

124 Character Analysis

In *Beloved*, 124 Bluestone Road is not only a setting but it takes place as character in the novel as well. 124 is seen as a character throughout the novel because it's where the beginning of Beloved's haunting came into play. 124 also becomes the character Beloved due the various haunting that readers see. At first, the house at 124 Bluestone Road was nothing significant besides the home of Sethe and Denver, but it soon had a new meaning once the spirit of Beloved began to haunt the house. Sethe's home became something different when she was forced to kill her unborn baby to 'free' her from slavery.

From the very beginning, Morrison allows the reader realizes that 124 Bluestone Road plays a major part in the story by opening the chapter with: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter were its only victims." By telling the reader that Sethe and Denver were the only victims left, it makes the readers wonder what kind of victims they were supposed to be. They were the victims of Beloved, the daughter that was killed by Sethe so she wouldn't have to go through suffering. 124 also relates to the daughter named Beloved because it's the third child that was born, yet, was also murdered, hence the missing '3' from the address. Beloved is also seen through the text at the very beginning because the 'spiteful' 'baby venom' refers to her. "In her account of the haunting of 124, Morrison employs most of the manifestations traditional to stories of haunted houses: noises, displaced objects, smells, lights, a brooding atmosphere, and the sensitivity of an animal to the presence of the ghost ("Haunting, "Encyclopedia;" "Haunted Houses," Man, Myth, and Magic)." (Schmudde 409) By relating 124 to a haunted house, we are able to understand why Beloved is left behind haunting Sethe and the others. Beloved represents the restless spirit that has been left behind after being murder by Sethe and her uneasiness for revenge.

Throughout *Beloved*, Beloved is portrayed as a character through 124 by haunting the different people living in the house. "[According to the] Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology, ["Haunting" is a] "tradition established two main factors in haunting: an old house or other locale and restlessness of a spirit. The first represents an unbroken link with the past, the second is believed to be caused by remorse over an evil life or by the shock of violent death' (588). In Morrison's novel, the restless spirit of Beloved so dominates the narrative that it is easy to overlook the importance of the first factor in a haunting: an old house representing "an unbroken link with the past." (Schmudde 409) Readers tend to overlook the fact that 124 isn't just a house being haunted but it's Beloved herself haunting 124 and the inhabitants there. As Schmudde states, the haunting of the old house can be caused by remorse over an evil life or by the shock of violent death. The figure that haunts the house is Beloved's spirit whom of which is seeking revenge for her death. "Morrison combines traditional accounts of haunting from both European and African sources; Denver's vision of a white dress's embracing her mother parallels accounts of headless haunts, dressed in white, which appear frequently among the stories collected from blacks along the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina (Drums and Shadows 6, 19, 29, 44, 60, 123)." (Schmudde 409) Throughout the novel, 124 is also seen as a character, which is characterized through Beloved. By allowing the reader to understand that Beloved is a ghost haunting 124, we are able to realize how Beloved, as ghost, plays a role in the

characterization of the house. In the storyline, *Beloved* affects more than just Sethe in physical form but also affects Denver and Paul D through the house that she's haunting.

"124 Bluestone Road is both the traditional haunted house of the conventional ghost story, and a radically possessed and repossessed arena of historic and mythic confrontation. Situated between the Ohio River, which marks the boundary between slave and free territory, and a stream marking the watery boundary African myth places between the worlds of the living and the dead, 124 is a point of intersection for powerful antithetical forces: North and South, black and white, past and present, this world and the other." (Schmudde 410) 124 also serves as a point of intersection for powerful antithetical forces because of 124's connection between Amy and Sethe. Without Amy saving Sethe's life on the side of the river, Sethe would have never lived in 124. 124 is also significant between whites and blacks because when Baby Suggs first lived there, she worked for the Bodwins to pay off her payments for staying there.

"*Beloved* is "a mythic revisioning," in the words of Karla F. C. Holloway (516), of the historical account of Margaret Garner, a fugitive slave who with her husband and four children crossed the ice of the frozen Ohio to Cincinnati in 1856. While Morrison's fiction changes many details of the historical account, it retains a significant number of them, including the approximate date; the name Garner; the number, sex, and ages of Margaret Garner's children; the attribution of some of the details of Margaret Garner's mother-in-law's life to Baby Suggs; the central action of an escaped slave mother's cutting her daughter's throat and attempting to kill her other children to prevent their recapture by slavehunters; and Margaret Garner's defense by an abolitionist lawyer. According to one contemporary account, the tragedy occurred in the house of a black man on the outskirts of Cincinnati, "in the West End, below Mill Creek," where the Garner family had sought refuge (Dabney 64- 65; Harris 10). No Bluestone Road appears on Cincinnati maps from the 1850s through the 1880s, but the fictional geography of *Beloved* is consonant with imagining 124 Bluestone Road in the area of Cincinnati where Margaret Garner killed her daughter. This consonance applies not only to the general spatial relationships of river, city, and stock yards, but also to smaller details." (Schmudde 412) This shows that 124 isn't just a character or a setting where the haunting takes place, but it also has historical content related to similar events that actually happened in the area, if not specifically at the same house in theory. The structure of the house also contributes to the haunting and feelings that 124 and *Beloved* generate. "The upstairs spaces have premonitory attraction for Sethe's baby daughter during the few months she lives in 124 before her death at the hands of her mother. Sethe, who believes that killing her daughter was the way to help her to safety, tells Paul D that the baby "loved those steps so much we painted them so she could see her way to the top" (160). The "lightning white" (13) stairs seem to Paul D to open onto a supernatural realm:" (Schmudde 412)

"Out of the dimness of the room in which they sat, a white staircase climbed toward the blue-and-white wallpaper of the second floor. Paul D could see just the beginning of the paper; discreet flecks of yellow sprinkled among a blizzard of snowdrops all backed by blue. The luminous white of the railing and steps kept him glancing toward it. Every sense he had told him the air above the stairwell was charmed and very thin." (11) Archetypically, the color white is referred to innocence and an angel figure but in *Beloved*, the color white places a different feeling. The "lightning white" stairs resemble *Beloved*'s innocence when she was born because

she was never really able to experience life. Beloved can also be seen as a angel when being represent through 124 because her spirit still remains active while she haunts Sethe.

“When Paul D asks Beloved "What was you looking for when you came here?" she replies " This place. I was looking for this place I could be in" (65). The house at 124 Bluestone Road is thus a necessary condition of Beloved's appearance, and it also is a condition of her interaction with the other characters of the novel. In a conventional ghost story, the haunted house is a setting in which the characters confront and attempt to defeat a frightening external force. For Denver, Paul D, and Sethe, who all live for a time with Beloved in 124, the force is both external and internal; the house shapes and the ghost gives expression to their own repressed inner conflicts. Their perceptions of the ghost are inextricably linked with their perceptions of the house itself; the setting forces self-confrontation.” (Schmudde 412) To each of the characters living in 124, the setting itself gives each character a different feel during their stay there. It affects Sethe different that Paul D or Denver by “external and internal” forces.

“For Denver, 124 is a fortress. Its boundaries (the yard, field, and woods back to the stream behind the house) are a line of defense against the outside world. Within these boundaries, she is also constantly on guard against her mother. She reasons: . . . something in her . . . makes it all right to kill her own..... Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too. (205) [Denver feels the constant need to be on the lookout because she feels that her mother might try to do the same thing as she did to Beloved to “free” her from the entire situation she’s in.] Denver's complicated dependencies, anxieties, and hostilities make her a likely poltergeist focus. Poltergeist outbreaks are most likely to occur in the house of a young person, most frequently female, usually healthy, of average or above average intelligence, sometimes suffering from hysterical attacks ("Poltergeists," Encyclopedia). Healthy and of above average intelligence, Denver suddenly goes deaf at the age of seven, when a classmate's question makes her confront her repressed knowledge of her mother's attempt to kill her. Her two-year-long deafness is broken by the sound of the baby ghost crawling up the stairs. Morrison tells us that the return of Denver's hearing "signaled another shift in the fortunes of the people of 124. From then on the presence was full of spite" (104). The poltergeist expresses Denver's anger against her mother. Denver identifies with her dead sister; the ghost becomes her only playmate in a lonely childhood. She feels safest in the company of the ghost, both of them confined to a haunted house. Denver is afraid of Paul D, who comes from outside the house, and she is jealous of her mother's interest in him. When Paul D drives the poltergeist out, Denver experiences his attack on the ghost as an attack on herself. Beloved returns in the flesh to do what on one level is a carrying out of Denver's wishes she moves Paul D out of the house. Her sister's appearance is at first perceived by Denver as an opportunity for increased companionship, but as the ghost focuses more and more demandingly on Sethe, Denver draws away and defines herself in opposition to Beloved. It is Denver, finally, who breaks the spell Beloved has woven inside 124; she does it by leaving the yard, which she thinks of as stepping "off the edge of the world" (243), and going for help. She has learned that the house is no fortress, that, while the outside world is fraught with danger, interaction with it is necessary in order to live and grow.” (Schmudde 413) Denver feels some kind of attraction with 124 and feels as it’s her safe place. During her stay at 124, she grows closer to Beloved as a spirit and grows the feelings that she’s there to protect her just in case her mother decide to turn on her and

murder her as well. Denver feels attacked when Paul D chases out the spirits of Beloved because she's gone so close to the house and the spirit itself that she feels that she's become one with it. Throughout the novel, when Beloved reappears physically, Denver feels as if they'll bond together but instead, Beloved bonds more with Sethe. Readers then, sense that Denver becomes jealous and angry because Sethe was the one who took Beloved's life away in the first place.

“For Paul D, 124 is an uneasy resting place, always on the verge of becoming an arena for combat. In his years of escaping from slavery, being recaptured and escaping again, he learned to define freedom by his ability to keep moving on. He is subject to "house-fits" (115). He wants to live with Sethe, but tells her, "I'm not saying this because I need a place to stay" (46). Within hours of his arrival he has engaged in combat with the poltergeist, outdoing it in violence until the house is quiet. When Beloved appears several days later, Paul D does not recognize her as the incarnation of the ghost he thinks he has vanquished, but he fears there is something supernatural about her. Baffled by and resentful of Sethe's acceptance of Beloved, "he couldn't put her out of a house that wasn't his" (66). Then Paul D finds himself spending the night in locations further and further away from Sethe's bed-the main room, the keeping room, the storeroom. Paul D thinks his actions are voluntary, but when he finds himself sleeping in the cold house, an outbuilding, he realizes what has happened. Beloved comes to him in the cold house, insisting, "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name" (116). Unable to resist, he does what she demands. He feels deeply ashamed, because Beloved has made him relive what for him was the most bitter part of slavery, the loss of his manhood in powerless obedience to the commands of others. He moves out of 124 in defeat. Only after the spirit has been exorcised does he return. Having been forced to confront his self-doubts, he realizes he has been drawn into dimensions of experience beyond this world: ". . . in the midst of repulsion and personal shame, he was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to" (264). The narrative voice says, ". . . his coming is the re-verse of his going." Beginning with the cold house, he reoccupies the spaces Beloved had moved him out of. His imagination reclaims the house; looking at the bed in Sethe's room, "It seems to him a place he is not. With an effort that makes him sweat he forces a picture of himself lying there, and when he sees it, it lifts his spirit." When he goes back downstairs to encounter Sethe, he leaves "the image of himself firmly in place on the narrow bed" (270). (Schmudde, 413) At first, Paul D is uneasy living at 124 Bluestone Road because of the haunting spirit of Beloved. Just as Schmudde says, Paul D is greatly affected when Beloved asks him to "touch her on the inside part" because he gives in to her demands which make him feel as if he's in slavery once again. Paul D spends the nights at different places during his stay at 124 because he begins to get more paranoid about the haunting spirit of Beloved and the "supernatural" presence that she gives away.

“For Sethe, 124 provides a changing definition of her identity. During her month there in 1855, before the arrival of the slavehunters, 124 is a place of friendship and activity where she practices being free. When she returns to the house after her imprisonment, the community withdraws in disapproval and 124 becomes a refuge. Sethe is proud of her ability to survive there alone with Denver and the ghost after Baby Suggs's death, and she is proud of living in a two-story house; she "left a dirt floor to come to this one" (22), the only house she's ever had. Yet her life at 124 is claustrophobic, drained of color. The house "crowded in on her ... until Paul D arrived and broke up the place, making room,... then standing in the place he had made"; with

Paul D in the house, windows "suddenly had view" (39). But the return of the ghost in the person of Beloved indicates that Sethe is not yet ready to leave behind the unresolved conflicts of her past and move on to a new life with Paul D. When Paul D leaves, Sethe recognizes Beloved as her dead daughter re-turned, and 124 becomes for her a place outside time. Sethe concludes that ". . . there is no world out-side my door" (184). The mutual absorption of the three women in the house and their withdrawal from the world outside is symbolized by Stamp Paid's footprints in the snow, cir-cling the house, unable to enter. Reunited with her daughter, Sethe turns 124 into a playhouse to recreate the childhood Beloved never had, gathering flowers and jars of lightning bugs, tacking up newspaper pictures, deco-rating the railing of the white staircase the baby had loved with "ribbons, bows, bouquets"; when he returns later, Paul D thinks it looks like "the house of a very tall child" (270). But as Beloved's recriminations and Sethe's explanations intensify, 124 becomes a madhouse. The narrative voice says, "If the whitepeople of Cincinnati had allowed Negroes into their lunatic asylum they could have found candidates in 124" (250). When the women of the black community conclude that Sethe has "lost her wits" (254), they organize the exorcism that drives Beloved from the house and releases Sethe from her madness. When Paul D returns at the end of the novel, Sethe is lying exhausted on the bed in the keeping room, a location which suggests two possible endings to Morrison's openended narrative: Like Baby Suggs, Sethe can stay in that bed and give up living; or, repeating her own recovery of health and strength in that bed after escaping from slavery in 1855, she can begin a new life again, freed from enslavement to her own past."(Schmudde, 414) 124 to Sethe was basically a place where she felt secure and safe. When Beloved reappeared physically and not by the spirits contained in 124, Sethe gave her more and more attention and began spending the time that she was never able to spend with her. At the end of the novel, 124 offers Sethe an ultimatum. I just give up and die there at the very place she was haunted for so many years or to start a new beginning and live the life she was never able to live.

"Throughout the novel, Morrison empowers the house by personifying it. Denver thinks of it as "a person rather than a structure" (29). Each of the three sections into which Beloved is divided begins, in fact, with a statement about the mood of the house: "124 was spiteful" (3), "124 was loud" (169), "124 was quiet" (239). At the end of the novel, Paul D knows the haunting is over because the house "does not look back at him"; now it is "just another weathered house needing repair" (264). Emptied of its ghost, 124 is "stone quiet.... A bleak and minus nothing" (270). There is "too much light," Paul D thinks; "Things look sold" (271). The house, he has heard, is about to be sold because Sister Bodwin thinks it is "full of trouble." Paul D and Stamp Paid, both well acquainted with the house's powers, are skeptical that it can be disposed of so easily: " 'Who they think want a house out there? Anybody got the money don't want to live out there' " (264). But living there may no longer be the issue; Morrison's narrative shows that the life has gone out of the house with the passing of its dead. A passage recording Edwin Bodwin's thoughts shows us 124 from a perspective which moves it out of myth back into social history. Though Bodwin feels a great sentimental attachment to the house, "the land, of course, eighty acres of it on both sides of Bluestone, was the central thing" (259). The shell of the haunted house, we realize, sits on a piece of prime real estate on the outskirts of an expanding city. No longer a gateway to the other world, "not claimed" (274) like the ghost who is driven from it, 124 is also about to be obliterated from the memory of the living. The conventions of the traditional ghost story shape and guide reader expectations through the radically redefined time and space Morrison's narrative occupies. There are some precedents in other psychological tales of the

supernatural, such as those by Henry James and Edith Wharton, for Morrison's use of a haunting to bring her characters not just into confrontation with the unexplainable other, but, more importantly, into confrontation with the dimensions of their own experience they must come to terms with in order to come truly to life. But *Beloved* may be unique in using the ghost story to shock its readers into locating the source of horror not in mysteries beyond this world, but rather in the repressed and unclaimed realities of the factual, historical past.” (Schmudde 415)

Throughout *Beloved*, Morrison personifies 124 in different ways because the house affects the different characters such as Sethe, Denver, and Paul D. By personifying 124 as *Beloved*, *Beloved* has different effects on each of the main characters. Morrison provides the personification of 124 Bluestone Road to allow us, as readers, to fully understand the different ways that *Beloved* haunted the residents of 124.