

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Treatment of women in theological texts offers significant insights on the social, historical, and cultural context of their eras. Sethe, the female heroine of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a landmark work of modern American literature, examines the awful legacy of slavery through her experiences. Comparably, the Old Testament has many female figures whose stories reflect the complexity of human life, faith, and atonement. Emphasizing themes of suffering, perseverance, and atonement, this research evaluates Morrison's *Beloved* against the main female characters of the Old Testament. Methodology Analyzing key passages from *Beloved* and some Old Testament tales, the study applies a comparative literary analysis approach. Examined depending on their roles, experiences, and thematic relevance are key female characters. It supports the research with scholarly books, critical essays, and secondary materials including novels.

### Leading women characters from the Old Testament: Eve

Eve, one of the first women mentioned in the Bible, is fundamental in the story of creation and the Fall in Genesis. Different people have interpreted her activities and their outcomes over history. She is occasionally depicted as the

mother of all living, therefore indicating the ability for both fallibility and atonement even as a figure of inquiry and rebellion.

o Eve's story catches themes of suffering via the agony of childbirth and the challenges of life outside Eden. Her perseverance is shown in her part as a human progenitor who keeps on despite the outcomes of her actions. God's curse on the snake foreshadows the promise of redemption and the eventual defeat of evil, therefore indicating a future restoration notwithstanding the Fall.

Ruth: As well as to the God of Israel, Ruth, a Moabite widow, displays Naomi, her mother-in-law, unflinching loyalty and allegiance. Her story ends with her marriage to Boaz and her heritage in line of King David; it is one of love, loyalty, atonement.

Suffering and Resilience: Ruth experiences much loss and hardship all her life, yet she is proactive in making sure Naomi and herself have a future. Her faith and will lead inevitably to atonement and integration into the Israelite culture. Ruth's story stresses through faith, persistence, and loyalty redemption's themes. Her transforming from a foreign widow to an ancestor of the Messiah emphasizes God's comprehensive redemptive plan.

Esther. One of Esther, a Jewish woman rising to be queen of Persia, saves her people from annihilation in significant part. Her boldness and strategic awareness define the narrative most of the time. Her character shows the capacity of individual initiative and bravery against very high risk.

Esther negotiates the intricacies of royal politics and sacrifices her own life to advocate for her people, therefore addressing the imminent extinction of her people. Her wisdom and tenacity enable her to properly thwart Haman's ambitions and guard the Jewish people. Esther's story is one of community atonement, in which her own strength saves an entire nation from catastrophe. It emphasises the power one individual might possess in reaching atonement and justice

Beloved:

*Beloved*, following the American Civil War, is a book looking at the horrible legacy of slavery. The story revolves on Sethe, a slave who has escaped and her struggle to overcome past suffering. The work defines itself with rich symbolism, intelligent characters, and analysis of concerns including motherhood, memory, and identity.

*Beloved* looks at the psychological, mental, and physical effects of slavery—a damage still felt by former slaves even in freedom. The most severe of slavery's impacts on former slaves' sense of self are those ones; the book provides multiple cases of self-alienation. For instance, Paul D finds it impossible to tell sometimes if the screaming he hears is his own or someone else's since he is so detached from himself. Slaves were subhuman; they were sold as commodities with known worth. These passages from *Beloved* most capture what Toni Morrison explores in the book:

"White folks thought that under any dark skin, whatever the behaviour was a jungle. Red gums waiting for their sweet white blood, sleeping snakes, fast unnavigable streams, swinging shrieking baboons. They were in a sense correct. < But the black people from the bush arrived here with nothing. It was the white folks from the bush placed in them. And it developed. It grew till it crept into the whites who had created it. (*Beloved* 199)

References to Christianity

Drawn from Romans 9:25, *Beloved*'s epigraph catches the presence of Christian ideas that would shape the book. The "four horsemen" that visit Sethe draw on the narrative of the Apocalypse found in the book of Revelation. *Beloved* comes back into Sethe's domain submerged in a sort of baptismal water. Denver consumes her mother's breast milk as well as her sister's blood as a newborn; this would be considered as a Communion act binding Denver and *Beloved* together and underlining the baby's sacrifice in death. Sethe's conduct so repugnant, the schoolteacher leaves without bringing her other children with him, therefore allowing them to live free. Like Christ, the martyr death of the newborn atones. The book's more exhaustive discussions of sin, sacrifice, atonement, forgiveness, love, and resurrection echo similar resounding with Biblical references.

Sethe: Character Analysis

Sethe runs from slavery to save her children, displaying as a fiercely powerful and persistent woman. Her decision to kill her daughter *Beloved* in order to release her from slavery sets up a key and disputed element of the narrative. o Her performance catches the immense love and sacrifice of a mother as well as the guilt and trauma scars. Sethe's experiences reflect the immense suffering enslaved women endure as well as the resiliency required for survival and protection of her family. o Her road is marked by ongoing struggle against the ghosts of her past and the societal limitations constantly haunting her.

Denver: Denver spends much of her life alone, which affects her development and loneliness. Her mother's horrible background and the ghost of her sibling loom big over her developing. Her alone helps her to grow into a modest, shy, very sensitive girl. o Independence and Development: Denver's personality shifts dramatically across the book. Her decision to leave 124 looking for community help shows her growth from a dependent child to a young lady with agency. This reaching out action releases her from the ties of her family's past. Denver seeks for a feeling of belonging and connection. She has long been denied sisterly affection and company, hence her attachment to Beloved arises from a need. Denver's attempts to keep Sethe free from Beloved's bad effects amply demonstrate her protective instincts. Her actions reveal a maturity considerably beyond her years and a deep sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of her family. Beloved is Sethe's guilt and hidden trauma taken physical shape. Her rising from the dead underlines the unavoidable nature of the past and its ongoing impact on the present.

Beloved's often aggressive and demanding conduct exposes a strong need for approval and attention. She stands for the unresolved suffering and suffering those who were slaves went through, either forgotten or neglected. Beloved's character is hiding depth and doubt. She is a daughter and a stranger, a ghost as also a real person. This paradox enhances the way the book investigates the psychological and spiritual aspects.

Destructive Influence: Beloved's growing needs and manipulations reveal a more sinister side even if her presence first offers some kind of healing and atonement. She becomes a parasite agent breaking Sethe's will to survive and separating the family even further. One comfort for the black population comes from spiritual leader and healer Baby Suggs. Her visits at the Clearing provide a platform for community healing and release of emotions suppressed under slavery. o Embodiment of Hope: Her talks on self-love and resilience help people still traumatized by slavery hope and a feeling of community. Her advice to value one's body and embrace humanity is a strong counter-narrative to the depravity of slavery. 2. Despondency and Withdrawal: Sethe's infanticide leaves Baby Suggs in dreadful circumstances that cause severe depression. She turns away from her role as a spiritual leader into a life of quiet resignation. Baby Suggs captures the desire for peace and meaning among the older generation in a society corrupted by the atrocities of slavery. Her journey from hope to hopelessness captures the more general historical pain African Americans experience.

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## Comparative Evaluation

### Loyalty and Sacrifice as Themes Sethe and Ruth

Ruth is the model of loyalty; she famously said to Naomi, "Where you go, I will go" (Ruth 1:16.). Her loyalty drives her to abandon her country and embrace Naomi's God, making spiritual and family sacrifices. Like Ruth, Sethe exhibits great loyalty—especially towards her children. Her ultimate act of loyalty—killing her daughter to spare her from slavery—represents a great, terrible sacrifice formed of love and the degrading conditions of slavery. Though Sethe's decisions are compounded by trauma and historical oppression, both women give family top priority above personal well-being.

Denver, Esther, Esther embodies bravery and selflessness as she puts her life in danger to save her people. Her sacrifice is political, guaranteeing the existence of her community. Denver grows into a modest hero who steps outside her mother's shadow to get help for their family. Her development stands for hope and a yearning for former freedom. Both characters show the ability of personal action for group survival.

### 2. Connections with Maternal Figures

Denver's Ruth Ruth acts as a companion and surrogate carer for Naomi in her later years. Respect and mutual need define her connection with Naomi. Denver is likewise connected to Sethe; her life has been moulded by her experience. Denver first depends but develops into a guardian looking for a future free from Sethe's suffering. Both show intergenerational caring, but they negotiate distinct kinds of mother trauma—Sethe's grief over her child's death differs from Naomi's loss of sons.

Ruth and Esther Though Esther's cousin Mordecai guides her, she does not have a clear maternal figure in the story. Her story revolves mostly on her freedom. The emotional core of the story is Sethe, the mother. Her choices expose the psychological wounds of servitude while also emanating from mother love. Sethe's motherhood drives Esther to actions that haunt her, therefore stressing diverse cultural and historical settings of female autonomy, even if Esther's deeds position her as a saviour.

3. Agency and atonement Ruth & Esther In communities run by men, both biblical women exercise agency. Ruth's familial line is ensured by her decision to remain with Naomi and her final marriage to Boaz. By bravery and diplomacy, Esther

saves her people from total extinction. Their experiences highlight how transforming faith and personal decisions can be.

Denver and Sethe Sethe's agency is complicated. Her choice to murder her daughter is a tragedy of moral uncertainty as much as a protest of slavery. With Denver helping her face her history, redemption results. Denver stands for optimism and the opportunity of healing generational trauma in discovering her own voice and road.

4. Symbolism and Cultural Context Ruth and Esther While Esther stands for bravery, activism, and divine intervention Ruth's narrative reflects faith, loyalty, and family love. Deeply ingrained in Jewish history and culture, both tales center Ruth on the dynasty of King David and Esther honoured on Purim.

### **Denver and Sethe**

Denver represents resiliency and future possibilities; Sethe stands for the lasting marks of enslavement. Deeply involved with the legacy of slavery and the fight for identity, community, and healing, Morrison's *Beloved* is a product of African American literature

### **5. Religion and Spirituality**

Biblical Characters The faith of Ruth and Esther guides their behaviour towards God. Ruth embraces Naomi's God, fasts and prays, then approaches King Xerxes. Central to their stories is their spiritual connection.

### **Sethe and Denver**

*Beloved* doesn't pay attention to conventional religion; yet, Sethe's conduct of ritualized love and remembering show spiritual presence in the haunting of 124. Morrison presents their challenges within a spiritual relationship with history and identity.,

## **CONCLUSION**

Though they differ greatly in cultural, historical, and spiritual settings, the stories of Ruth and Esther and Sethe and Denver probe themes of loyalty, sacrifice, mother connections, and redemption. Sethe and Denver struggle with the psychological and historical trauma of slavery, therefore underlining the junction of love, suffering, and survival even if Ruth and Esther's stories are anchored in faith and tradition. But both groups of women show the transforming potential of female agency as well as the strong links of family. Comparative Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the leading female characters of the old testament of Holy Bible reveals important thematic links and cultural resonances. Sethe and Biblical heroines such Eve, Ruth, and Esther highlight themes of suffering, resiliency, and atonement by presenting strong tales of personal and group development. These stories still inspire and challenge modern readers, thus stressing the continuous relevance of classic issues in modern writing.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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