

'LIKE GETTING THE USE OF AN EYE BACK' : AN EXPLORATION  
OF THE RECOVERY OF SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS  
IN TONI MORRISON'S BELOVED

by

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In Beloved, Toni Morrison explores the lives of slaves during and after the experience of slavery. Slavery debilitates and fractures the sense of self in the individuals who have been slaves and has ramifications beyond their lives into the lives of others. The characters in Beloved confront what would destroy them and take steps towards healing their individual and collective pasts. Each individual, through this process, journeys towards forming or recovering a spiritually whole self. The spirituality which is expressed in Beloved is primarily feminine and African-American; it is inclusive and non-hierarchical, affirming the meaning and importance of all aspects of life and the individual. As the novel recognizes the ambiguity of good and evil, natural and supernatural, realism and myth, dualities collapse. Spirituality is experienced and expressed in every aspect of the individual, affirming the body as well as the mind. The focus of this thesis is to examine each character's spiritual development towards wholeness through his/her lifetime.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's Beloved is a powerfully rich, complex and rewarding novel. Set during Reconstruction following the Civil War in Cincinnati, Ohio, it explores the lives of a people who are technically 'freed,' but who are struggling to "free themselves from the memories of a system in which they had no rightful ownership of a Self" (Clemons, 74). With memories so intolerable and of such horrifying magnitude, "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (42). At the heart of the novel is the question of how to survive these memories, and beyond survival, how to live, fully alive, in the present, with a whole self and a future. Memories of the past affect the characters in varied ways, and in equally many ways they confront the past, trying to understand it and who they are, trying to heal it and themselves.

The purpose of this thesis is to trace and examine the unique ways in which characters confront and heal their individual and collective pasts through which each takes steps and journeys towards recovering or forming a spiritually whole self. The novel expresses and explores the struggles and spiritual transformations of characters with intricacy and richness. No spiritual, emotional or physical stone in the quarry of memories is left un-turned, personal or collective, no matter how painful, traumatic or hesitantly

approached. Terry Otten describes:

[The protagonists] undergo a process of becoming....move toward the condition of tragedy: reliving the past in the present, suffering division and facing inevitable choice, choosing and bearing the consequences of choice-- and all this played out in a community given voice as a chorus and itself in need of resurrection. (97)

Characters move spiritually from various forms of debilitation and suffering towards reconciliation, acceptance, rebirth and wholeness, and help others along when they can. Slavery, as a system, denied slaves the concept of a self by definition and action; slaves were considered objects owned by their masters. Thus, in order to heal or recover their selves, slaves had not only the task of keeping their identities intact but also the task of escaping from the system of being an owned object. Being 'owned' is not something which individuals accept easily, but slavery, with violent effort, tried its best. Thus slaves often had to undergo the process of learning how to 'own' themselves. As Sethe describes, "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (95). Taking action to protect or preserve oneself against destruction is different from taking action to nurture or develop oneself.

The process of trying to heal one's life and find wholeness involves the recovering of origins and heritage, and of one's personal history. The process involves both the individual and the community as a whole. The transformation also includes understanding and taking moral responsibility for one's choices and actions. This movement is often one full of pain and suffering, and is made especially so when one's past includes slavery and its horrors. Yet

the pain that "can't be undone" can lead towards knowledge of the self. Suffering can be seen in a negative light, but it can also be a catalyst to change and as in the process of birth, it must be worked through. Angelita Reyes expresses:

suffering can be an emotional and sacred rite  
towards becoming whole again. It can be a rite of passage for  
the continuity of the dynamic spirit. Suffering does not  
necessarily stabilize powerlessness and submissiveness but  
rather it can be a source for strength and endurance.  
(24)

The memories of the characters, and the aspects of "re-memory," are at the heart of the novel and are in many cases intolerably painful, but then, so is the absence of memories which they should have, such as the memory of mother, father and family. Yet the characters are not freed from moral responsibility because of the evil done to them. As Terry Otten writes, "The moral judgments implicit in the individual stories allow no evasion of the truth as these characters wrestle with the presence of evil at large in the world and in themselves" (87).

In Beloved, the past and memory play an integral role. Sethe says, referring to time, "It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay," (35). Although the novel reaches far back in time often and with immediacy, the current date is 1873, where Sethe and her daughter Denver live at 124 Bluestone Road. It has been eighteen years since Sethe managed to escape from slavery at "Sweet Home" having smuggled her two sons and infant daughter out ahead of her. During her escape, she gives birth to her last child, Denver, with the help of a girl, Amy. She

miraculously reaches Cincinnati, and her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Sethe's husband, Halle, had bought his mother's freedom, but he never makes it to Cincinnati. After twenty-eight days, Sethe's former master, schoolteacher, arrives to claim his 'property.' Sethe sees him first and attempts to kill her children and herself. She "collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil...over there where no one could hurt them" (163). Only the "crawling-already?" girl dies, but Sethe has convinced the master that she is no longer suitable slave material, and is sentenced to prison for two years rather than slavery. But she also separates herself in isolation from the community, and they from her.

After her release, Sethe, her two sons, Denver and Baby Suggs share the house with the ghost of the baby girl. As Baby says, "Not a house in the country ain't packed to the rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby" (5). Eight years later, Sethe's two sons run away and Baby Suggs dies. After eight years of just Sethe, Denver and the ghost living in house, Paul D, the "last of the Sweet Home men" arrives and drives out the ghost. Paul D. and Sethe begin to consider the possibility that they could "make a life" (46) for themselves, together. Soon afterwards, a young woman emerges from the creek who calls herself Beloved, and makes her home with them. It is quickly apparent that both Paul D. and Beloved love Sethe deeply; the struggle which ensues ends with

Paul D moving out of the house. Although Denver had guessed that Beloved was her dead sister, grown, Sethe now realizes that Beloved is her baby, returned to her. When the three women shut themselves off from the outside world and are "free at last to be what they liked, see whatever they saw, and say whatever was on their minds. Almost" (199) the reader learns that Beloved is the embodiment of more than Sethe's dead daughter.

Having recognized, loved and claimed each other, the fighting begins. Sethe struggles to explain her actions and her love to Beloved, and Beloved demands more, needs more. Denver is forgotten in their mutual absorption. Their food runs out. As Beloved becomes stronger, Sethe withers. Finally, Denver faces her own fear and leaves to seek help. When folks learn what is happening at 124 Bluestone, a group of women form to take action. As they approach the house, praying and singing, Denver's new employer happens to ride up; seeing him, Sethe sees her former master reappear, and this time chooses to attack him. Beloved disappears. Denver steps in to care for her mother, and in the end, Paul D reappears.

The character of Beloved is an important way in which the individuals confront the past and its pain and move towards the future. Beloved is indeed a "miraculous resurrection" (105) of the past; in her the past is made present in physical reality. Beloved as a character represents many things, only one of which is the "crawling-already?" girl. Her memories extend to encompass the experience of "sixty million and more" Africans who "never even made

it to slavery" in a passage so horrifying that "mostly it's not remembered at all." It is painful, but as Amy says while trying to massage the life back into Sethe's broken feet, "Anything dead coming back to life hurts" (35). Although it hurts to bring what has been deadened in memory back to life, the characters are coerced to return to their pasts--and to the dead parts of their selves--and they "begin to understand themselves and to reassess where they have been" (Otten, 85). None have an easy time of it, especially when the past includes times when there were choices to be made which did not include even a 'lesser evil'.

In Beloved, Morrison blends present and past, good and evil, and the natural and supernatural in a way which allows no easy judgments. Her "moral vision allows for few single-minded villains or heroes. She asks us to distinguish between an Amy and a schoolteacher...she creates black characters fully capable of moral choice" (Otten 96). As there are no stereotypical judgments of white versus black, there are none within the characters either. No individual is wholly good or evil. The characters are "duality exposed....they seek equilibrium, struggling to exist in creative tension with their own dark sides" (Otten, 98). The blending of what can be considered to be good or evil creates paradoxes. For example, Terry Otten writes:

Blacks who rest secure in the conviction of an externally defined righteousness become morally and existentially stunted; those who risk a fall bear the scars

of their humanity. Conventional 'goodness' leads to acquiescence, subservience, accommodation; 'evil' paradoxically may lead to freedom, self-awareness, an authentic self. (96)

There are no straight forward polemics in these spiritual quests. The characters "press towards knowledge" though often at "the expense of happiness" (Otten 97), evil and good exist together ambiguously, and reality includes the natural and supernatural.

As good and evil are ambiguously blended, so are "mythic matter and intense realism" (Otten, 97) and the natural and supernatural. For example, when Ella says to Stamp Paid "You know as well as I do that people who die bad don't stay in the ground," Morrison writes that "He couldn't deny it. Jesus Christ Himself didn't, so Stamp ate a piece of Ella's head cheese" (188). Joanne Braxton explains that Morrison attempts to "blend the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world...with neither taking precedence over the other" (300). Toni Morrison refers to this blending and ambiguity as Black cosmology. She describes this way of blending the supernatural with the real world thus:

[It is] indicative of the cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world. We are a very practical people, very down to earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things. But to blend those two worlds together at the same time was enhancing, not limiting. And some of those things were 'discredited knowledge' that Black people had. (Braxton, 303)

Black cosmology, an alternate way of knowing to the dominant culture's, is highly spiritual in nature and certainly enhances the spirituality of the characters.

The spirituality which one finds in *Beloved* is primarily feminine and African-American, and is manifested in non-traditional ways, as in the blending or ambiguity of good and evil and natural and supernatural. The word traditional as used here refers to the Western or European patriarchal tradition. The spirituality expressed in *Beloved* is clearly influenced and reflected by Morrison's moral vision, which realistically recognizes the ambiguity of right and wrong, dark and light; supposedly exclusive qualities in individuals and actions are inclusive in each and all. Morrison's expression of spirituality can be clearly seen in the ways in which her characters order their existences, find meaning within their own lives, and confront both the natural and the supernatural realms. One finds that Morrison's works provide unique symbols, rituals and experiences of spirituality with which her characters face life and its transitions. One can seek out the ways in which this spirituality is manifested as her characters progress through the novel towards recovering spiritually whole selves.

Tracing the steps which the characters in *Beloved* take towards recovering or forming spiritually whole selves requires one to consider their spiritual growth. In order to reach a wholeness as a spiritual self, the characters must confront those aspects of their lives which stunt them spiritually. For the most part, the spiritually debilitating aspects of these characters' lives have been in their past; the memory of the past affects their lives in the present. They have to heal their memories as individuals and must

also regain their heritage as part of a community, as painful as it may be. As these individuals learn to heal what has scarred them in the past, they learn and reveal the ambiguity of good and evil, right and wrong in themselves as well as in what they have done and what has been done to them. Right and wrong are not easily judged as both are blended in character and action. The characters, however, must learn to accept moral responsibility for what they have done while the reader must ponder the morality of slavery. As the characters move towards spiritually whole selves, they experience both realism and an 'alternate' way of knowing; the scientific and the supernatural, good and evil, past and present are equally real and are part of the whole. The characters' spirituality and the spirituality expressed through their quests for whole selves is inclusive in these aspects of their lives. This spirituality, however, is difficult to describe or define in words; it is not analytical knowledge which can be separated from life and encapsulated.

The definition of the Latin word "spiritus" is breath. Spirituality in the context of the word breath suggests life, energy and power. In Western European tradition spirituality is usually thought to be something removed from the living of daily life, or as an added dimension of consciousness directed towards something above and beyond the physical and commonplace. Spirituality has also been considered to be exclusively concerned with that which is outside of and remote from the self. In order to more clearly understand and

discuss the spirituality expressed in Beloved, the clarification, vocabulary and framework in feminist theory and theology is invaluable. As generally understood in feminism and expressed in Beloved, spirituality involves the whole self in all of its dimensions: physical, sexual, social, emotional, intellectual--in every aspect. It can be seen to be very much a part of life, based on the experience of oneself, the community and the world. Spirituality involves discovering the potential of the whole self, placing one's whole self in the context of the universe, and finding a grounding in the awareness of power that is within the self as well as without. Spirituality is perceived as naming, valuing, celebrating, affirming and empowering the whole self. It is a celebration of life and its gifts, which includes all natural cycles and all of the stages of life. It seeks a wholeness which is difficult to find in patriarchal religion that is based on male, rather than universal, experience. The masculine definition of experience is inherently hierarchical and dualistic: female/male, body/soul, emotion/reason, nature/culture, evil/good, social/spiritual, private/public, passive/active, and black/white, are a few of these dualisms. The understanding of spirituality which is outlined here, and which is expressed by Morrison in Beloved collapses and breaks down these dualisms: it is inclusive. As Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book Sexism and God-talk, discussing this inclusive spirituality expresses, "It reaches for a new mode of relationship, neither a hierarchical model that diminishes the

potential of the 'other' nor an 'equality' defined by a ruling norm drawn from the dominant group; rather a mutuality that allows us to affirm different ways of being" (20).

Within this framework of feminist spirituality, one can find other pertinent connections which have a direct bearing on this topic. As Adam Miller recognizes, "Any observations of Toni Morrison's world must touch on religion in it, the presence of evil in its many forms, sacrificial figures..., guilt and redemption, superstition" (49). In approaching this evident spirituality, and especially Morrison's alternative ideas of spirituality, it is essential to recognize that she is both a woman and a woman of color. As such, her ideas and experiences contrast strongly with the literary and spiritual tradition based on white patriarchal cultural and religious ideas. Morrison's expression of spirituality in many ways brings it to life, brings it into the daily living of women and men. She offers a challenging new vision, expressing ancient oral and mythic traditions from Africa, and reinterpreting these in current terms, as well as lending her particular and eloquent voice to the chorus of women, both black and white, who are re-defining spirituality. She blends the ideas of the ancient African-American and the contemporary Womanist (a term defined by Alice Walker), both of which are outside of Western "culturally sanctioned" ideas of spirituality.

There are ways in which both women's and African-American women's literature have a very strong sense of spirituality inherent

in them, which may perhaps be a reflection of oppression which has been, and is, endured. Although there are many reactions to oppression, one of these is a deep need for and growth of spiritual strength when other forms of confirmation and expression have been denied. In addition, when one is oppressed and is marginalized to the edges of a dominant culture, there is a sense of being isolated from the attention of the dominant culture and therefore of feeling free to express one's own truths. Qualities which are exclusively Toni Morrison's are enriched by her participation in these groups.

The non-traditional spirituality expressed in Morrison's work are in many ways "traditional" to the spirituality of women's, and African-American women's, literature. As Carol Christ discusses in her book Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest, women's writings as a whole can be considered to have a "sacred" dimension, "because [a woman's] sense of self and world is created through them...For these are stories that orient the life of people through time, their life-time, their individual and corporate experience and their sense of style, to the great powers that establish the reality of the world" (2). Women's writing has been one means by which feminine spirituality has been expressed, and perhaps because it is not expressed elsewhere as culturally sanctioned religion, it is expressed all the more powerfully in literature.

Christ, among others, has written of how many women's stories told in literature and in life are highly spiritual, and reveal

spiritual truths. These revealed truths include meanings in life, perceptions of forces inside and outside of the self, choices made and the reasons for making them, moments when life's meaning seems clear or unfathomable. Reading Beloved, one can understand and share in the character's lives, can share in the spiritual truths which their lives animate. One can see the will to survive, the will to find wholeness, values by which they live and die, and the forces of their senses and feelings. Stories reveal the sense of meaning, power and value in individual's lives; they describe the "boundaries against which life is played out" (Christ, 3). Stories can help one to make important decisions; they aid in learning to value struggles, to celebrate strengths, to own one's pain and to comprehend oneself. Stories lead to a deeper experiencing of the self and the world. Beloved certainly is a powerful example of this, not only in its story, but in the use of the stories the characters tell to each other.

Christ discusses women's alienation from "the experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious" (1) and how women writers have depicted women's spiritual quests in their works. She explores moments or what could be called 'places' that are reached in women's spiritual quests: these include the "experience of nothingness" (13) or a realization of the emptiness in one's life, an awakening in which one is empowered by a "new sense of self and a new orientation in the world" (13) and a "new naming" of self and world. For example, she finds that women's "conversion" experiences usually

involve a "coming to self" (19), a discovery of power within themselves rather than a giving up of the self to an external power. Christ's discussion of "coming to self" is very illuminating in the context of tracing how the characters in Beloved attain or strive for spiritually whole selves.

Because Beloved contains such a depth of material, the method of organizing this thesis to focus analysis is by character. Each of the five major characters in Beloved, Baby Suggs, Sethe, Denver, Paul D., and Beloved is the focus of a chapter. Beloved is discussed in the final chapter. The analysis of each character includes examining how each individual's perspective is unique, how their relationships with others reflect their individual needs and values, and what symbols are significant in understanding each individual. The life experiences of each individual are discussed along with the ways in which these experiences are confronted and steps are taken towards recovering spiritually whole selves.

The experience of reading and understanding Beloved is painful while being deeply rewarding. The unbearable hurt outrages the reader, while the beauty and strength of the characters humbles and encourages the reader. Toni Morrison's writing adds new meaning to the word 'poetic' while her unique perspective, symbolism and description illuminate fresh and different ways in which to view the ordinary and extraordinary. As her characters' 'get the use of an eye back,' heal their brokenness and come to a deeper experience of self and world, the reader is invited to do likewise.

## CHAPTER II: BABY SUGGS

Baby Suggs, "holy," is perhaps the character in *Beloved* who most clearly achieves and expresses spiritual wholeness, and a whole self, but not without pain and suffering, and not in totality. Throughout the novel, she is referred to as "holy," for she accepts "no title of honor before her name, but [allows] a small caress after it" (87). Withstanding the circumstances and facts of her life, she is a character who has been given the 'Word' and who speaks and lives it with her whole heart. She inspires with her strength and great powers of love and wisdom. Having endured more than one would consider possible, she eventually decides that some things are not to be tolerated, and "quits"; in Baby Suggs' experience, "her past had been like her present--intolerable and since she knew that death was anything but forgetfulness, she used the little energy left her for pondering color" (4). But she does not 'quit' before she has spoken her truths, relinquished her "sword and shield," and let her healing powers flow into the community.

The earliest we know of Baby Suggs is that she was a slave in Carolina, where her hip was injured until she "jerked like a three-legged dog when she walked" (139). She gave birth to eight children and never got to know any of them except her youngest. With

her hip, she was a "real bargain" and was sold, along with Halle, her youngest son, to Mr. Garner and put to work at Sweet Home. Halle eventually is able to "buy" her freedom, and she moves to Ohio where she settles into the house on Bluestone Road and supports herself with her skills of shoe-making and washing. She runs a halfway house, and preaches informally. Her grandchildren and her daughter-in-law escape from Sweet Home, but there is a bloodspill when the "white men walk right into her yard" to capture them; this results in one granddaughter's death, the loss of Sethe and another granddaughter to prison, and two grandsons who never fully recover. She discontinues her preaching and ponders what happened, eventually ending up pondering colors instead. For Baby Suggs, worn out by life's harm, is tired and decides to 'fix' on something harmless.

When Baby Suggs arrives in Ohio, she decides that "because slave life had 'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb, and tongue'", she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart--which she put to work at once" (87). Having been treated as a commodity in the slave system which recognized and used up only her body's labor, she has the difficult task of trying to achieve self-ownership, discovering what is in her heart, and how best to put her heart to use. There is a lack of a centered-self in Baby Suggs,

for the sadness was at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home. Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like. (140)

Rather than presence, there is absence. As she had lost all her children, save Halle, and never known them, she has never had the chance to get to know herself:

It made sense for a lot of reasons because in all of Baby's life, as well as Sethe's own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought out, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby's Eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock that she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing just because the pieces included her children. (23)

Baby Suggs knows the names of her children, Patty, Rosa Lee, Ardelia, Tyree, John, Nancy and Famous, but to find those that may be alive may perhaps endanger them. As for Halle, whom she has known, he has given her freedom, but denied her being able to live with him. Her own name is less of an indication of her self, "I don't call myself nothing" (142) it is rather "all she had left of the 'husband' she claimed" (142). She claims him, his name, and the possibility that he might find her, never having known why the Garners had called her Jenny.

It is difficult to discern whether it is loss or absence which characterizes Baby's emergence into freedom for in reality she has not had the chance to "own" that which is missing. And she believes that her children are dead, having "felt each one go the very day and hour" (8). Halle is the exception to this:

What was left to hurt her now? News of Halle's death? No. She had been prepared for that better than she had for his life. The last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done

that: held a little foot; examined fat fingertips with her own--fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like;...All seven were gone or dead. What would be the point of looking too hard at the youngest one? (139)

But she does get to know Halle, and he and Denver are the only characters in *Beloved* who have the experience of growing up with their mothers. Denver relays what Baby said about him:

She said she was always a little scared of [Halle]. He was too good, she said. From the beginning...he was too good for the world. Scared her. She thought, he'll never make it through nothing. Whitepeople must have thought so too, because they never got split up. So she had the chance to know him, look after him, and he scared her the way he loved things. (208)

The enormity of loss in the novel makes it impossible to deny the connection between "ownership" of self, of mates, of children, and the fear of love and need. For Baby, before her freedom she could not "own" anything let alone her love for her son, but in gaining the power in freedom to "own" she loses the chance to share his life.

When Baby Suggs reaches freedom, she begins to claim and to own what she can. It begins with increased awareness and perception of her self and her body:

She didn't know what she looked like and was not curious. But suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, "These hands belong to me. These my hands." Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her heartbeat. Had it been there all along? This pounding thing?...She couldn't stop laughing. "My heart's beating," she said. (141)

Baby embarks on a journey of self discovery, of claiming her self, of loving, and helping others to do likewise. But she does not forget

or overlook the facts of her situation. She tells her ex-master, "you got my boy and I'm all broke down. You be renting him out to pay for me way after I'm gone to glory" (146). Her realistic attitude towards life, however, is a healthy one. Later Sethe recalls Baby's repeated encouragement to accept the past rather than fight it saying "Lay em down...sword and shield...Both of em down. Down by the riverside...Don't study war no more. Lay all that mess down" (86). Baby Suggs gains her freedom, but the price is very high. With strength and her own spirit, she sets about putting what she discovers of her free self to work.

Baby's house on Bluestone Road becomes a gathering place for those in need, and Baby gives all she has. Sethe describes that it was "a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed" (86). Through the cherished memories of others, one arrives at a feeling of how good it was, and understands more of Baby Suggs' character. Her words are well remembered and true. "Talk was low and to the point--for Baby Suggs, holy, didn't approve of extra. 'Everything depends on how much,' she said, and 'Good is knowing when to stop'" (87). Baby Suggs gathers together what she had and stops up the holes in people.

Although Baby Suggs never learns to read the Bible, she has her own message to give, her own heart to share: "She fixed on her own brand of preaching, having made up her mind about what to do with the heart that started beating the minute she crossed the Ohio River" (141). Whereas in slavery she had "talked as little as she could get

away with because what was there to say that the roots of her tongue could manage?" (141), in her freedom, Baby Suggs has the "Word" and opens her heart. Her voice is notable in a world where slavery has taken away the meaning of words, where children cannot understand their parents' African dialects, where Denver becomes deaf and dumb as a result of words spoken. Baby Suggs has a voice and the people respond to her Call. As Sethe expresses, "With Baby Suggs' heart in charge, the people let go" (94). Baby's heart is powerful: Sethe can feel it even after Baby has died. Baby's "long-distance love was equal to any skin-close love she had ever known" (95).

Baby Suggs' Call involves the celebration of freedom to be, to be free, to love one's self and one's body. Her message is at the heart of the novel, and is a spirit-filled expression of finding wholeness of self. Her message calls to mind Ntozake Shange's words "I found god in myself and I loved her fiercely":

Uncalled, unrobed, unannointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence. When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman, and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing--a wide open place cut deep in the woods....In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the Clearing while the people waited among the trees. (87)

Baby Suggs does not need a building to "get to church" (146). Baby requires no formal title, no outside authority save her heart and the power of her 'Call'. She does not compete with the church in town. The Clearing is a sanctuary for her, as well as being a reflection of her heart. As the Clearing is wide open and cut deep, so is Baby's heart, wide open to share her own way of healing the deep cut in her

own and her fellow peoples' hearts:

After situating herself on a huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggs bowed her head and prayed silently. The company watched her from the trees. They knew she was ready when she put her stick down. Then she shouted, "Let the children come!" and they ran from the trees toward her.

"Let your mothers hear you laugh," she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling.

Then "Let the grown men come," she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees.

"Let your wives and children see you dance," she told them, and the groundlife shuddered under their feet.

Finally she called the women to her. "Cry," she told them. "For the living and the dead. Just cry." And without covering their eyes the women let loose. (87-88)

Baby Suggs calls everyone: women, men, girls and boys, young and old. Her 'Call' is not exclusive. Baby affirms and encourages each to express their individual needs, to recognize their pain and joy and "lay it down", let it out, name it. Her message affirms laughing, dancing and crying as expressions appropriate of worship; she affirms the connectedness of emotion, body, mind and spirit:

It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart.

She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure.

She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it. (88)

With Baby Suggs' call, they express physically, emotionally, mindfully their spirituality as individuals and as a community; dualisms are broken down as each recognizes the pain and happiness,

good and bad, weak and strong in themselves. Baby Suggs does not exhort them to follow rules, or to believe in what would not be a true and healthy expression of their selves. She does not judge them, does not name them sinners who can be saved only through religiously sanctioned means. Rather, she encourages them to express and imagine. Baby Suggs opens them up to the liberating force of imagination; she does not deny the power of imagination by enclosing the sacred in written, cannonized rules and regulations:

"Here," she said, "in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in the grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out .... And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. YOU got to love it, YOU! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. YOU got to love it." (88)

Baby Suggs encourages her people to recognize, name, and affirm their wholeness as beings. She calls for each to affirm and love the entirety of themselves, beginning with the flesh which is so degraded by racism, and which is named as an integral part of the spiritual self, not as the 'downfall' of the religious self. Baby Suggs' spirituality recognizes the body, the expression of each individual part of the body, the use these parts are put to, and calls for their healing. Accept your self, your flesh, what your flesh needs and what it can do, and love it, heal it, caress it, restore it to

wholeness. She first focusses on the eyes, the hands, the face, the mouth, all of which are the primary means of expression, and communication, but also the means of viewing, feeling, sensing and hearing oneself and what surrounds you. Baby then goes on to recognize the other parts:

This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; Backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver--love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your lifeholding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, Love your heart. For this is the prize,". Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh. (88-89)

Baby Suggs' 'Call' does not forget any part, and does not denigrate or cause shameful feelings about any part or what that part's function may be. Altogether, the individual parts make up the whole, inner and outer, receptive and expressive, physical and emotional and intellectual and all together sacred. Baby affirms the power and sacredness of the forces within the entirety of the individual. And having named this individually, it is only fitting that the group them joins together in 'harmony' to sing.

The experience at the Clearing, Baby Suggs' heart, words and dance are deeply moving. While the horror of racism is there, the beauty and strength of the message shines through. Healing the

wounds and pain is a necessary step towards loving, valuing and celebrating the self in its entirety. Laughing, dancing and crying are affirmative actions, actions which express deeply felt experiences of self and of life. Rather than focussing on what may happen after death, Baby Suggs brings out aspects of birth and rebirth--"how to nurture on-going life here on earth" (Ruether, 236). For the people she addresses, this is a very real dilemma. The Call in the Clearing is an example of spirituality being a "paradox of ebb and flow, of fullness of delight and of emptying, of intense compassion and letting go to simplicity, of blessing and of pain" (Weber, 6).

Having given of herself and taken in return, Baby Suggs eventually finds her dreams coming true. Three of her grandchildren are delivered to freedom and to her, and she thinks that "if Halle made it, God do what He would, it would be a cause for celebration" (135). When Halle's wife, Sethe, "the idea of a whoop moved closer to the front of her mind" (135). She is blessed to have family--a daughter and grandchildren. Baby ministers to the children and to Sethe who was "all mashed up and split open, but with another grandchild in her arms" (135). Through the night, Baby "bathed her in sections, starting with her face" (93). Together, they share twenty-eight days of "healing, ease and real-talk" (95) and have a "celebration of blackberries that put Christmas to shame"(147).

Following the celebration, Baby stands in her garden "smelling disapproval, feeling a dark and coming thing" (147). Baby Suggs is

very conscious of the "other" way of knowing; Baby's world is expanded by her understanding and recognition of both the natural and supernatural.

The scent of their disapproval lay heavy in the air. Baby Suggs woke to it and wandered what it was....She lifted up her head and looked....Baby Suggs, holy, looked up. They sky was blue and clear. Not one touch of death in the definite green of the leaves....Nothing seemed amiss--yet the smell of disapproval was sharp....She was accustomed to the knowledge that nobody prayed for her--but this free-floating repulsion was new. It wasn't whitefolks--that much she could tell--so it must be colored ones. And then she knew. Her friends and neighbors were angry with her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess. (137-8)

Later, Baby will dwell on this, and on the way in which it distracted her from sensing the immediate danger at hand. "The whitepeople came anyway. In her yard. She had done everything right and they came in her yard anyway" (209). The master from whom Sethe had escaped arrives while Baby is looking in the direction of the "disapproval," and Sethe gathers her children into the woodshed and tries to escape with her children to death, where they would be safe. The community has a definitive share in the guilt, yet Baby Suggs never places any guilt on them, feeling only how she had invited their reaction upon herself. But her yard, her life, her self has been violated.

In the woodshed, Baby concerns herself immediately with saving life. She "noticed who breathed and who did not and went straight to the boys lying in the dirt" (151). Her actions reflect her spirit and her beliefs. Having bound the wounds of the living, she wrestles with Sethe to exchange the dead baby for the living. When Sethe finally relinquishes the dead and tries to feed the living her milk

without cleaning off the blood, "Baby Suggs slammed her fist on the table and shouted 'Clean up! Clean yourself up!' They fought then. Like rivals over the heart of the loved, they fought" (152). Even in shock, Baby responds to preserve the sacred aspects of life and nurturing--struggling to keep spilt blood and milk separate.

This incident is the turning point in Baby Sugg's life. The significance of it, for her, is far-reaching. As Terry Otten writes:

even Baby Suggs, for all her "great heart" and insistence on self-love cannot counter the enormity of evil (and love) that destroys Beloved, and Baby has to accept failure .... worn out by a love so uncompromising as to warrant the slaughter of her grandchild. (88)

Her freedom, her personal integrity, her self-ownership is violated in the form of her yard. They just walked in; she is powerless. She cannot stop the whitefolks and she cannot stop Sethe.

The heart that pumped out love, the mouth that spoke the Word, didn't count. They came in her yard anyway and she could not approve or condemn Sethe's rough choice. One or the other might have saved her, but beaten by the demands of both, she went to bed. The whitefolks had tired her out at last. (180)

The moral paradoxes of Sethe's action are very real for Baby, and she cannot dismiss them. Baby Suggs thinks:

her authority in the pulpit, her dance in the Clearing, her powerful Call ... all that had been rebuked by the bloodspill in her backyard. God puzzled her and she was too ashamed of Him to say so .... Suddenly Baby declared peace. She just up and quit. (177)

Baby's beliefs and words are most pointedly mocked by Sethe's actions, and yet are at the same time an expression of them for a return to slavery would have accomplished the same end of death in one form or another. The horror of the killing is balanced against

the horror of slavery. While Sethe is in jail, Baby Suggs continues to cobble and do laundry, but is no longer a part of the community and loses the fellowship she once had. When Sethe is released and returns with Denver to 124 Bluestone, Baby learns to live with the spiteful ghost of her granddaughter, and accepts it saying "We lucky this ghost is a baby" (5).

Perhaps the most illuminating passage about Baby's pondering is her last discussion with Stamp Paid. Stamp Paid knows the power of Baby's 'Call' and tells her that the "Word" was "given" to her to speak, he refuses to accept that she has quit. Baby responds that if she did call, and if the people would still come to her, she would not know what to say, for the "Word" is "one other thing took away from me" (179). Stamp Paid does not understand and accuses Baby of "blaming God," of "saying the whitefolks won," and of "saying nothing counts," but Baby responds by repeating "I'm saying they came in my yard" (179). When Stamp Paid reminds Baby that Sethe was the "one did it," Baby asks him, "And if she hadn't?" (179) which is what the reader must ponder as well. Frustrated, Stamp decides that Baby is punishing God, to which Baby answers, "Not like He punish me" (179). Baby does not know what is right and wrong in the case of Sethe's action. Where the slave owners denigrate and destroy the body, mind, emotions--the spirit--of their slaves in hate or ignorance, Sethe has done likewise in love. Yet, she does not place blame on any side, or judge, except in the case of her yard, her family, her autonomy being violated. She dwells on the reality of the moment; she is not

looking for a "miracle", she's looking for the "back door" (179).

Baby Suggs, in this conversation, states clearly and simply what she thinks; they walked right into her yard, and she does not know who was right or wrong. What she says may be colored by the separate stance of the community of which she was once a valued member but which now sets her apart, a community of which Stamp is still a part. The lack of bitterness in her decision to focus on "something harmless" speaks of her inner beauty. She follows her own advice and knows when to stop; she goes to bed and ponders colors until her death. Yet, even beyond the grave, it is her memory and her spirit that inspire and comfort those that knew her. Her inner beauty and strength remain even through the most terrible circumstances.

It is fitting that Stamp Paid, acting in honor and love for Baby, who acts as a catalyst to the events which eventually result in healing in the living characters the scars and pain which Baby also felt. As Stamp Paid expresses:

Her marrow was tired and it was testimony to the heart that fed it that it took eight years to finally meet the color she was hankering after. The onslaught of her fatigue, like his, was sudden, but lasted for years. After sixty years of losing children to the people who chewed up her life and spit it out like a fish bone; after five years of freedom given to her by her last child, who bought her freedom with his, exchanged it, so to speak, so she could have one whether he did or not--to lose him too; to acquire a daughter and grandchildren and see that daughter slay the children (or try to); to belong to a community...to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed--and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance--well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy. (177)

Baby Suggs, who has borne pain and who has given great joy; she who

has opened her great but cut heart to help others heal and affirm their whole selves has come face to face with a problem which she cannot solve, with a choice she cannot make, with wrong on all sides. "Worn out," and without knowing what "Word" to call, she follows the path of her heart to love and minister to herself, to take care of her "prize," her "beat and beating heart." Baby Suggs dies "Soft as cream. Being alive was the hard part" (7). She was an inspiration with her heart, her 'Call,' her caring ministry, her understanding. In her affirmation of the whole individual, in her encouragement of spiritual expression in the totality of means, in her understanding of the power of the imagination and forces inside each individual, she helped to heal and transform her community and herself.

## CHAPTER III : SETHE

## THE FIRST CYCLE

The pattern of Sethe's life seems to be one of series of terrible events spaced between long years of forced forgetting. In between, there is usually one brief hiatus of beauty and joy. Sethe herself thinks "Was that the pattern?...Every eighteen or twenty years her unlivable life would be interrupted by a short-lived glory?" (173). In *Sethe*, Morrison details the inner and outer life of a woman who struggles and fights against that which would destroy her sense of self. She has the will to preserve herself, and to preserve those that she believes are hers. Sethe's strong sense of herself is shown through her willful acts to preserve it against the most powerful attempts to destroy it. She survives, each time, but the pain and the memories are so deep that the quality of her existence becomes yet another sacrifice she makes to ensure her self. Her journey towards having "a life" (46) is at the mysterious heart of *Beloved*. She is willing to love, and to bond herself to others, but also has to relinquish and suffer loss.

In a novel which examines closely the relationships, or the lack thereof, between mothers and daughters, Sethe is the character who is a mother and who remembers her own mother. She was born in "Carolina maybe? or was it Louisiana?" (30). When Sethe remembers her mother,

her memories dwell surprisingly often on the importance of trying to recognize and discern which woman is her Ma'am. The distinction of "a cloth hat as opposed to a straw one, singularity enough in that world full of cooing women" (30). A woman named Nan was in charge of nursing the babies and cooking, but Sethe remembers her mother, especially by the mark which her mother showed her, "a circle and a cross burned right in the skin" (61), a way for Sethe to recognize her. Sethe responds "But how will you know me?" (61), asks for her mother to mark her, and receives her mother's slap. Once she has her own "mark," she can understand why her mother slapped her. But when Sethe's Ma'am is hung, although she looks for the mark, the body is so marked that the circle and cross are unrecognizable.

Although Nan and Ma'am used "different words," and Sethe thought she had forgotten what they had said, with Beloved's arrival and questioning, it returns to her memory:

Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home except singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan had told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. The same language her ma'am spoke, and which would never come back. But the message--that was and had been there all along...she was picking meaning out of a code she no longer understood. Nighttime. Nan holding her with her good arm, waving the stump of the other in the air. "Telling you. I'm telling you, small girl Sethe," and she did that. She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away...The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. (62)

The deep re-memory of her mother remains with Sethe in spite of the

loss of language and the lack of experience shared with her mother in her mother's culture or in slavery. But Sethe knows that she was named, kept, and that her mother had loved her father even though she was never "cared for" by her mother. She finds that when she is questioned about why her mother was hung, "Something privately shameful...had slipped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross" (61). Had her mother run? And if she had, she had left Sethe. This anguished relationship (or lack of relationship) with her mother allows one to more deeply understand Sethe's passionate reactions as a mother herself. When Sethe describes caring for Mrs. Garner, she says:

I tended her like I would have tended my own mother if she needed me. If they had let her out the rice field, because I was the one she didn't throw away. I couldn't have done more for that woman than I would my own ma'am if she was to take sick and need me and I'd have stayed with her till she got well or died. And I would have stayed after that except Nan snatched me back. Before I could check for the sign. It was her all right, but for a long time I didn't believe it. I looked everywhere for that hat. Stuttered after that. (201)

Sethe cannot accept that her mother would abandon her, and begins to stutter--a reflection of her loss, a loss of voice, of expression, similar to that of Denver when she cannot accept her fears about her mother.

Sethe loved and needed her mother, the concept of "mother." She needed to be cared for and to care for, and it becomes a deep loss in her life. In a particularly poignant passage, Sethe equates her own love for her mother with her daughter's love in coming back from the dead to her:

You came right on back like a good girl, like a daughter which is what I wanted to be and would have been if my ma'am had been able to get out of the rice long enough before they hanged her and let me be one....I never saw her own smile. I wonder what they was doing when they was caught. Running, you think? No. Not that. Because she was my ma'am and nobody's ma'am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she now? Leave her in the yard with a one-armed woman? Even if she hadn't been able to suckle the daughter for more than a week or two and had to turn her over to another woman's tit that never had enough for all.  
(203)

In many ways, Sethe's love for her mother, and the deep pain it causes her results in her "thick" love for her own children; but the reverse may be just as true. Perhaps in Sethe's loving as a mother, she cannot help but reflect back on her experience as a daughter. In trying to heal her loss of mother in her own experience as a mother, Sethe is confronted with a situation in which there is no way to avoid further loss.

At Sweet Home, Sethe encounters a different kind of slavery where the owners, the Garners, encourage their six slaves to think; "they were believed and trusted, but most of all they were listened to" (125). The Garner's radical type of slave mastery allows their slaves to feel a type of autonomy--a feeling of being able to make one's own choices--which leads to further inevitable loss and pain. Sethe becomes Baby Suggs' replacement in the house. She remembers:

she ...had to bring a fistful of salsify into Mrs. Garner's kitchen every day just to be able to work in it, feel like some part of it was hers, because she wanted to love the work she did, to take the ugly out of it...(22)

At Sweet Home, the slaves can almost imagine that they "own" themselves and their work, they can almost imagine that they can

love, but in reality it is truly "ugly." The very thought of trying to love her work and "take the ugly out of it" reflects deeply upon the character of Sethe. She dares to own her life: to love, to need, to possess, to create.

Sweet Home offers Sethe the illusory chance to believe in many things. She is able to "choose" her husband, Halle, and when he asks her to marry him, she agrees. She expects there to be "A preacher, some dancing, a party, a something" (26) and feels disturbed when all she receives is permission from her owners. To make her marriage special for herself Sethe makes a dress out of scraps of cloth, but the only ceremony is that Halle "hung his hitching rope from a nail on the wall of her cabin" (26). But although Sweet Home on the surface seems 'comfortable' the reality of it is a cruel and wounding joke. Just as Halle and Sethe, coupling in the cornfield "were under the impression that they were hidden" but were on "public display" (26) or as though Sethe's efforts "in a whitewoman's kitchen could make it hers" (23), it is all illusion. Sethe describes:

[she] had the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that "somebody" son who fathered every one of her children. A blessing she was reckless enough to take for granted, lean on, as though Sweet Home really was one. (23).

Sethe and Halle love each other, they have a family and they love their children, despite the obstacles they face. Sethe and Halle rarely are able to see each other in daylight, and Sethe is unable to put her children's, Halle's or her own needs and care above those of her owners'.

With the Garners, the male slaves are under the impression that they are "Sweet Home men," and Sethe that she is a woman, wife and mother. But with the death of Mr. Garner and the arrival of the new master who they call "Schoolteacher" and his nephews, this impression is shattered. Schoolteacher quickly asserts his ownership over the slaves, beating them to show that "definitions belonged to the definers-- not the defined" (190), and Schoolteacher's definition of slaves was more animal than human. As Sethe expresses, "Schoolteacher was teaching us things we couldn't learn" (191). She describes:

He liked the ink I made. It was her [Mrs. Garner's] recipe, but he preferred how I mixed it and it was important to him because at night he sat down to write in his book. It was a book about us but we didn't know that right away. We just thought it was his manner to ask us questions. He commenced to carry round a notebook and write down what we said. I still think it was them questions that tore Sixo up. Tore him up for all time. (37)

Schoolteacher, Sethe describes, "wrapt that [measuring] string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth" (191). When she discovers the reason for this, Sethe encounters the very depth of racism; its dehumanizing and debasing premises and results change and hurt her to such an extent that she never shares this with anyone except Beloved. Schoolteacher was measuring her so that his students could list her "human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right" (193). Sethe's reaction of feeling "fine needles" sticking in her scalp is a foreshadowing of the hummingbirds to come, outside of the woodshed. She begins to think of her self, of her children, and of a future. The clarity of how

intolerable their situation is sharpens after a conversation with Halle when he mentions the phrase "while the boys is small" (196-7). The decision to run follows closely afterwards, even though most of them have no comprehension of how to, or where to go, and the defining urgency for Sethe is her children. She says, "No notebooks for my babies and no measuring string neither" (198).

When the plan to run materializes, Sethe has besides her two young sons a nursing baby daughter and is six months pregnant. However careful and cunning they have been, the escape does not proceed as planned. Sethe later says, "The one set of plans she had made--getting away from Sweet Home--went awry so completely she never dared life by making more" (38). What happens is at the center of Sethe's pain. The shocked disbelief of being considered an animal becomes reality, and Sethe is changed--"Once, long ago, she was soft, trusting" (189). It is not only Sethe who is changed for all time, but all of the slaves at Sweet Home.

Sethe does not know why the others are not ready to leave, when the moment comes, but she makes sure that her three children are on the "train". She sends them off, her baby daughter still nursing. It is a supreme effort for her--"Then you know what its like to send your children off when your breasts are full," (16). She remains only because Halle is not there, and she returns to look for him. But she has to get them away from Sweet Home, and she is determined to get to them; she says, "I had milk...All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me," (16).

This determination in many ways relates back to her own mother. She explains:

Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left. (200)

Sethe did not have the milk that was her own; she had no real mother of her own--she has never been recognized as owning anything, but she herself knows and fights for ownership and for her baby's. This is where she is hurt the most--the schoolteacher and his nephews insult, assault, inflict, invade this most central part of Sethe. They take her milk from her and from her baby; the nephews assault her body, her motherhood, violating her sense of self as a woman and her sense of self as a mother. Her milk is perhaps the only thing which she owns, and that she can give exclusively to her children. Her milk is her only means of nurturing her babies; it is exclusively hers and her babies'. Sethe now has to live with the memory that "those boys came in there and took my milk...Held me down and and took it" (16). This violation is one which Sethe can not and will not forget, although it hurts her terribly. She explains, "they handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses" (200).

As if this were not enough, add to it schoolteacher sitting watching and writing it all down in his notebook with the ink that

Sethe herself had made. Then, eighteen years later, she discovers that her husband Halle had been above her in the loft, watching:

I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up. I am still full of that, god damn it, I can't go back and add more. Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft--hiding close by--the one place her thought no one would look for him, looking down on what I couldn't look at at all.(79)

Despite her own anger and bitterness, and despite her understanding of Halle's impotence in watching his wife being sexually abused, Sethe realizes that even he had more power in this situation than she. The loss is too great. Sethe cannot hold it in and tells Mrs. Garner what has happened. She says, "Somebody had to know it. Hear it. Somebody" (202).

This action, Sethe's assertion of autonomy in the face of her violation results in further violation. "Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree" (16). When Sethe tells this to Paul D, it is interesting to note that while he cannot believe that they would "use cowhide" on her when she was pregnant, but Sethe can only respond, "And they took my milk," (16). In the supreme effort to protect their property, Sethe explains that they "dug a hole for my stomach so as not to hurt the baby" (202). The position of the slave woman is painfully clear: to be denied the basic role of motherhood and in its place to reproduce to increase the owner's property. The institution of slavery inflicts upon slave women this alienation from themselves as women and from their children--as Sethe's own mother had "thrown"

her offspring. Yet, although schoolteacher treats Sethe as an animal, takes from her her milk, and while whipping her protects what he thinks is his property, Sethe claims her self and her children as her own. Hers. Schoolteacher may use her ink, but he cannot take away her belief that her milk and her child are hers and not his to use. She will not let him use her words, either. She describes, "Bit a piece of my tongue off when they opened my back. It was hanging by a shred. Clamped down on it, it come right off. I thought, Good God, I'm going to eat myself up" (202). She wills not to be a product for schoolteacher's use, and remains silent. In yet a further irony, the "tree" that grows on her back--reminiscent of the trees her race are hung from and tied to--is labeled a chokecherry tree. She is "choked." And she now has a "mark" on her body, just as her mother had. Sethe asserts ownership of herself and refuses to collude, confronting what has dehumanized, debased and debilitated her spirit. She takes her first positive, independent step towards a long journey towards healing despite what has happened, surviving what is to come, and coming to a wholeness of self through it all.

Sethe never finds Halle. She has to leave without him. Her "crossing" is done alone, badly beaten, and her baby pressing to be born. Her feet are destroyed by the journey, "Her leg shaft ended in a loaf of flesh scalloped by five toenails, but she could not, would not, stop, for when she did the little antelope rammed her with horns and pawed the ground of her womb with impatient hooves," (30). Sethe cannot remember why she thinks of an antelope, but connects it back

to near unconscious memories of her Ma'am, back to the African dances which are her lost heritage. She remembers how when they danced, they "shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did," (31). She herself is in a Middle Crossing, suffering, remembering what those before her had lost while she herself is trying to attain that state of being "unchained". In a field of wild onions, Sethe believes that she is going to die:

That on a ridge of pine near the Ohio River,  
trying to get to her three children, one of whom was starving  
for the food she carried; that after her husband had  
disappeared; that after her milk had been stolen, her back  
pulped, her children orphaned, she was not to have an easeful  
death. (31)

She thinks that she is going to be discovered by a whiteboy and in a primal reaction she prepares to fight. She describes, "a SOMETHING came up out of the earth into her...Suddenly she was eager for his eyes, to bite into them; to gnaw his cheek" (31). She connects with the power of the earth, with the roots and demands the nourishment she needs to assuage what has been, to preserve life while taking it. But it turns out to be a whitegirl, Amy Denver, who has herself been a victim. Amy, in her own peculiar way, meets Sethe's needs and saves her life.

Amy's "dreamwalker's voice" (79) quiets the antelope, and holds Sethe's mind. She does "magic" for Sethe, massaging the feet and legs saying "It's going to hurt now...Anything dead coming back to

life hurts," (35). Amy tries to soothe Sethe's back with spiderwebs and gives the first description of the tree:

it's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See,  
here's the trunk--it's red and split wide open, full of sap,  
and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a  
mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, looks like, and dern if  
these ain't blossoms...Your back got a whole tree on it. In  
bloom. What God had in mind, I wonder. (79)

Amy ties some leaves in cloth for Sethe to use on her feet, and takes her back to the river where they find a "whole boat to steal. It had one oar, lots of holes and two bird nests" (83).

As Sethe reaches the river her, own water breaks. In bittersweet irony, she gives birth to her baby in the sinking boat, her baby "Face up and drowning in its mother's blood" (84). But the baby is alive, and together they wrap up the baby. In this context, during a rare narrative break, Morrison provides a unique insight:

Spores of bluefern growing in the hollows  
along the riverbank float toward the water in silver-blue  
lines hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right  
at the river's edge when the sunshots are low and drained.  
Often they are mistook for insects--but they are seeds in  
which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And  
for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one--will  
become all of what is contained in the spore: will live out  
its days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer  
than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself. (86)

The idyllic surface of nature is juxtaposed with the bloodied and wounded woman fighting for her life and that of her newborn infant. But even the spores can only believe and hope for the future, and their spores may last no longer than that moment. And Sethe's baby girl is indeed a "seed" for a whole generation who can only dream that they and she will have a future, and "live out" their days.

Sethe finally makes it to Halle's mother's place with the help of Stamp Paid and a woman named Ella. Her children, she learns, made it too. Baby Suggs welcomes her with her big heart and sets about trying to heal and soothe. Her ministering to Sethe is a ritual of cleansing and healing, a kind of baptism:

She led Sethe into the keeping room and, by the light of a spirit lamp, bathed her in sections, starting with her face. Then, while waiting for another pan of heated water, she sat next to her and stitched grey cotton. Sethe dosed and woke to the washing of her hands and arms. After each bathing, baby covered her with a quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen...When Sethe's legs were done, Baby looked at the feet and wiped them lightly. She cleaned between Sethe's legs with two separate pans of hot water and then tied her stomach and vagina with sheets. Finally she attacked the unrecognizable feet. (93)

Sethe mercifully cannot feel her feet as Baby soaks and cleans them. Baby then softens and cleans Sethe's nipples, enabling her to feed her newborn for the first time. But Baby has yet to discover the horror of Sethe's back where "Roses of blood blossomed" (93). When she does, Baby cannot speak but acts to heal it. During the night Sethe is annointed with oil, has Baby's hands of healing laid on her, is cleansed and purified the water Baby carefully prepares, is bound back together, has her milk returned to her and has her wounds covered with soothing balm.

When Sethe finally sees her children again, her joy is almost complete. Her husband, her childrens' father and Baby's son is not there. She tries not to let her children see anything but love in her eyes. For the first time in her life, she is free:

Sethe had had twenty eight days--the travel of one whole moon--of unslaved life...Days of healing, ease and

real-talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, their habits; where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own, which made it better. One taught her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and DECIDE what to do with the day. That's how she got through the waiting for Halle. Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another. (95)

Sethe is free and is part of a free community of people like herself. Although she has lost the communion she shared with her husband, she has gained a new kind of communion. And what she shares is for the first time truly hers to share. She describes in her own words exactly what it meant to her:

I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too.  
Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own.  
Decided. And it came off right, like it was supposed to. We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. I had help, of course, lots of that, but still it was me doing it; me saying, GO ON, and NOW. Me having to look out. Me using my own head. But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before. It felt good. Good and right. I was big,..and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was THAT wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon--there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. (162)

Sethe's life is radically changed. Her spirit is born again in an environment where it has a chance to survive. She owns her body, her mind, her desire; she learns what it means to be freely responsible, able to make decisions and see their consequences without fear. Her sense of self and joy grows and expands as her love becomes hers to feel and give.

As Sethe heals and learns to live a life that is free, the air

of celebration and thanksgiving grows. Stamp Paid felt the goodness of life, and ignoring his own difficulty in picking, went out and picked two buckets of blackberries. The berries tasted "so good and happy that to eat them was like being in church. Just one of the berries and you felt anointed" (136). Baby decides to prepare something "worthy of the man's labor and his love" (136), everyone helps out and soon they prepare a feast for ninety people. The occasion was such that eighteen years later, the community remembers it and how young and happy they had been. Crucial to the story, however, and to Sethe's life, is the reaction of the community following the feast. In the morning, they are angry and envious:

124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy?...Loaves and fishes were His powers--they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale...Who had never been lashed by a ten-year-old whiteboy as God knows they had...It made them furious....the bounty, the reckless generosity on display at 124. [They] whispered to each other in the yards about fat rats, doom and uncalled-for pride. (137)

That next morning, Baby can only smell their disapproval, and Stamp Paid can only watch where Baby is watching. And the community does not aid the family at 124 Bluestone.

The concept of community is crucial in Beloved. In practical ways, the community is necessary just for survival--especially in the days of slavery. But spiritually, community is the foundation of the individual. With community comes the power of sharing, of taking and giving. With community comes the power of exchanging gifts. Within a community one can find, like Sethe had found, power which is

"communal, circular, mutual, cooperative" rather than "elitist, hierarchical, dominating, and competitive" (Weber, 12-13). Sethe had "women friends, men friends...to share grief with" (96). In this case of anger and envy, the community is made up of individuals who have all been debilitated and poisoned by the effects of racism and slavery, and they do not draw together to protect and empower each other; yet, later, the individuals of the community recognize their failure, unlike the "enslaving" community surrounding them, and "share in a guilt that makes them morally alive" (Otten, 88).

When Sethe's personal apocalyptic "four horsemen" arrive in the form of schoolteacher, a nephew, the sheriff and a slave-catcher, the community does nothing:

nobody sent a fleet-footed son to cut 'cross a field soon as they saw the four horses in town...Not Ella, not John, not anybody ran down or to Bluestone road, to say some new whitefolks with the Look just rode in. The righteous Look every Negro learned to recognize along with his ma'am's tit. Like a flag hoisted, this righteousness telegraphed and announced the faggot, the whip, the fist, the lie, long before it went public. Nobody warned them, and he'd [Stamp Paid] always believed it wasn't the exhaustion from a long day's gorging that dulled them, but some other thing--like, well, meanness--that let them stand aside, or not pay attention, or tell themselves somebody else was probably bearing the news already to the house on Bluestone Road where a pretty woman had been living for almost a month. Young and deft with four children....Maybe they just wanted to know if Baby really was special, blessed in some way they were not. (157)

The "Look" which the four horsemen display is the antithesis of the spirituality expressed in the lives of this community. This "righteousness" gives sanction to slavery, to the immoral dehumanization of human beings; it gives sanction to the destruction

of the bodies, minds and emotions of sovereign beings. Baby Suggs' 'Call,' and the spirituality which she affirms, are in direct opposition to this "Look" of "righteousness." To see it is to know that terrible things are about to happen to someone. Yet the community reacts with spitefulness and jealousy, all individuals disregarding the responsibility to themselves and to each other. No one warns Sethe, and she is forced to make her "rough choice." When Sethe sees the horsemen and recognizes schoolteacher's hat, she has to decide what to do. It is too late to escape. Her choice to try and kill herself and her children is at the crux of the novel. Her choice is at the center of the deepest issues the novel explores: reflecting them, forcing one to consider the paradoxes, the causes and effects, the alternatives, the lack of alternatives. There is no easy way out of this choice; a mother has to choose between the moral and spiritual consequences of slavery versus murder and suicide. As she expresses her freedom and autonomy she attempts to kill herself and enslaves herself in another way. Both options are devastating. In expressing her mother-love, she kills.

Toni Morrison, during a McNeill Lehrer interview aired on PBS, said of Sethe that she has no right to do it, but it was the right thing to do. What Sethe knows is the condition of slavery, which is to her worse than death for her children and herself. In death, they would be "safe" and together; in slavery they would be separated, abused, used, their selves changed unrecognizably. Sethe will take the action in which she has the control, in which she can determine

the outcome which she believes is the right one, no matter how the pain of it rips her apart. In attempting to liberate, she is captured and held in slavery to the memory. Rather than liberating herself to the freedom of death she gains the deadness of a life trying to not remember or feel.

The moment of choice and the actions which follow are seen through the eyes of different characters in the novel. Stamp Paid remembers how "she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how she collected them every which way" (157). Images of birds abound in the descriptions of Sethe as she acts out her choice, reflecting not only the harsh reality of nature or mother nature, fierce protectiveness and yet the necessity of the kill, but also the swiftness and flight. It is an escape--a flying away into the safety of the sky. Sethe, trying to explain it to Paul D, remembers:

Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nonono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe.  
(163)

The sound of wings can mean many things: the wings which gather and hide the chicks under their warmth and protection, the wings which signal a swift death. It is of note that Sethe imagines hummingbirds, which one associates with nectar and sweetness, in the context of the "sugar teat" that had nourished her children in their journey to

freedom, and in the context of the "sweetness" and craving for sweets which are nearly synonymous with the character of Beloved. For Sethe, there is no way in which she will "let em live under schoolteacher" (163) so she "makes a way out of no way" (95) and uses the saw in the woodshed.

For the white men, they cannot imagine "what she want to go and do that for?" (150), whereas Schoolteacher considers "what happened when you overbeat creatures God had given you responsibility of--the trouble it was, and the loss...you just can't mishandle creatures and expect success" (150), creatures such as the hounds or a horse. This ironically makes absolute sense of why Sethe did do it. She is not a "creature" for whom Schoolteacher is responsible--she is responsible for herself and for her children. By this action, she paradoxically asserts her humanity, and finds a way which "stopped him in his tracks" (164). She and her children will not be considered as animals, will not be treated as such. When Paul D and Sethe eventually talk of this, he makes a terrible mistake when he suggests that Sethe is an animal. He says, "There could have been another way. Some other way" and she asks, "What way?" to which he responds "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (165). Sethe chooses the way she took because she knows that her children and herself are human. Because of their humanity and the inhumanity of slavery she choses death. Her "thick" love for her children and her newfound self will not allow them to return to that 'hell' again.

As Terry Otten writes, "her retort 'what way?' remains

unanswered ... the truth remains a paradox ... Sethe could not have remained innocent whatever she chose. Either she would violate her love or offend the moral code" (90). The fact that she does violate her love by killing, and that she is perhaps defending morality by defying slavery only enhances the ambiguity. The dilemma of Sethe's action is never resolved, and she has to bear the consequences of it. Immediately, she is changed--even the white men can see that. Schoolteacher thinks, "the woman--something was wrong with her" and notes that of all of the eyes in the shed, "the worst ones were those of the nigger woman who looked like she didn't have any. Since the whites in them had disappeared and since they were as black as her skin, she looked blind" (150).

Blindness and the empty eyes which even eighteen years later Paul D notes as "punched out eyes" connote many things: blind justice, blinding pain, the reaction to witnessing such horror, and the refusal to witness it. The gaze, like the voice, is an integral part of the individual. The eyes, for example, are the point of view--the channel through which one perceives the world. They are a way of expressing power (as in holding in one's gaze) or a way of receiving (as in seeing love in another's eyes). Sethe's eyes are emptied, "her eyes did not pick up a flicker of light. They were like two wells...Even punched out they needed to be covered, lidded, marked with some sign to warn folds of what that emptiness held" (9). She has seen her mother's decaying body; she has seen herself categorized as an animal, milked like an animal, her most meaningful

and only true possession stolen from herself and her children, has been beaten worse than an animal; she has seen her friends hanging dead from beautiful trees. But in trying to keep her children and herself from seeing these things and more, she has seen her children dying, has seen herself pass the handsaw over her baby's throat, has seen her baby's life blood pump out. Her vision is changed. The last colors she sees are the red blood of her children and the pink shades of a gravestone.

After hurting the two boys and slitting the throat of the crawling-already baby, Stamp Paid runs in and catches Denver before Sethe can swing her against the wall. Baby Suggs takes control and tends to the living, but soon Sethe and Denver are taken away by the sheriff. As she leaves, the distinct separation between herself and the community is made clear:

Outside a throng, now, of black faces stopped murmuring...Sethe walked past them their silence and hers. She climbed in to the cart, her profile knife-clean...a profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once, the moment she appeared...Some cape of sound would have quickly have been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and steady her on the way. As it was, they waited till the cart turned about...And then no words. Humming. No words at all.  
(152)

Besides the emptiness in her eyes, the cloak which should have surrounded her is now isolating her, and there are no words, only humming which recalls the hummingbirds stinging her. Sethe's experience in prison is dark, visually and spiritually. Sethe is not the only one darkly affected by her action. Her two sons, Howard and

Buglar, have been permanently changed by the woodshed and will not allow Sethe near them when she is allowed to attend the burial of her daughter. Sethe recalls how she did not see all the people there, "just the box" and does not remember the words spoken except for the "first two" (183), which were "Dearly Beloved."

Sethe is not hanged, and is not sent back to slavery. Although the reason for this is never fully revealed, the reader learns that Mr. Bodwin and the The Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio, have something to do with it, as does schoolteacher's conviction that his slave is no longer functional. Margaret Garner, the historical figure after whom Sethe is modelled, was ironically tried not for murder, but for stealing property from her owner--herself. She was duly found to be guilty and was returned to her master. Morrison, however, departs from history to explore how a woman, a mother and an ex-slave continues on living. Through Sethe the untold story of countless slave women is given voice. Her pain and joy, fear and courage as she re-memories being a slave and as she learns to live a free life has not been historically expressed. Sethe's life is a testament to remembering the strength and power of African-American women who experienced the institutional evil of slavery. Morrison, through Sethe, can explore the ramifications of slavery: how a mother survives following the deep devastation of her self as mother, how a woman can confront her pain-filled past and fractured self and come to a point of rebirth into a spiritual wholeness.

#### CHAPTER IV : SETHE THE SECOND CYCLE

Sethe's time in jail marks yet another breaking point in her life, a time when her entire existence has turned into something unforeseen and different. In darkness of her cell and her isolation from the outside world Sethe's imprisonment can be seen either as a womb or a tomb. Perhaps this time is necessary for her to collect her strength and learn to consciously bury the memory of her child's death; perhaps it is a period of learning to deaden what life had been sparked in her during the previous twenty eight days of recombination, joy and communion. When she emerges from her cell, she has only one final step to take before she can continue on as a person who does not really live but just exists for certain clearly defined purposes: protecting her remaining children and beating back the past.

Sethe's first action following her release from prison is to get a headstone for her daughter's grave. This incident is recalled often throughout the book, and is very important in Sethe's memory. She recalls, "I didn't have money enough for the carving so exchanged...what I did have" (184). In exchange for ten minutes of sex, she has one of the words she remembers from the burial engraved--"Beloved"--which she figures was "the one word that

mattered" (5). The memory of this is one which is distinctively a re-memory, one of those "things [that] just stay[s]...there for you, waiting" (36,7). Sethe re-memories:

The welcoming cool of unchiseled headstones; the one she selected to lean against on tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave. Pink as a fingernail it was, and sprinkled with glittering chips...She thought it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new. That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust...but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil. (4,5)

This deeply poignant and significant passage contains a myriad of meanings. The fact that she is performing this act of "barter" is at once demeaning and redeeming. Sethe describes it as she would the pigs in the slaughterhouse yard, an animal act, a terrible, repugnant act. The onlooking son recalls the stealing of her milk. Yet, in another revelation of the horror of slavery, she at least owns herself to sell herself, and this time she has a choice. This time she, in a way, takes her self for her child, rather than being taken from and losing what she would give to her child.

It is a type of punishment for herself--an expression of her suffering, and yet an expression of her deep love for her daughter. It is an act of lowering herself in the public's eye, yet one which 'proves' to them how strong her love is. The description of "her knees wide open as a grave" connotes many things in itself. The act of creation becomes one of destruction, birth is connected to death;

Sethe sees her life-giving parts as a grave. The stone is ironically "dawn-colored", associating it with the beginning, with birth, whereas her womb feels to her a grave; issue from it is dead. More has been killed than her daughter. The color of the stone is the last she sees for eighteen years.

Immediately following this, the baby's ghost takes up residence at 124 Bluestone. It is almost as though by naming the "crawling-already?" girl Sethe liberates her to take shape and form as an identity. The first lines of the book describe the ghost; "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom." Sethe gets a job as a cook in town, "working, working dough. Nothing better than that to start the day's serious work of beating back the past" (73). Sethe expresses that "The 'better life' she believed she and Denver were living was simply not that other one [in slavery]...As for Denver, the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered" (42). She lives in isolation from the community with Baby Suggs, her children and the ghost until Baby dies and the two boys run away leaving her, Denver and the ghost alone. Sethe lives for Denver, and is fiercely protective of her; as she says, "I'll protect her while I'm live and I'll protect her when I ain't" (45).

The arrival of Paul D transforms Sethe's life. Not only is he an old friend, but he is the first adult she has been able to really talk to since Baby died: "For twelve years...there had been no visitors of any sort and certainly no friends" (12). He makes it

through the ghost's brace and Denver's opposition, and begins to share life with Sethe. On the first night he is at 124, Sethe is able to share with him her final experiences Sweet Home. In a ritual reminiscent of the way in which both Amy and Baby Suggs ministered to Sethe, he traces the tree on her back as she weeps:

Behind her, bending down, his body an arc of kindness, he held her breasts in the palms of his hands. He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches...he touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years. What she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands. (18)

Sethe's sorrow as reflected by the physical carving on her back is indeed wide and intricate, yet she can now share it with Paul D and lay it down with his presence to support and encourage her. The weight of her breasts, which are so intrinsic to her motherhood, and which in some ways are also symbolic of the suffering she has endured for her children, is relieved. She can unburden her heart at last as tears long held back wash her. With a revealing indication of the last eighteen years of her life, Sethe wonders:

Maybe this one time she could stop dead still...and feel the hurt her back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank? (18)

Sethe relearns in these moments what it means to enter into herself and experience and feel life in its fullness. Even though it is unbearably painful, she once again recognizes her spiritual needs and considers the possibility of renewal and rebirth as a whole person.

In is at this moment that the ghost reacts violently, and Paul D

confronts it and drives it out. Then he reminds Sethe of desire, even though she "had forgotten how it worked" (20). Paul D brings Sethe back to life, stirring her physically and emotionally, reminding her of the unfathomable joy sensuality brings to a life. Sethe begins to regain the idea of a "life", begins to remember how it felt to really "live."

With Paul D there, although Denver resents his presence, Sethe begins to feel as though she can depend on someone else--learn to trust again. When Paul D asks her how things are, on the "inside", Sethe responds, "I don't go inside" (46). But Paul D assures her:

Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out...We can make a life, girl. A life. (46)

The terror of the "inside", of the memories, and of the past has made it practically impossible for Sethe to live in the present. Paul D not only is a living reminder of the past, but has more of it to fill in for her. She thinks:

I don't want to know or have to remember that. I have other things to do: worry, for example, about Denver...about age and sickness not to speak of love...but her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day...Other people went crazy, why couldn't she? (70)

Yet every individual must in some way be able to reconcile the self with its past in order to be a complete individual. The past is part of the living self, and has helped to make it what it is, rather as the roots of a tree support it. With Paul D, Sethe begins this

process, and although it is terribly hard, she is willing to risk it with him. She describes:

No matter what he told and what he knew, she wanted him in her life...Trust and rememory...the way she believed it could be when he cradled her before the cooking stove. The weight and angle of him; the true-to-life beard hair on him; arched back, educated hands. His waiting eyes and awful human power. The mind of him that knew her own. Her story was bearable because it was his as well--to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other--the things neither had word-shapes for--well, it would come in time.... (99)

Almost repeating Baby Suggs' litany of what to love--the whole, in all of its aspects--Sethe recognizes all of Paul D, and what he means to her. It is not only his mind, but his weight, his hands, his angles, his story. Her barren life changes:

He was responsible for that. Emotions sped to the surface in his company. Things became what they were: drabness looked drab; heat was hot. Windows suddenly had a view. And wouldn't you know he'd be a singing man. (39)

For the first time, she can really share her life and find communion. With Halle, their relationship had been so whittled by slavery that she had not been able to truly give of herself and take for herself. For how could one really trust another when that other is regulated by a slave owner. This is a big first step for both Sethe and Paul D, and although they both recognize that it will take time, there truly is a mountainful of the past which neither one feels able to attempt to view yet, let alone cross.

Just as they are together beginning to feel like they might have a "life", to feel like they may be able to be a family, another person arrives at 124 Bluestone. This arrival is even more dramatic

for Sethe. As soon as they see the figure in the distance, Sethe has to void water:

Sethe's bladder filled to capacity...the water she voided was endless...there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now. (51)

Morrison privileges the reader with the knowledge that the newcomer is indeed more than a woman on the road. And Sethe's body reacts in a powerful way, but her mind does not discover the secret for some time. Denver and Paul D strongly react to the visitor as well.

The woman is thirsty, and drinks glass after glass of water. When asked for her name, she responds "Beloved" and spells it out for them. For Sethe, this name has a deep significance, reminding her instantly of the headstone, making her feel "especially kindly" (53) toward Beloved. Paul D recognizes that it is normal for a travelling woman to not want to mention what has gone before, but wonders at the newness of her shoes. Denver, however, shook, and "looked at this sleeping beauty and wanted more" (53). The woman seems to be ill, so Denver takes over the job of nursing her. Paul D questions Sethe about what she is going to do about Beloved, because he notices "Something funny 'bout that gal" (56), but Sethe likes her; she is company for Denver and no trouble for her.

Beloved, however, is more than "no trouble." As Beloved, they learn, craves sweets, she craves Sethe. As Sethe's returned baby daughter, Beloved yearns in the manner of an infant for her mother. The "crawling-already?" baby was only two when she died, yet she like Sethe herself has already twice experienced the rupture caused by

separation from her mother; once she was sent off to the North without Sethe, and then after only twenty eight days she was separated from her mother by her death. Her need for Sethe's love is the core of her existence. So begins their relationship. As "rainwater held on to pine needles for dear life...Beloved could not take her eyes off Sethe...Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (57). Beloved is associated from the first with water and thirst, and with her hunger for Sethe which she assuages using her eyes and her ears. Sethe is "flattered by Beloved's open, quiet devotion" (57). Sethe cannot deny that Beloved is hungry, and learns to feed her what she craves--herself, her presence, her story:

[Sethe] felt Beloved touch her. A touch no heavier than a feather but loaded, nevertheless, with desire...Sethe...looked around. First at Beloved's soft new hand on her shoulder, then into her eyes. The longing she saw there was bottomless. Some plea barely in control. (58)

Sethe learns to meet Beloved's craving by telling her stories. In a new way, Sethe learns to re-memory, to recall the past and meet it without the horror and pain she had felt before. This is different from her sharing of the past with Paul D, because it does not hurt her as badly. A new level of healing is broached:

It became a way to feed her...Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe...because every mention of her past life hurt...Even with Paul D, who had shared some of it and to whom she could talk with at least a measure of calm, the hurt was always there--like a tender place in the corner of her mouth that the bit left. But, as she began telling about the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it. Perhaps it was Beloved's distance from the events itself, or her thirst for hearing it--in any case it was an unexpected pleasure. (58)

Her "choke", her bitten tongue, the bit--all of those things which

had denied her expression and voice--have started to heal. Sethe finds herself speaking the "unspeakable" (58) but not all of it.

Sethe's relationship with Paul D is strained by Beloved's presence. Paul D feels that something is strange about Beloved, where Sethe defends her. As they grow closer, and she begins to hear more about what had happened in those last days at Sweet Home, Sethe reaches a breaking point. Although he had beaten the spirit out of her house, "a blessing, but in its place he brought another kind of haunting" (96). She has determined that she cannot go crazy and forget it, so she figures that what is left is to take Baby Suggs' advice, and "lay it all down" (86). She needs to lay down her "heavy knives of defense against misery, regret, gall and hurt"; she needs some "fixing ceremony" (86). Sethe decides to go to the Clearing in the footsteps of Baby, and look for a way to proceed.

Sethe takes Denver and Beloved to the Clearing and replays Baby Suggs' sermons in her mind. Sethe has determined to "lay it all down, make a way out of this no way" (95). She longs for Baby's fingers to rub her neck as they had in the past, and does get a touch from "the other side" (98). She believes that the fingers are Baby's when the touch turns into a strangling choke. Denver and Beloved rush to her and see the bruises on Sethe's neck. As Beloved rubs the splotches, Sethe comes to a decision:

Sethe moaned. The girl's fingers were so cool and knowing. Sethe's knotted, private, walk-on-water life gave in a bit, softened, and it seemed that the glimpse of happiness she caught...was a likelihood--if she could just manage the news Paul D brought and the news he kept to himself. Just manage it. Not break, fall or cry each time a

hateful picture drifted in front of her face...All she wanted was to go on...Why now, with Paul D instead of the ghost, was she breaking up?...Beloved's fingers were heavenly. Under them and breathing evenly again, the anguish rolled down. The peace Sethe had come there to find crept into her. (97)

Sethe takes the first steps to trusting and beginning a life when Beloved leans down and kisses her neck. She smells Beloved's breath which is "exactly like new milk" (98) and breaks away. Her new found peace slips away as she considers this, and later she believes that what really bothered her was the fact that the touch on her neck had been something else, not Baby's fingers; they reminded her of the ghost's touches. But her real concern is "to launch her newer, stronger life with a tender man" (99). She finds him, fittingly, in water; he stands up in his tub and holds her, soaking her dress. She thinks, "There was no question but that she could do it. Just like the day she arrived at 124--sure enough, she had milk enough for all" (100). It is another important point in her life, and the soaking dress and water reminds one of the birth by the riverside, of the pushing of her babies over to the "other side"; this time, however, she is giving life to a relationship, and in a way to herself. Perhaps it is time for her to nourish herself. But Beloved has other plans.

Paul D's discomfort with Beloved grows, until he feels that he cannot remain at 124 with Sethe. He tries to confront her with it, meeting her after she gets off from work, but he cannot tell her the truth. She thinks that he is going to leave her, and is prepared to "accept, release or excuse an in-need-or-trouble man...it was all right. No fault. Nobody's fault" (128). But instead he asks her to

have his child. She responds by saying that he is crazy, then they begin to laugh and play their way home. As they near the house, they stop and hold each other:

She let her head touch his chest, and since the moment was valuable to both of them, they stopped and stood that way--not breathing, not caring...Sethe closed her eyes. Paul D looked at the black trees lining the roadside, their defending arms raised against attack. Softly, suddenly, it began to snow, like a present come down from the sky. Sethe opened her eyes to it and said, 'Mercy.' And it seemed to Paul D that it was--a little mercy--something given them on purpose to mark what they were feeling so they would remember it later on when they needed to. (129)

This moment of shared love between them is at once beautiful and terribly sad. Clearly foreshadowed is a dark and coming storm which will change their lives. While they create new memories, there are still many memories they have not shared. It is Beloved and not Mercy who greets them at the door. Before she goes to sleep, Sethe considers Paul D's request. She knows that "unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (132). She wishes for a family, but one made up of Denver, Beloved, and the return of her sons, not a new child. She wonders if Paul D is jealous of the children she has.

It is Stamp Paid who once again starts the storm. He shows Paul D the newspaper clipping with Sethe's picture on it. Paul D only repeats that it can't be Sethe, that there must be some mistake. But the bloodspill resurfaces. When he asks Sethe about it, she attempts and answer, circling and wheeling around the room and the heart of the question. Sethe's effort to explain what had happened when schoolteacher came is a testimony to her love for Paul D and his love for her:

Perhaps it was the smile, or maybe the ever-ready love she saw in his eyes--easy and upfront, the colts, evangelists and children look at you: with love you don't deserve--that made her go ahead and tell him what she had not told Baby Suggs, the only person she felt obliged to explain anything to. (161)

She tells him of her love for her children, of learning to own herself, of the pleasure of being free to love. Of how it was a simple choice. Of how she "took and put her babies where they'd be safe" (164). When he tells her that her love is "too thick", she responds, "Too thick?...Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all" (164). To his questions, she tells him she believes that what she did worked, that "They ain't at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain't got em," (165). Paul D says "Maybe there's worse" and she responds, "It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (165). He tells her there must have been another way, and she says "What way?" at which point he responds, "You got two feet Sethe, not four" (165). The bond between them is shattered after Paul D says this; the bridge between them breaks. As Paul D leaves, Sethe thinks:

He must think I can't bear to hear him say it.  
That after all I have told him and after telling me how many feet I have, 'goodbye' would break me to pieces. Ain't that sweet. (165)

Sethe is once again faced with present pain. The choice she had made is once again brought to the surface, and she is judged and left, although there are other reasons for Paul D's departure which he keeps to himself. The question of what other way Sethe could have

gone remains unanswered. She has been "junkheaped for the third time because she loved her children" (174).

Sethe is left wondering how she could have believed and hoped that he would understand. She "despised herself for having been so trusting...so quick to surrender" (174). She recalls:

a few months of sunsplashed life...tentative greetings from other colored people in Paul D's company; a bed life for herself...every bit of it had disappeared. Was that the pattern?...Every eighteen or twenty years her unlivable life would be interrupted by a short-lived glory? (173)

Sethe feels that there is nothing left but to accept it. She decides, "if that's the way it was--that's the way it was" (173) and proceeds to take the two girls out ice-skating. She has to "lay it all down" again.

So begins a new phase in Sethe's life. The words "Nobody saw them falling" (174) are interspersed throughout the description of Sethe, Beloved and Denver's hilarious attempts at skating. There is an ominous beauty to this experience:

Exhausted finally they lay down on their backs...The sky above them was another country. Winter stars, close enough to lick, had come out before sunset. For a moment, looking up, Sethe entered the perfect peace they offered. Then Denver stood up and tried for a long, independent glide. The tip of her single skate hit an ice bump, and as she fell, the flapping of her arms was so wild and hopeless that all three--Sethe, Beloved and Denver herself--laughed till they coughed. Sethe rose to her hands and knees, laughter still shaking her chest, making her eyes wet. She stayed that way for a while, on all fours. But when her laughter died, the tears did not... (174-5)

This passage foreshadows what is to come, the laughter, the tears, the exhaustion, the foreign "country" that they will enter together. It also speaks of the peace for which Sethe struggles, and the

independence which Denver will eventually need to find. And it also strangely reminds the reader of Paul D's wounding remark of Sethe's having two feet with the mention of "on all fours."

With Paul D's absence, the stage is set for a new presence. For Sethe's deepest self, the question of how to resolve the terrible death of her child, and the terrible action she had chosen, must be resolved. She has to find an answer to her darkest fears concerning her mother, her self as a daughter and as a mother. Beloved had drawn the stories out of Sethe, taking away the deep pain, and now a new avenue is opened by Beloved. Sethe understands, finally, what Beloved is to her, and understands the desire and need which Beloved has for her. Interestingly, what makes it "click" is a song which Beloved hums, a song which Sethe had formed and sung only to her children. No one else knows this song. Reviewing the ways in which Baby Suggs knew her children, and the way in which her mother had tried to make sure Sethe knew her, Sethe knows. Coming through time, growth, decay, and even death, through the supreme efforts of the slave system to deny the slave any idea of family, there remain the guiding signs which have been passed on. In this case, it is fitting that it is a song, and one which Sethe herself had made--her own words, her own music. For Sethe, "The click had clicked; things were where they ought to be or poised and ready to glide in ... No gasp at a miracle that is truly miraculous because the magic lies in the fact that you knew it was there for you all along" (176). For Sethe, the ultimate miracle has happened; her daughter has returned to her.

The resurrection of Beloved means many things to Sethe. The tight knotted horror of what had happened, the memory which plagues her, the past which has haunted her can now be let go. With Beloved here in the flesh, Sethe feels blessed, vindicated, and forgiven, even though she has not been sure that she needed to be vindicated or forgiven. What had pained her has now been changed into joy. The past has been rewritten, and now she can look "straight at the shed, smiling at the things she would not have to remember now. Thinking, 'she ain't even mad with me, not a bit" (182). The craving and need which Beloved has exhibited for Sethe is now recognized, and Sethe can return her own for her daughter. She can now make sure that Beloved understands her: understands her reasons, her actions, her deep love. Sethe is changed:

Be nice to think first, before I talk to her,  
let her know I know. Think about all I ain't got to remember  
no more. Do like Baby said: think on it and then lay it  
down--for good. Paul D convinced me there was a world out  
there and that I could live in it. Should have known better.  
Whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world  
is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs  
to be. (182-3)

Sethe feels satisfied with her life, and now feels fulfilled in her life even in the lack of a community, and even with the loss of her relationship with Paul D. She feels she can now truly lay it all down.

In her own private inner soliloquy, Sethe considers the return of her Beloved, and shares with her the things which she has told to no one else. She unburdens the atrocities she has born, the crimes schoolteacher committed, the triumph of escaping, the love which

caused her to put Beloved where she would be safe, and the repercussions of her love. She thinks, " I don't have to remember nothing. I don't even have to explain...I thought you were mad with me. And now I know that if you was, you ain't now because you came back here to me" (183-4). Sethe considers the "body returned to her--just like it never went away, never needed a headstone. And the heart inside it had not for a single moment stopped in her hands" (198). Sethe locks the door to her home, and inside the women are "free at last to be what they liked, see whatever they saw and say whatever was on their minds. Almost. Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house...were the thoughts of the women in 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (199).

At this point, the narrative text breaks into four chapters which have captured a great amount of critical attention. In three, Sethe, Denver and Beloved each express their "unspeakable thoughts", but they are 'spoken' insofar as each has her own voice and memory. In the fourth discourse, all three and maybe more join in. These passages are dense, poetic, and in essence are re-memory in which time and space have collapsed. Sethe's discourse begins, "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine" (200). As the re-memory and thought rolls, she describes with vivid sensuality the colors, smells, shapes, feelings of what is deepest in her heart. In particular, she dwells upon being a daughter and being a mother, and how 'tough' love and survival are. She re-memories what she has survived, and what she has triumphed over. Her discourse ends in reminder of the

"peace" which she found during the ice-skating episode:

When I put that headstone up I wanted to lie  
in there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you  
warm, and I would have if Buglar and Howard and Denver didn't  
need me, because my mind was homeless them. I couldn't lay  
down with you then...I couldn't lay down nowhere in peace,  
back then. Now I can. I can sleep like the drowned, have  
mercy. She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine.  
(204)

Sethe tells her story, repeats it, verifies its existence, makes it real. Within the collapsed time and space, the past becomes the present and the future, as life and death collapse, as peace is associated with drowning, as a mind is homeless. Sethe has claimed her ownership, her possession, she has entered the place where one can lick icy stars. Yet, one wonders what happens when one sleeps the sleep of the drowned after the daughter one killed comes back to you in the flesh.

The raging desire for ownership and possession burns in the last discourse as well. Beloved makes it clear that she desires and possesses Sethe in return, and in both body and soul. The possession is so complete that Beloved claims Sethe as her own self, yet recognizing their separateness, claiming Sethe's face and smile as her own and asking, "Will we smile at me?" (215). The voices merge, the identities become unclear and in ways irrelevant as they claim their belonging to each other and ownership of each other repeating a litany of "You are mine" (216-17). Changeable and insistent, questioning and affirming, separate yet merging, the meanings flow on in pleading and giving. The claiming and naming is certain, but what is named and claimed is uncertain as in the forward: "I will call

them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." The struggle is established.

From being "spiteful" and then "loud," 124 Bluestone road is now "quiet" (239). Denver is forgotten as Sethe and Beloved immerse themselves in each other. There is no outlet, no outside interference in what happens at 124. Sethe gives and Beloved takes; they play games--sewing, cooking, dressing up, dressing hair, and singing. Sethe eventually loses her job, but does not care. All she does is give of everything she has to Beloved. Sethe spends her life savings and lavishes Beloved in every way she can. Denver watches closely, seeing that as for Beloved, "Anything she wanted she got," (240) and it becomes apparent that Beloved wants it all. Beloved begins to take over Sethe's identity, imitating her in every way. Beloved will not let Sethe forget what her love meant, and "lays claim to her very self" (Otten, 91). As Beloved grows in size, Sethe shrinks. Soon "it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who" (241). When Beloved's desires grow larger than Sethe's capacity to meet them, they begin to argue. Sethe is in a curious position. As Terry Otten writes:

Even as she [Sethe] assures herself...Yet she feels obligated to explain...True to the paradox, Sethe both seeks forgiveness and 'luxuriates' in it...Sethe seems more and more compelled to earn forgiveness, perhaps a realizing that reconciliation with Beloved is finally a way to forgive herself even while she rejects judgment. (91)

Sethe will not accept being judged by others for what she did, and the question of whether there was a 'lesser evil' remains. Yet, Sethe can hardly live with the reality of her own action; the horror

of it is very real to her. The struggle between Beloved and Sethe grows in strength with "A complaint from Beloved, an apology from Sethe ... Beloved accused ... Sethe cried ... Beloved wasn't interested ... Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons ... Beloved denied it" (241-2). Sethe is diminished in body and soul.

With all of the fighting, and without food, Denver describes how Sethe's eyes were "bright but dead, alert but vacant, paying attention to everything about Beloved ... limp and starving but locked in a love that wore everybody out" (242-3). Beloved, Denver finds, is "not like them...[she is] a wild game" (242), and Sethe is very ill. There seems to be no way out, Sethe can not forgive herself or find any way to truly redeem herself or compensate for what she had done to Beloved. Her fierce love and protectiveness for Beloved seems endless. Terry Otten observes that, "Trapped in a paradoxical relationship, needing to plead forgiveness in order to gain Beloved's assurance that in fact she does not need it, Sethe is rendered incapable of action" (91). Neither Beloved nor Sethe will give in, and so it is Denver who ventures out for help and support from the community. With food, the wrestling gains momentum, but Sethe is fading behind the strength, size and appetite of Beloved:

Then it seemed to Denver the thing was done:  
Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the  
teething child, for other than those times when Beloved  
needed her, Sethe confined herself to a corner chair. The  
bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter  
Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that never used to look  
away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed  
her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the

chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur. (250)

For Sethe, her most urgent need is to redeem herself, or punish herself, by convincing Beloved of her love, by making her understand her reasons, by gaining Beloved's acceptance of what she had done. She does not want Beloved to leave her.

In the last description of Sethe's thoughts before the community takes action and the 'haunting' ends, Denver explains:

Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that ... she knew Sethe's greatest fear was ... that Beloved might leave. That before Sethe could make her understand what it meant--what it took to drag the teethe of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood pumplike oil in her hands; to hold her face so her head would stay on; to squeeze her so she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through that adored body, plump and sweet with life--Beloved might leave. (251)

Sethe still has more to consider than the excruciating pain of what she had done to Beloved. What exists beyond this is the horrible reality which she tried to save them all from:

That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others had lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing--the part of her that was clean ... She might have to work the slaughterhouse yard, but not her daughter. And no on, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no ... Sethe had refused, and refused still. This and much more Denver heard her say ... trying to persuade Beloved, the one and only person she felt she had to convince, that what she had done was right because it came from true love. (251)

This discourse reveals Sethe's most painful re-memories and most impassioned beliefs and needs. She has been dirtied, treated as an animal, been sold and sold herself; she has been degraded physically, mentally and spiritually. But she will not allow her children to experience this, or to be hurt in this way through them. Perhaps her need is to protect herself from further 'dirtying' through them, but her protectiveness and love is focussed on them and she considers them and not herself "her best thing." There is no answer with which to resolve the paradox of Sethe's conflicting needs. Denver finally feels that "It was as though Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out" (252).

The community learns of what is happening at 124 through Denver, as Denver has found employment at the Bodwins, the same brother and sister who had helped both Baby Suggs and her mother. The women of the community react in different ways, but for all of their misgivings about Sethe and her pride, they decide to "get down to business" (257). The community of women understand that "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and nobody needed more" (256-7). They cannot "countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy" (256). And although they cannot accept the mother's killing of her child, they know "the children can't just up and kill the mama" (256). The women of the community gather together and congregate outside of 124, reversing the past eighteen years during which they had nothing to do with Sethe. They bring with them what they "believed would work" (257) and as they stand

outside 124, a curious thing happens. Rather than seeing Denver sitting on the steps waiting for Mr. Bodwin to pick her up for work, they see themselves as young girls, happy and satisfied at Baby Suggs' feast. They forget the feelings which had surfaced the following day, and their indignation at a "pup coming back to whip" (259) its mother grows. Ella leads the crowd by "hollering":

They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like. (259)

Mr. Bodwin, with his white hair and black hat, comes riding to pick Denver up for work as the sound of the women breaks open, and Sethe and Beloved appear in the doorway of 124. The women see Beloved and wonder at the beauty and cleverness of the "devil-child" who stands in the "shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling...Thunderblack and glistening...Her smile was dazzling" (261).

The women's voices take Sethe back to the Clearing, where the same voices had helped her find harmony and healing before. In this case, the voices have a similar effect:

the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water...it broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (261)

This is a new water which Sethe is coming through, a new ritual of cleansing and rebirth into the community. As she had broken water at Beloved's return, Sethe experiences healing water at Beloved's departure. This time, it is Beloved who is pregnant, not Sethe.

Perhaps Sethe's rebirth from the encompassing deep water of Beloved is signalled by this breaking of water. When expression cannot be found in words, when the water changes from drowning to baptizing, a new ritual of power breaks over Sethe.

Sethe looks and sees Mr. Bodwin riding up, and the past rises up to greet her. It is like a return to the crossroads she turned at in the woodshed. For when she looks at Mr. Bodwin, she perceives a previous picture:

his black hat wide brimmed enough to hide his face but not his purpose. He is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing. She hears wings. Little hummingbirds stick needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thinks anything, it is no. No no. Nonono. She flies. The ice-pick is not in her hand; it is her hand. (262)

The past has been made present in the flesh of Beloved, and now Sethe has returned to the past in the present. Sethe sees the slavers, the schoolteacher, the nephews, and instead of saving her "best thing," she sets out to destroy the man. She attacks the attacker and does not retreat to save herself and hers. This time, she will act upon her love for Beloved not by killing her, but by killing that which would hurt Beloved. Terry Otten writes:

In attacking him, Sethe achieves an exorcism; in saving Beloved by offering herself, she at last frees herself from the demonic presence that will not release her from the past. Once Sethe acts to save Beloved, retestifying to her love, the ghost disappears. (94)

It is true that Beloved is gone. Sethe has 're-written' the past, although in fact she attacked the one white man who had helped her in the past. The community has taken responsibility for what part it

played in the past. Denver, at least, now has ties and relationships with other and is no longer isolated and outcast. But Sethe had changed; Denver expresses that Sethe is "not a bit all right" (266) and thinks she may have "lost" her. Sethe won't get out of bed, and when Paul D works up to seeing her, her eyes are "expressionless". It is evident that she has not exorcised her own private pain when she reminds him of the ink she had made, but she reminds Paul D of Baby's end when she says "I'm tired...so tired. I have to rest a while...I don't have no plans. No plans at all" (271-2).

In yet another return to the past, Paul D asks to rub her feet and bathe her in a ritual of cleansing as Amy and Baby had; Paul D asks to minister to her, to bring what is dead back to life, to heal, to cleanse and empower her. Sethe's ties with the community of women have been restored as their waters baptized her; now Paul D will do likewise and heal the fracture between them, renewing the love and support they exchange. Sethe thinks:

This little place by a window is what I want.  
 And rest. There's nothing to rub now and no reason  
 to...assuming he even knows how. Will he do it in  
 sections?...ending with her exhausted breasts? And if he  
 bathes her in sections, will the parts hold?...She looks at  
 him...and sees it--the thing in him, the blessedness, that  
 has made him the kind of man who can walk in a house and make  
 the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could.  
 Cry and tell him things they only told each other: that time  
 didn't stay put; that she called, but Howard and Buglar  
 walked on down the railroad track and couldn't hear her; that  
 Amy was scared to stay with her...That her ma'am had hurt her  
 feelings and she couldn't find her hat anywhere and 'Paul  
 D?...She left me.' (272)

Her breasts are "exhausted" now. She no longer is bound by her mother-love, a bewildering feeling for a woman whose life and

identity have been so closely connected to her motherhood. Yet this leaves her free to concentrate on herself. The things that hurt her are still in her heart, but she has someone whose face "smoothed her heart down" (71) and whose mind "knew her own" (72). She can share with him what she cannot speak to any other, and she does. Her sorrow is spoken, Beloved's departure is shared, while Sethe cries and says "She was my best thing" (272).

The reader is left with many questions concerning Sethe, but also with some assurance, and with plenty of hope. Paul D will not leave Sethe, as he tells her "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (273). One feels that plans will be approached, pain will be shared and eased, joy and pleasure will grow between them. Sethe, one believes, will heal her past, will live her life, and will be able to plan a future. For in the end, Paul D reminds her "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (273).

Sethe's life seems to be a cyclical pattern of pain worse than death followed by rebirth and the hope of happiness. She has experienced the loss of her voice through the devastation of her relationship with her mother and she has experienced the blinding pain and loss of fullness of vision through her 'love' killing of her child. Her passion as a mother has both propelled her towards spiritual wholeness and shattered what little she has struggled for and found. Her love as a mother has subverted her sense of self but also has given her power which is unstoppable. As a mother she has committed her most redeeming and most damning actions, which affect

her sense of self as an individual. Sethe has experienced ritual purification and spiritual recombination through the ministry and word of Baby Suggs and through her participation in community. She has also experienced the loss of Baby and community and the accompanying ripping of her wholeness. Sethe has also found an intimate and dynamic relationship with Paul D, receiving and giving love, regaining and nurturing her sense of her physical, emotional and intellectual worth. She has also had this love and nurturing rebuked. Sethe's daughter miraculously returns to life for her, giving Sethe the chance to seek forgiveness and absolution for killing, the chance to forgive and redeem herself as well, even though she did not have any clear alternative for what she did. Yet rather than gaining forgiveness and a new wholeness of life, Beloved judges her and usurps Sethe's life. But Sethe is reborn from the ashes of her time with Beloved, the ritual support and power of her fellow women is restored to her as is the support, love and blessedness of Paul D. Sethe's spirit has been broken again and again, yet with each loss she has learned to survive and try to recover her wholeness through rituals of spirituality which are active and passive, shared and individual, natural and supernatural, physical and emotional. Sethe's sense of self has been formed, transformed and miraculously resurrected with an accompanying spiritual wholeness.

## CHAPTER V: DENVER

When Sethe describes Denver, she states that Denver is "a charmed child" (41), that "Nothing bad can happen to her" (42). As Sethe's youngest child, and the only child who remains with Sethe, Denver is Sethe's main concern, and is very much affected by Sethe's life and attitude. Far from being charmed and invincible, Denver's life has been a mixture of darkness and silence, a life of unspoken terror and hunger for what she hardly knows she lacks. Her life is certainly shadowed by her mother's, in that she also is isolated, stigmatized by the community with her mother. She learns her brothers' horror stories, Baby Suggs' disillusionment, her mother's re-memory. She keeps her inner self carefully hidden. Denver's closest friend has been the spiteful baby ghost. In her loneliness, she has the escape of imagination and fantasy, but her hunger always returns. Denver is so hungry and lonely that even absence, she feels, is not hers.

The story of her birth and any story which her mother can tell her about herself are Denver's favorites. Denver was present in her mother's womb when Sethe's milk was stolen, and was carefully protected as her mother's back was whipped to pieces. She was born during her mother's crossing, and they both survived against all odds because, as Sethe tells it, the unborn Denver "pulled a whitegirl out

of the hill." This girl, Amy Denver, is Denver's namesake, and Denver craves the stories and descriptions of Amy which her mother can tell her. When they reach 124, Denver finally shows signs of life and nurses. Thriving, she is special in the mind of Stamp Paid, who had helped Sethe get to Baby Suggs', and who did not think that the baby would live. He picks blackberries, and gives them to the infant Denver first, whose reaction is "thrilled eyes and smacking lips" (132). Later, it is Stamp Paid who saves Denver's life. He runs into the shed and as Sethe tries to hit Denver's head against the wall, he "snatched the baby from the arch of its mother's swing" (149). Stamp Paid is one person outside of Baby Suggs and Sethe who cares for Denver and who worries about her. He recognizes Denver's value and inner potential, yet understands the risk of debilitation which her early experiences and their ramifications may cause her. He describes eighteen years later how he feels:

Denver needed somebody normal in her life. By luck he had been there at her very birth almost--before she knew she was alive--and it made him partial to her. It was seeing her, alive,...and looking healthy four weeks later that pleased him so much he gathered...the best blackberries in the county and stuck two in her mouth first...To this day he believed his berries were the reason Denver was still alive. Had he not been there, chopping firewood, Sethe would have spread her baby brains on the planking. (170)

Just as Stamp Paid has played a crucial role in Denver's life, although she does not know it, so does Baby Suggs. It is Baby who takes her from Sethe and tries to keep her from drinking her sister's blood with Sethe's milk. But Baby cannot prevent it; Denver has the knowledge that she "swallowed her [sister's] blood right along with

my mother's milk" (205). It is of note that Denver has also swallowed and been swallowed by Sethe's blood at her birth. There is a gaping difference in these two experiences of blood; at her birth, her mother was giving Denver life, whereas Beloved's blood is that of death. The life giving blood is contrasted with the killing blood; blood does not stop her mother from nurturing Denver, even with the stain of Beloved's blood signalling Sethe's recent attempt to kill Denver. Denver accompanies Sethe to jail, and when this memory resurfaces, she remembers, "I've seen my mother in a dark place, with scratching noises. A smell coming from her dress. I have been with her where something little watched us from the corners. And touched. Sometimes they touched" (206). Sethe claims that the rats touched everything except Denver, but Denver remembers otherwise. As Sethe's memories of her mother are so painful that for a long time she does not even recognize that they exist, Denver's memories of Sethe are a deep and horrible nightmare that she tries to forget.

When Sethe gets out of jail, Denver has a curious relationship with her brothers, who tell her "die-witch! stories with proven ways of killing her [Sethe] dead" (19). Denver believes that Sethe "cut my head off every night. Buglar and Howard told me she would and she did" (206). Denver describes how Sethe cuts off her head:

Her pretty eyes looking at me like I was a stranger ... like I was somebody she found and felt sorry for. Like she didn't want to do it but she had to and it wasn't going to hurt ... I know she'll be good at it, careful. That when she cuts it off it'll be done right; it won't hurt. After she does it I lie there ... with just my head. Then she carries it downstairs to braid my hair. I try not to cry but it hurts so much to comb it ... I want to go

to sleep but I know if I do I won't wake up. (206)

Denver's terrible fear of death at her mother's hand is a reflection of the absence of any meaningful emotional relationship with her mother; the absence of security and trust in the figure of her mother is devastating. Her sense of her mother's ultimate rejection and betrayal disfigures Denver's life in all of its aspects. The distance between herself and her mother extends to the distance and separation she experiences from her own body. On guard and alert, she is disconnected even from her physical self.

Denver's brothers have been permanently traumatized by Sethe's actions in the woodshed, and behave strangely. Yet they are, with Baby Suggs, the company and protection which Denver has against her mother whom she loves but of whom she lives in terror. She remembers, "I spent all of my outside self loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill me" (207). For her inner self, she has few means of comfort.

The other means of escape for Denver is the "emerald closet," a secret chamber formed by five boxwood trees. This is her sacred, safe place:

It began as a little girl's houseplay, but as her desires changed, so did the play. Quiet, primate and completely secret...First a playroom (where the silence was softer), then a refuge (from her brother's fright), soon the place became the point. In that bower, closed off from the hurt of the hurt world, Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. Wore her out. Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish. (29)

It is interesting that her bower is of boxwood, which calls to mind a

coffin, whereas for Denver it is in this chamber that her life gains texture. Denver's inner life is indeed shadowed and secret, full of dreams and nightmares. She longs for her daddy, "the angel man," and waits for him to rescue her from her "witch" mother, she plays with her terror-shocked brothers and with the ghost of her baby sister. She also yearns to be "normal," to forget all of this; she longs for friends and for a mother who loves her and who she loves, for brothers who are not frightened. To believe that her mother would kill her, or would kill her siblings is too horrible.

It is difficult to tell how much of Denver's terror in her early childhood is caused by her interaction with her brothers and the ghost in her life, and how much is a result of her personal experience. Her terrible fear of Sethe may be the fruit of a frightening game played with her brothers, a nightmare, or her memory of what had happened. At any rate, during some period in her life Denver succeeded in burying her memory of betrayal--she says, "I didn't remember for a long time" (206)--but when her memory is jogged, besides her own memory and her brothers' stories, she understands that others know the terrible secret of what her mother has done to her. Regardless of the fact that she had perhaps been traumatized by fear of her mother before, when her own memories resurface and confirm what she had perhaps only "played" before, her reaction so powerful that what she fears takes away her ability to hear and to talk. Denver's spiritual rupture affects her entire being, inwardly, outwardly, mentally, emotionally, physically.

Denver had once "walked the path to a real other house" (101) where other children went, to the house of Lady Jones, who taught "book learning." Denver finally goes inside and with her peers is taught to spell and count. She is thrilled, she "practiced every morning; she starred every afternoon" (102), and does not notice how the children avoid her. Then a boy named Nelson Lord asks her a question about her mother, and "certain odd and terrifying feelings were collecting around the thing that leapt up inside her" (102). He asks her, "'Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?'" (104). She is so afraid that she cannot ask anyone about it, and when she does finally ask, she cannot hear the answer. Denver's hearing is "cut off by an answer she could not bear to hear" (103). Denver loses what little interaction she had with outside world. Unlike Sethe, Denver's reaction to her sense of her mother's betrayal result in the loss of her voice and also the loss of her hearing. Her withdrawal into the silence of herself is total, no longer a careful withdrawal or hiding of herself. Denver, like Sethe, chooses the 'death' of silence to what she finds unable to bear. Like *Beloved*, her experience in this 'death' is one of unbearable hunger and yearning. But although Denver may yearn for a mother and for love, her memory of Sethe will not allow her to find what she needs through her mother.

Denver is deaf and dumb for two years, and discontinues her visits to Lady Jones while she suffers from "monstrous and unmanageable dreams" about her mother. In the silence, and the

discontinuation of communication with the world, her eyes gain a "power even she found hard to believe" (103). Her vision allows her to see in an alternate way which is indicative of Morrison's moral vision; Denver goes beyond sensing and understanding the liminal spectrum of life and sees it clearly. In the silence, she also "learns to read faces and figure out what people were thinking" (206). Denver refers to this period in her life as the "original hunger":

For anything is better than the original hunger--the time when, after a year of the wonderful little i, sentences rolling out like pie dough and the company of other children, there was no sound coming through. Anything is better than the silence when she answered to hands gesturing and was indifferent to the movement of lips. When she saw every little thing and colors leaped smoldering into view. (121)

Denver finds that the baby ghost "held for her all the anger, love and fear she didn't know what to do with" (103) and during this time she turns to the ghost for companionship. Her state, overflowing with boiling anger, love and fear is described thus; "like the little four o'clocks that searched openly for sunlight, then closed themselves tightly when it left, Denver kept watch for the baby and withdrew from everything else" (105). Later she recognizes that it was due to her lack of hearing and its consequences that the ghost was so accessible to her. She says, "That's how come me and Beloved could play together. Not talking" (206). In a sense, this period of Denver's life is comparable to Sethe's experience following her twenty-eight days of fellowship at 124 Bluestone. Like Sethe, Denver has experienced loss.

Her hearing, lost with Nelson Lord's question is "cut on by the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs" (103-4). The return of Denver's hearing signals the onset of the baby ghost's spitefulness. For two months, Howard and Buglar withstand it, but each "fled...the moment the house committed what was for him the one insult not to be borne or witnessed a second time" (3). The ghost inflicts "pointed and deliberate abuse...personal" (104), causing her brothers to leave, and soon thereafter Baby Suggs takes to her bed with a worn out heart. Denver remembers:

All that leaving: first her brothers, then her grandmother--serious losses since there were no children willing to circle her in a game or hang by their knees from her porch railing. (12)

She spends time with Baby, listening to stories of Halle, her father, and learning what Baby has to teach her about the world, much of which deeply affects her. From listening to Baby, combined with her memories of her mother and the stories of her brothers, Denver's fear and terror of the strange "thing" that could make her mother kill find a home--they exist outside the yard. She says:

I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. 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 is haunted by more than a ghost. She emerges as a solitary, lonely, frightened girl who has a rare gift of sight.

When Baby Suggs dies, Denver suffers a great loss. She goes to her secret house to suffer not being able to go outside and join the other people. She is truly left to guard and hope, alone with Sethe and the ghost. Without anyone to share her fear or to provide any type of ritual protection for her, Denver's struggle to protect herself intensifies. She has an awareness of herself and recognizes her own power, but cannot focus her powers on the task of finding healing and wholeness; all that she is she uses to protect herself from what is outside of herself, not on forming and affirming her inner self.

During the long stretch of years following Baby Suggs' death, Denver learns to live with her situation in a strange way. Where the spite and anger of the ghost and her loneliness "wear her out," these things have deeper effects upon her:

Denver had taught herself to take pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped on them; the assumption that the haunting was done by an evil thing looking for more. None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but knowing the things behind things. Her brothers had known, but it had scared them; Grandma Baby knew, but it saddened her. None could appreciate the safety of ghost company. (37)

Denver has been assured that the ghost is not angry with her, but that it needs love and attention. She understands intimately that the ghost is "not evil. But not sad...[it is] lonely and rebuked" (13).

Denver's unique way of seeing things allows her, for example, to regard the house "as a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits" (29). On one particular occasion, Denver sees her mother inside, but next to her mother is a

white dress with its sleeve holding Sethe in a "tender embrace" (29). This tender embracing of Sethe by a dress is a blending of the natural and supernatural, it is an example of the affirmation of all sides of experience. Both the natural and supernatural are experienced as equally valid and appropriate parts of life. The embrace is an expression of the sensuality of spirituality in *Beloved*; not only is physical expression seen as spiritually significant, but in this case it is a 'spirit' who is sensually ministering to Sethe.

When Denver tells Sethe about the dress, they try to figure out what it might mean. Denver decides that it is the ghost and says, "Well, I think the baby got plans" (37), which is true. The strangely ominous part of this lies in the fact that the dress was holding on to Sethe in Sethe's manner of holding, and it "looked just like" (35) Sethe, combined with Denver's knowledge that "Anything coming back to life hurts" (35). Then, during their discussion, Sethe talks about her re-memory and Denver states, "that must mean nothing ever dies" (36). Although the subject is not the ghost, one realizes that the ghost does indeed have plans; it prefigures the 'coming back to life' of the ghost, of Sethe, and of Denver herself.

Whatever the ghost had planned, it is Paul D who shows up at 124 Bluestone next. When Denver sees who it is, and sees the effect that he has on her mother, she is "Hot, shy...lonely" (12). Denver sees her mother relaxed, happy, talking to a man who is "Someone her mother wanted to talk to and would even consider talking to while

barefoot. Looking, in fact acting, like a girl" (12). This is serious for Denver, who has been her mother's focus for so many years. Although Sethe does not meet Denver's inner needs, Sethe is the only living person who meets any of her needs. For Denver to see her mother acting like a girl calls to attention the absence of any girlhood in Denver's life. Denver has never been carefree and happy. Although emotionally she may still feel like a lonely little girl inside, Denver is in a constant struggle with the monsters which should be under her bed but which instead come from outside the yard and enter her mother; her monsters do not disappear when the light is turned on.

Denver considers all of her losses and decides that none of them mattered "as long as her mother did not look away as she was doing now, making Denver long, downright long, for a sign of spite from the baby ghost" (12). Sethe is Denver's only means of reflection or verification of herself. Denver later describes:

I heard his voice downstairs, and Ma'am laughing, so I thought it was him, my daddy. Nobody comes to this house anymore. But when I got downstairs it was Paul D and he didn't come for me; he wanted my mother. (207)

When Denver discovers that Paul D at least knew her daddy, she "fought an urge to realign her affection" (12), but this dies as Sethe and Paul D talk of Halle. Denver feels that "her own father's absence was not hers...Only those who knew him ('knew him well') could claim his absence for themselves" (12). In an attempt to break up the "twosome" they make, Denver brings up the ghost, and wishes for its anger, which would thrill her now "where it used to wear her

out" (13).

As her mother and Paul D become more and more friendly, Denver's resentment grows until she becomes rude, offending both Sethe and Paul D. As Sethe begins to chastise her, Denver begins to cry;

"Denver was shaking now and sobbing so she could not speak. The tears she had not shed for nine years wetting her far too womanly breasts" (14). The stability of Denver's unchanging life is shaking. She sobs:

I can't no more. I can't no more...I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either...It's not the house. It's us! And it's you! (14)

It might seem ironic that Denver longs for what has just happened--someone to come by and talk. But perhaps it is just that this person is exclusively her mother's, and that this visit accentuates the lack of anyone else for the last "twelve years" (12). Paul D, heatedly supporting Denver, but Sethe and Paul D lost in each other again until the ghost shows its anger, "pitching" (18) the house. This is what Denver had hoped for, and she "burst in from the keeping room, terror in her eyes, a vague smile on her lips" (18). An alliance of loyalty has been formed on Denver's side, she and the ghost against Paul D. But Paul D does not retreat in terror. He fights back "wrecking everything, screaming back at the screaming house" (18). When everything is quiet again, "It was gone." And her brothers and grandmother are gone. Even her mother is 'gone.' She thinks, "Now her mother was upstairs with the man who had gotten rid

of the only other company she had" (19). Denver waits miserably for something to happen.

Paul D recognizes Denver's animosity, and tells Sethe, "She's got a waiting way about her. Something she's expecting and it ain't me...whatever it is, she believes I'm interrupting it" (41). Denver openly suggests that he should leave on the third day, causing Sethe and Paul D to argue over how a daughter should be raised. Paul D advises Sethe to explain to Denver that it is "not about choosing somebody over her--it's making space for somebody along with her" (45). During these days, Denver keeps to herself:

[she] stayed in her emerald closet as long as she could, lonely as a mountain and almost as big, thinking everybody had somebody but her; thinking even a ghost's company was denied her. (104)

Denver waits in the one place which to her is a haven, a sanctuary. The significance of the emerald closet to Denver is comparable to the Clearing's meaning to Baby. But where Baby's Clearing is open, a place of ritual sharing as a community, Denver's emerald closet is closed, shut off from the outer world, where Denver is utterly alone with herself now that the ghost is gone. Denver's context is a closet and her feeling a huge inanimate object. Denver's closet is perhaps a type of womb in which can she endure this transition. When she emerges, a new life is started; although unwilling and more than hesitant Denver leaves her emerald closet and the yard and goes out into the community.

When Paul D takes them to the carnival, Denver's tight loneliness and resentment of Paul D begin to loosen:

surrounded by a crowd of people who did not find her the main attraction, who, in fact, said, 'Hey, Denver,' every now and then, pleased her enough to consider the possibility that Paul D wasn't all that bad. In fact there was something about him--when the three of them stood together...that made the stares of other Negroes kind, gentle, something Denver did not remember seeing in their faces. Several even nodded and smiled at her mother, no one, apparently, able to withstand sharing the pleasure Paul D was having...Denver was swaying with delight. (48-9)

This outing is a large step for Denver, a giant step in her development as a whole person. Denver is happy and shares in the pleasure around her. She is not seen or treated as a 'main attraction' due to her association with the notorious scene in the woodshed. For the first time she sees herself as a part of a family with a mother and a father, "the three of them stood together." She has left the yard of her house only once before, that she remembers. It is the first time since she went to Lady Jones' classes that she has interacted with others in the community, and it is the first time that she feels that she is accepted. Perhaps Denver is on the path towards finding healing and wholeness.

On their way home from the carnival, it is Denver who first sees the stranger sitting on a stump near the house. After they take the woman inside and she tells them her name, Denver shakes; "She looked at this sleeping beauty and wanted more" (53). Denver, the person who had been closest to the ghost, and who is lonely following its departure, feels that this is a miracle. She remembers, "when she saw the black dress with two unlaced shoes beneath it she trembled with secret thanks...Beloved was hers" (104). Beyond Denver's joy of having someone of her own is her recognition of who this person is,

and the feeling that Beloved has returned for her, in response to her needs. She expresses:

I was the only one who knew right away who it was. Just like when she came back I knew who she was too. Not right away, but soon as she spelled her name--not her given name, but the one Ma'am paid the stone-cutter for--I knew...my sister come to help me wait for my daddy. (208)

So begins Denver's obsession with Beloved. There can be no easy return from her desire for Beloved, from her need to protect Beloved and keep her from leaving again. Denver thinks:

when we came back I thought the house would still be empty from when he threw my sister's ghost out. But no. When I came back to 124, there she was. Beloved. Waiting for me. Tired from her long journey back. Ready to be taken care of; ready for me to protect her. This time I have to keep my mother away from her. That's hard, but I have to. it's all on me. (205-6)

Denver feels fiercely protective and possessive of Beloved, and acts upon it in any way she can, becoming secretive and manipulative.

While Beloved is sick, Denver becomes her nurse, watching over her, not letting anyone else near her. Denver learns what it means to be a 'mother', a nurturer. She learns what it means to be responsible for another person. Denver has discovered a new part of herself and a new depth of experience:

Denver tended her, watched her sound sleep, listened to her labored breathing and, out of love and a breakneck possessiveness that charged her, hid like a personal blemish Beloved's incontinence...So intent was her nursing, she forgot to eat or visit the emerald closet. (54)

Beloved quickly becomes Denver's secret, more important than any other thing or person in her life. She no longer has to visit her emerald bower; she has a new avenue through which to assuage her

hunger and loneliness. Denver will do anything for Beloved: her loyalty is unquestionable. No one, including her self and her mother, is more important to her.

When Beloved starts to be conscious, and smiles at Denver for the first time, fully awake, "Denver's heart stopped bouncing and sat down--relieved and easeful like a traveler who had made it home" (55). Denver finds out what Beloved likes best and gives it to her, whatever the cost. As Beloved is pleased by sweet things, Denver plies her with whatever sweet she can find. When Paul D suspects that Beloved is fully recovered and raises questions to Sethe, Denver lies. Her eyes are "deceptive, even when she held a steady gaze" (56), and whatever feelings had developed between Paul D and Denver at the carnival are lost.

As Beloved enters into the circle of people at 124, it becomes obvious to all involved that her main interest is in Sethe; Denver's devotion is not reciprocated. Beloved watches Sethe while Denver watches Beloved. Beloved wants to know everything about Sethe, wants to be with her at all times, just as Denver wants these things with Beloved. Denver knows this, and it irritates her, but her loyalty to Beloved does not waver. When Beloved tries to get Sethe to tell stories, Denver reacts strongly:

Denver hated the stories her mother told that did not concern herself, which is why Amy was all she ever asked about. The rest was a gleaming, powerful world made more so by Denver's absence from it. Not being in it, she hated it and wanted Beloved to hate it too, although there was no chance of that at all. (64)

Finally, Denver has the chance to move Beloved into her own room,

where she can make sure that Beloved will not "(God, please don't) get up and wander out of the yard" (67). In Denver's room, they can have their talks, "Sweet, crazy conversations full of half sentences, daydreams and misunderstandings more thrilling than understanding could ever be" (67). Upstairs in Denver's room, they dance and laugh and talk. This is precious communion for a girl who has yearned for it for most of her life. Denver experiences the playfulness, friendship and enchantment of childhood and the fierce protectiveness and loving of motherhood, but experiences them both in an unusual and slanted way. Denver's sense of self is changing and growing stronger.

At Beloved's prompting, Denver dances with her and laughs; they are "merry as kittens" (74) until they are exhausted. When Denver sees the tip of the scar at Beloved's neck, she questions her about where she came from and why. Beloved responds that she came back to see Sethe's face. Denver is hurt by this, but still begs her "You won't leave us, will you?" (75). It becomes clear who is the leader and who is the follower; Denver tells Beloved to keep her identity a secret and Beloved repeatedly tells her, "Don't tell me what to do...She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have" (76). Denver pleads that she belongs there too, that she never hurt anyone, but Beloved is insistent. The only way to keep Beloved's attention is to feed her stories about Sethe. Denver knows what to do. She must keep her tentative hold on Beloved; "Nothing was out there that this sister-girl did not provide in

abundance: a racing heart, dreaminess, society, danger, beauty" (76). And so Denver tells stories, "a net to hold Beloved" (76), and learns through her telling:

Denver was seeing it now and feeling  
it--through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to be her  
mother. Seeing how it must have looked. (78)

As she tells Sethe's stories, seeing them in Beloved's eyes, she begins for the first time to really understand what they tell. Denver experiences an awakening, seeing her mother with new eyes and understanding her situation with fresh insight. It is also significant because in order to achieve spiritual wholeness, Denver's relationship with her mother will need to be unravelled and reformed. Denver's new sight is the first sign that her feelings towards her mother may be changing.

The first round of fighting begins in the Clearing when something attempts to strangle Sethe. Denver watches Beloved rub and kiss her mother, and later accuses Beloved of choking Sethe. Beloved claims that it was the "circle of iron" that choked Sethe, and that she had "fixed it" (101). When Denver grabs Beloved's arm and says, "I saw you," Beloved snatches back her arm, says "Look out, girl," and runs (101). Denver is left alone to think about it. She recalls being in class, being deaf, the loss, the terror, and makes a decision:

Whatever her power and however she used it,  
Beloved was hers. Denver was alarmed by the harm she thought  
Beloved planned for Sethe, but felt helpless to thwart it, so  
unrestricted was her need to love another. The display she  
witnessed at the Clearing shamed her because the choice  
between Sethe and Beloved was without conflict. (104)

Denver then finds Beloved and tries to discern whether Beloved will forgive her. But Beloved is standing in the water of the stream, staring at two turtles.

The narrative break which describes the turtles bears upon most of the relationships in Beloved:

A turtle inched along the edge, turned and climbed to dry ground. Not far behind it was another one, headed in the same direction. Four placed plates under a hovering motionless bowl. Behind her in the grass the other one moving quickly, quickly to mount her. The impregnable strength of him--earthing his feet near her shoulders. The embracing necks--hers stretching up towards his bending down, the pat pat pat of their touching heads. No height was beyond her yearning neck, stretched like a finger toward his, risking everything outside the bowl just to touch his face. The gravity of their shields, clashing, countered and mocked the floating heads touching. (105)

The yearning to love and for love described in this passage is one which is powerful enough for the creatures to risk their lives, their most sensitive and susceptible parts. For the smallest embrace, they stretch and reach, overcoming the barriers of their massive protective shells. Sethe, Paul D, and Denver, like turtles, are creatures who have an enormous capacity for self-protectiveness. They have survived against odds; they bear the scars, carry their swords and shields, have lost their sensitivity in other places. Yet, the yearning in them is immense, enough for them to stretch, risk, and defy their shells, all that weighs them down and yet protects them. To be spiritually whole, they will have to open themselves to the risks of love, progress to the point at which their fragile and broken spirits no longer need the heavy shell and the weapons for protection, and rejuvenate those parts of themselves which have been

deadened. Sethe and Paul D are taking the risk represented by the turtles, as is Denver with Beloved. In Beloved's case, one remembers that her stretched neck was once cut, yet her yearning for Sethe will not die. And like the turtles, Paul D will, against all that is inside him, mount Beloved in the cold house as she turns "her head over her shoulder the way the turtles had". She will take him from his shell. And Denver knows.

Denver plays a tight-rope game, taking whatever little thing Beloved will offer her while trying to keep Beloved's attention and keep her from wandering off, being careful not to disturb her in any way. She is satisfied with just looking at Beloved, "looking was food enough to last" (118), and she thinks that to "go back to the original hunger was impossible" (118). But her true joy lies in the rare occasions when Beloved looks at her; "to be looked at in turn was beyond appetite; it was breaking through her own skin to a place where hunger hadn't been discovered" (118). Denver's unique vision has been her power, and she recognizes the power which Beloved's eyes have over her. She describes it as "Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other" (118). Denver feels like the dress she had seen holding her mother, the one she now believes was Beloved. When Beloved looks at her, "She floated near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what there was" (118).

Denver's hunger for Beloved drives her. The memory of what it

had been like before makes it an even more desperate hunger. She puts it:

It was better to feast, to have permission to be the looker, because the old hunger--the before Beloved hunger that drove her into boxwood and cologne for just a taste of life to feel it bumpy and not flat--was out of the question. Looking kept it at bay. (120)

Denver changes in order to keep Beloved near her, to keep Beloved in the frame of mind where she might look at her. She becomes a "strategist," "spry, executing, even extending the assignments Sethe leaves for them" (121) trying to entertain and interest Beloved. Denver is expanding the perimeters of her inner power, learning the extent of her potential as an active agent in life. She is no longer paralyzed by fear except for her fear of Beloved leaving but learns what it means to have control, to be able to control her circumstances. Although she is ironically dependent upon and 'controlled' by Beloved, Denver has transformed herself into an individual who knows what she wants and needs and takes positive actions to attain it.

One day, in the cold house where it is dark, Denver cannot see Beloved, and Beloved tells Denver to find her. She cannot. When she opens the door, letting in the light, there is no trace of Beloved. Denver feels that this may be the unthinkable moment when Beloved leaves them. She cannot let this happen because "the loss is ungovernable" (122):

she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee. She feels like an ice cake torn away from the solid surface of the stream, floating on darkness, thick and crashing against the edges of

things around it. Breakable, meltable and cold. (123)

Denver dissolves, or literally feels that she does, once the speck around which she formed her raindrop as a subject or at least an object disappears. Her body is lost to her.

A magical appearance on a stump, the face wiped out by sunlight, and a magical disappearance in a shed, eaten alive by the dark... 'Don't go back'. This is worse than when Paul D came into 124 and she cried helplessly into the stove. This is worse. Then it was for herself. Now she is crying because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing... she doesn't move to open the door because there is not world out there... She won't put up with another leaving, another trick. (123)

Not only is her body lost, but her inner self. She has transferred her identity to the eye of Beloved and her eye exists to hold Beloved; the only food she can tolerate is that which she derives from Beloved. When Beloved returns, Denver holds onto the hem of Beloved's skirt. Denver has placed herself in the context of Beloved, not in the context of the universe. She has not named, valued, or celebrated herself, but Beloved. She is a transitional being, her spiritual self although transformed from what it had been has not been empowered from within but from without.

Meanwhile, the situation between Paul D and Beloved has been growing worse. Denver warns Beloved that Sethe likes Paul D, and might be angry if he leaves. Things are falling apart, however, with tension and secrets. Even Beloved feels that she is physically falling apart with the loss of a tooth. Denver tells her that it is all right to cry, and sits and holds Beloved while she weeps. Soon it is Sethe and Paul D who fall apart, and Sethe who weeps. This leaves

Sethe, Beloved and Denver alone, to do what they please, and they spend an afternoon of laughter skating on the frozen pond during which the phrase "Nobody saw them falling" (174) is repeated over and over. Denver's try at a "long independent glide" ends in a fall, perhaps prefiguring how she will soon try one and succeed. When they return home, a new phase in Denver's life begins. Sethe realizes the truth about Beloved; Denver's secret is no longer hers. As Sethe and Beloved immerse themselves in each other, and eventually disintegrate into life-threatening struggles, Denver learns to be independent, faces her memories and her fears and takes the steps necessary for her to achieve spiritual wholeness. Yet at the start of this new chapter in Denver's life, she reveals how far she has yet to go, how much she has to face.

When Denver's "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (199) surface, she reclaims Beloved as hers and as her sister. Her discourse begins, "Beloved is my sister" (205) and ends with "She's mine, Beloved. She's mine" (209), echoing Sethe's claims of kinship and possession. Denver relates the early memories of fear, terror and loss connected with her mother and her brothers as well as Baby Suggs' words. Denver dwells on what the ghost had meant in her life, the closeness they had shared. She remembers the way in which it was always she who knew the ghost before anyone else knew; how she had recognized Beloved from the start. She returns to the task at hand of keeping Beloved safe from Sethe. And she hopes and dreams of her father. Her thoughts run:

even now I bet he's trying to get here. If Paul D could do it my daddy could too. Angel man. We should all be together. Me, him and Beloved. Ma'am could stay or go off with Paul D if she wanted to. Unless Daddy wanted her himself... (209)

Denver envisions her father as a spiritual entity, an angel. But he will not be coming to rescue her. It is interesting to note that Halle had been broken (as far as one knows) by seeing Sethe abused whereas Denver, upon seeing Sethe abused, is prompted towards a conversion, towards a coming to self. Denver loves her sister, lives in fear of her mother, and dreams of her father. She says, "Now it's just us and I can protect her till my daddy gets here to help me watch out for Ma'am and anything come in the yard" (207). The discourse which follows again repeats the litany of "When I needed you, you came to be with me...I will protect you...I watch the house; I watch the yard...Daddy is coming for us...I drank your blood...You are mine" (215-17). But Denver will soon need to look out for herself, even if only to protect others.

It starts out as fun and games; "Denver had joined in the play, holding back a bit out of habit, even though it was the most fun she had ever known" (239). Sethe's job is lost, the savings spent, the food getting scarce, and "the two of them cut Denver out of the games" (239). The scene remains, but the players change; instead of Denver playing with the ghost, it is Sethe playing with Beloved. Still, Denver remains alert for any sign of danger to Beloved. When the fighting begins, Denver tries to figure out "who was to blame" (240) and has to admit that it is Beloved who makes demands, who

wants more, and who appreciates what she is given less and less. Denver begins to have trouble telling the two apart as Beloved imitates Sethe and dresses in her clothing. The arguments turn into fights, and the fighting gets worse. Denver's eyes begin to see her world in a new light. Her keen insight reaches a conclusion about Beloved before anyone else does, once again. Denver has broken free of her dependence upon Beloved which frees her to focus on herself and struggle with her own darkness.

Watching Beloved destroy her mother, watching her mother fade away, Denver is shamed. Denver sees, perhaps, Sethe in her own previous role with Beloved, only deeper. She sees:

[Beloved] was not like them. She was a wild game, and nobody said, Get on out of here girl, and come back when you get some sense. Nobody said, You raise your hand to me and I will knock you into the middle of next week. Ax the trunk, the limb will die. Honor thy mother and thy father that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee...God don't love ugly ways. (242)

Denver's early experience of using the Bible as a textbook comes back to her, with the familiar mores. Just as she feels terror and horror at the evil of killing one's child, she feels likewise that the child should not kill the parent. Denver has grown to understand Sethe, the initial change in Denver which will make it possible for her to heal her painful and problematic relationship with her mother. Denver sees that Sethe is losing the fight. Someone has to take action to save Sethe, beyond saving Sethe to saving herself, and Denver knows that she is the only one who can.

What prompts Denver is the sight of her mother spitting up

"something she had not eaten" (243). Denver thinks it through:

The job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved. Now it was obvious that her mother could die and leave them both and what would Beloved do then? ...Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help. (243)

The psychological barrier is strong enough, but added to this are the practical matters of not knowing directions, not knowing anyone to ask. For Denver, this is no easy task. She must leave the yard and try to find her way to a house where someone would help them. The outside world is terrifying--it is from there that the 'thing' which makes her mother kill originates. Denver categorizes it as "out there" or "the world beyond the porch" (243):

Out there where small things scratched and sometimes touched. Where words could be spoken that would close your ears shut. Where, if you were alone, feeling could overtake you and stick to you like a shadow. Out there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again. Like Sweet Home where time didn't pass...What was more...out there were whitepeople and how could you tell about them?...Grandma Baby said there was no defense--they could prowl at will...and even when they thought they were behaving, it was a far cry from what humans did. (243-4)

Denver's personal traumatic memories added to Sethe's memories and Baby Suggs' stories have formed a black and white division between Denver and the world "out there." Denver is a prisoner to the spiritual suffering and debilitation which has been caused by her painful experiences and memories, her terror of her mother, her lack of any interaction with the community and the world outside her yard.

Fittingly, it is Baby Suggs who empowers and convinces Denver to

take this step. Baby Suggs, whose belief in the power of self-love, the healing and expression of spirituality through the affirmation of the whole self, and the liberating force of the imagination now makes a long distance attempt to open her heart to Denver. Denver hears Baby Suggs' laugh, "clear as anything" (244), and she reminds Denver of Carolina, of Denver's daddy, of why she walks the way she does, of Sethe's feet, and asks, "Is that why you can't walk down the steps?" (244). With this prodding from the 'other side,' Denver leaves the yard. She remembers the way, is forced to pass two men who surprise her by just greeting her, and realizes how small things seem to her now. She heads towards Lady Jones' house.

Lady Jones recognizes Denver, and as they talk Denver works up the courage to tell her that she needs to work for food. Denver tells her that this is because her mother "doesn't feel too good" (249) and Lady Jones responds, "Oh, baby." The narrative continues:

She did not know it then, but it was the word 'baby', said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman. The trail she followed to get to that thorny place was made up of paper scraps containing the handwritten names of others. (248)

Denver has confronted her fear and has taken charge of her life and the lives of Beloved and Sethe; her imprisonment to terror and loneliness is broken, her hunger can be assuaged in new ways. She has taken the giant step of restoring her and her family's relationship with the community by asking for help.

Food begins to appear at 124 Bluestone, and Denver makes sure to thank everyone who leaves it. During these interactions she hears new

stories of her heritage, mostly concerning Baby Suggs. Denver receives a book of Bible verses and memorizes all fifty-two pages. As her outside life improves, the situation at home grows worse. Energized by food, Beloved and Sethe "arrived at a doomsday truce designed by the devil" (250). Denver sees her mother becoming the child and Beloved the mother. She sees that Beloved "ate up her [Sethe's] life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur" (250). Denver, from listening and observing to her mother tell her deepest thoughts to Beloved, finally thinks that she understands Sethe, and Sethe's relationship with Beloved. She, at last, knows the whole story, the reasons behind her mother's action, the motivation and the unthinkableness of her mother's options at the time. Denver is free from the debilitating and stunting aspects of her life which have been Denver's source of terror for so long.

Denver comes to the conclusion that she must get a job for "somebody had to be saved, but unless Denver got work, there would be no one to save, no one to come home to, and no Denver either. It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve" (254). A job, for Denver, is a means through which she can interact with the community. She has found her own potential power and can now support herself as a productive member of the community, and can provide for her mother. Denver, like Baby Suggs and Sethe, has come upon the truth of a self, has learned that she has a self to protect. No more does she continue living for the sole purpose of protecting Beloved

or her mother. No longer will she hope for a daddy to come and save her. It is a twist of fate that the person who points this out to her is Nelson Lord who represents to her the activation of her original hunger and the shame and insecurity she feels. He had put a stop to any leaving of her yard. Nelson Lord had shown her that it was common knowledge that her mother was a killer and had tried to kill Denver herself. When she sees him, he says "Take care of yourself" (252), and for Denver, another wound is healed. A self to care for. She "heard it as though it were what language was made for. The last time he spoke to her his words blocked up her ears. Now they opened her mind" (252). Denver gets a job at the Bodwins, and in the process tells their servant, Janey Wagon, the partial truth of the situation at 124 Bluestone, which in turn results in the women of the community converging to help Sethe.

When the scene occurs, Denver sits waiting for a ride to her new job, and the women are congregated outside the yard. The noise they make attracts Sethe and Beloved to the porch when Mr. Bodwin rides up. When Sethe runs out and attacks Mr. Bodwin, it is Denver who "was the first to wrestle her mother down. Before anybody knew what the devil was going on" (267). Denver, with her new independence and forged self, has the insight to know what is happening and takes action. As we last see Denver, "Her smile, no longer the sneer he [Paul D] remembered, had welcome in it and strong traces of Sethe's mouth" (266). Denver's inner recognition of her mother is now visible in her face. The impression she gives is that she has come

to terms with her mother, and with herself as her mother's daughter, and can now truly love and care for her. She tells Paul D that Sethe is "not a bit all right" and that she thinks she has "lost" her mother (266). She is looking for a second job so that she can "put away something and help her mother too" (266). She also gives Paul D her conclusions on Beloved, the clearest impression which comes forth in the novel. When asked if she thought Beloved was her sister, she responds, "At times. At times I think she was--more" (266). Denver has seen her heritage in Beloved, has felt and understood the sacrifice of her grandmothers, great grandmothers and those who came before them, the past which Denver did not know was hers but which she now has recognized and named.

Denver is being taught at the Bodwins, and "might go to Oberlin" (266). Hers is one life which will not be held down any longer. She ambitious, intelligent and is firmly confident of her self. When Paul D says "Well, if you want my opinion--" Denver cuts him off and replies "I don't...I have my own" (267). She leaves Paul D as a young man runs towards her saying, "Hey, Miss Denver. Wait up" (267). This incident points towards the potential in her future, hints at the possibility of future intimacy in her life. She has experienced a conversion, a coming to self and a discovery of the power within herself.

Denver's life has been characterized by terror, loneliness and hunger. The source of her spiritual debilitation and suffering stems from her fractured relationship with her mother. Denver does not

have with her mother the crucial bonding, the paramount emotional and social relationship which is the foundation of the experience of love and trust, the source from which Denver's individual sense of self and identity could have begun. What Denver has instead is the deeply wounding feeling of her mother's rejection and ultimate betrayal. Her mother to her is a life taker. The condition of those around her and her loss of them revolves around the crux of what her mother had done: her traumatized brothers leaving, Baby Suggs worn out and dying, her spiteful sister a ghost. Denver's experience of self and world is affected in all of its aspects by her mother and her fractured relationship with her mother. She had discovered the joy of learning, of company, of communication, only to have it erased and her ties with the 'outside' severed by her sense of her mother's betrayal. She has the gift of vision to see the whole spectrum of experience, but cannot fully experience it or envision herself. She gains what she desires in the figure of Beloved, but is not desired in return. She ironically gains a sense of herself and her power when she gives herself and all that she has to Beloved. It is through Beloved that her understanding of her mother grows, through Beloved that she learns of her heritage and the suffering of her mother and foremothers. It is Beloved who initiates the restoration of Denver's relationship with her mother and Beloved who indirectly forces Denver to confront her fear, recognize her power and find independence while being reborn into community. Denver's debilitating relationship with her mother is healed; Denver acts to restore her mother's place as

part of a community, jumps to protect her mother, nurtures her mother through the loss of Beloved. Denver has been reborn into a new relationship with her mother and her community, into a new wholeness of self as a spiritual being. Denver's life is transformed from terror into courage and confidence, from loneliness to relationships and community, from hunger to fulfillment.

## CHAPTER VI : PAUL D

As Baby Suggs' name is followed by the caress "holy", Paul D's name is associated with the word "blessed." His character is lovingly detailed through the novel, revealing his uniquely wonderful qualities as well as his faults, his joy and his pain. As the experiences of slavery and its aftermath related in the novel unroll, Paul D has his share of debilitation, and his own ways of coping with it. What concerns Paul D deeply is his heart and his sense of himself as a man. His heart and manhood are parts of himself in which he does not feel blessed. These are problems which he must come to terms with before he can be whole in himself.

Paul D, like Baby Suggs and Sethe, has very little knowledge of his parents: "Mother. Father. Didn't remember the one. Never saw the other. He was the youngest of three half-brothers...sold to Garner and kept there...for twenty years" (219). He describes his "awe and envy" when he comes across a family which is whole, and makes them tell him "over and over...who, in fact, belonged to who" (219). But, growing up at Sweet Home, he did not realize that he was missing anything. He and his brothers are known as Paul F, Paul A, and Paul D. Together with Sixo and Halle, they make up the "Sweet Home men," slaves in what Paul D calls a "cradle." Mr. Garner is a master who calls them men. Paul D grows up thinking that of "all the Blacks in

Kentucky, only the five of them were men" (125). From the beginning, Paul D's sense of self is distorted by slavery; in this case the distortion is ironically positive, which will result in greater rupturing of his self in the future.

The way in which Garner treats his slaves is integral to Paul D's questions about himself; under Garner the paradox is one of slavery which is 'comfortable' on the surface, yet wrong in all ways. The five slaves are treated in an unusual manner:

Allowed, encouraged to correct Garner, even defy him. To invent ways of doing things; to see what was needed and attack it without permission. To buy a mother, choose a horse or a wife, even learn reading if they wanted to...they were believed and trusted, but most of all they were listened to...He [Garner] thought what they said had merit, and what they felt was serious. Deferring to his slaves' opinions did not deprive him of authority or power. (125)

This is the "cradle" to which Paul D refers. Garner's slavery is on one level good--he does not beat or break his slaves--but instead he instills in them a false sense of identity. The relative freedom and authority which they feel is meaningless, given and defined by their owner, and it signifies nothing outside of Garner's context. The illusion shatters abruptly and violently. But, without having had his eyes opened, Paul D wonders in shame at how accepting he had been of slavery. He was "isolated in a wonderful lie" (221), ignoring the experiences of other slaves:

Protected and convinced they were special...being so in love with the look of the world, putting up with anything and everything, just to stay alive in a place where a moon he had no right to was nevertheless there. Loving small and in secret. (221)

Paul D lives in the illusion, trusting the little autonomy he has too much of with his two brothers and two friends.

When Baby Suggs is bought by Halle and is replaced by Sethe, the scene changes. After Sethe's arrival, the 'Sweet Home men' excluding Sixo are "paralyzed by yearning for Sethe" (25). It takes Sethe a year to choose to marry Halle, and they try to make a family together, while Sixo determines to do the same with the Thirty-Mile Woman. Then Mr. Garner dies, Paul F is sold, and schoolteacher arrives, breaking everything to pieces; the illusion of the cradle and their sense of themselves within it is shattered.

Of the slaves at Sweet Home, the person upon whom Paul D dwells and who he can never forget is Sixo; his respect for Sixo is a reflection into himself. When Paul D thinks of Sixo he recognizes "Now there was a man" (22). Sixo is "indigo with a flame red tongue" (21), a slave who sees Sweet Home for what it is. Sixo has the power to make them "cry-laugh" (25) when he tells them of his experiences. Sixo "night creeps" (24), he goes "among the trees at night. For dancing, he said, to keep his bloodlines open. Privately, alone, he did it" (25). It is Sixo who "stopped speaking English because there was no future in it" (25), a gesture of his independence and autonomy. Sixo is connected to his heritage, to their heritage.

Sixo learns the area around Sweet Home and knows other slaves. He loves a woman named Patsy. As an example of Sixo's unique experiences, one of the stories which Sixo tells to Paul D explains why Patsy is referred to as the Thirty-Mile Woman. Sixo spends three

months and two thirty-four-mile round trips to arrange a meeting with Patsy. When the night arrives, Sixo walks to their pre-arranged meeting spot, but she is not there. Finally, "he stood in the wind and asked it for help" (24), a reminder of the 'alternate ways of knowing' in persons connected to the natural and supernatural. Sixo and Patsy finally find each other, but are out of time and have to part at once. On the way home, Sixo encounters a wagon driver with a whip, but Sixo "melted into the woods" before he can be lashed. His feeling of connection with nature, expressed in his "night creeps" and "open bloodlines" gives him protection from the effects of what is unnatural, the treatment of a human being as an animal. "Time never worked the way Sixo thought" (21), so many of his vigorous efforts fail, but Sixo has something inside him, the spirit which he had before he was a slave, which compels him and keeps his selfhood intact. It is Sixo who thinks with insight and reason that "the doctor made Mrs. Garner sick" and who says that Mr. Garner was shot in the ear; Sixo is "the only one of them not sorry to see him [Mr. Garner] go" (219). Later, it is Sixo who wants to run and knows how to.

With Schoolteacher's arrival, the four "Sweet Home men" become slaves in name, fact and essence. Without Mr. Garner and his definition of them their identities are lost, their value as intellectual and emotional beings disappears. Paul D knows:

[It was a] truth that waved like a scarecrow in rye: they were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns;

gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke. (125)

The definition of their selves and their lives lies in the hands of their owner, and Schoolteacher defines them as animals. Paul D thinks, "everything rested on Garner being alive. Without his life each of theirs fell to pieces. Now ain't that slavery or what is?" (220). Paul D's spirit is debased, yet he now knows the truth of slavery and its evil. It is a paradox that schoolteacher's terrible actions result in good; Paul D now knows and understands the evil of slavery and sees through the facade of what had been at Sweet Home.

Schoolteacher wreaks havoc on his slaves, showing them the true sadism which slavery can promote. Paul D remembers that "At the peak of his strength...they clipped him" (220); Paul D's self is cut off, cut up, disrupted. Schoolteacher takes many things from his slaves, denigrating even their thoughts:

schoolteacher didn't take advise from Negroes.  
The information they offered he called back talk and developed a variety of corrections (which he recorded in his notebook) to reeducate them. (220)

They decide to escape, and develop a Plan, but everything goes wrong. Sixo knows of a group of slaves who are going to escape with Patsy, and arranges for them to wait until those at Sweet Home can join them. Halle and Sethe decide to escape with their children, and Sixo is going to leave, but it takes the two Pauls a while to decide, to wonder what will happen, what would they do in freedom, where, and what to do about Paul F. Their hesitation proves to be a point of shame for Paul D, but they decide to go. And the planning begins.

As the time to run approaches, several factors change, and the

plans have to be altered. Sethe is very pregnant and on constant call for Mrs. Garner. Halle likewise has to be wherever Schoolteacher tells him to be. Sixo is tied up with the stock at nights. When they hear the sign, a rattle, they wait the day out in the fields for the cover of night, but Halle has to leave and tell Sethe at the house that the time has come. Paul A has to go and move some timber. When he does not show up for supper, Paul D hopes that he has gone on ahead and leaves for the creek. He meets Thirty-Mile Woman and Sixo at the creek and they wait for Paul A. Paul D watches Sixo and Patsy embrace in the dark, and sees her "lit now with some glowing, some shining that comes from inside her" (225). The love which Sixo and Patsy share is so strong and powerful that it is physically visible to Paul D, unlike his own small love. Then Sixo hears something. Sixo pushes Patsy and she runs, but Paul D and Sixo are surrounded and tied.

Paul D is "tied like a mule" but he smells the "perfumed air," feels the "dewy and inviting" grass (225). Although degraded and treated like an animal, Paul D's spirit is such that he senses the beauty around him. Sixo grabs the mouth of the nearest rifle and tries to hit them with it while Paul D is tied to a tree. Schoolteacher screams that he wants them alive. Sixo sings with five rifles trained on him; they hit him across the head and tie him to a tree with a fire at his feet. Schoolteacher has been convinced that "This one will never be suitable" (226). The fire is not hot enough to kill. Sixo begins to laugh:

He laughs. A rippling sound like Sethe's sons make when they tumble in hay or splash in rainwater. His feet are cooking; the cloth of his trousers smokes. He laughs. Something is funny. Paul D guesses what it is when Sixo interrupts his laughter to call out 'Seven-0! Seven-0!' Smoky, stubborn fire. They shoot him to shut him up. Have to. (226)

Paul D is led off, hearing the men talk. He has witnessed the terrible death of a man whom he loved, a man whose inner power had shone through even in his dying, a man who Paul D will never forget and a death which will remain with him always. He also has to wonder what it is that Sixo had which he lacks. Paul D thinks, Morrison recounts:

he should have sung along. Loud, something loud and rolling to go with Sixo's tune, but the words put him off--he didn't understand the words. Although it shouldn't have mattered because he understood the sound: hatred so loose it was juba. (227)

Sixo is dead, extinguished in a blaze of his heritage, pride and defiance. Paul D, however, has no heritage besides Sweet Home, and his pride in himself has been destroyed along with his manhood by schoolteacher. He has no inner power left with which to fuel defiance. He does not know what it is he lacks which Sixo had. But he has seen, and he has heard the sound--the sound of hatred.

Paul D learns his worth to them--his price: "The dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future" (226). He is worth nine hundred dollars; in his owners' definition, his only worth and value is economic. His sense of his own worth and value as a human being is decimated. They lock him in shackles and a three-spoke collar, and he hears that they must have

caught Paul A and are looking for Halle. Paul D is collared and shut in a cabin, and when Sethe comes in and tells him she is leaving, he is shamed by his "shackled ankles and the neck jewelry" (228). Furthermore, he knows he will "never see her again, and right there and then his heart stopped" (228). His heart is in peril, broken or ready to be buried. His sense of self-identity and self worth is shattered. He has no control over his circumstances or his life.

In the aftermath, in his "jewelry" Paul D considers what he cannot ignore and what he is strong enough to think of. He wonders what the others' prices are, and remembers that "Schoolteacher would know. He knew the worth of everything. It accounted for the real sorrow in his voice when he pronounced Sixo unsuitable" (228). Sixo is on his mind. He cannot escape the memory of Sixo, of Sixo's strength and character:

Who could be fooled into buying a singing nigger with a gun? Shouting Seven-O! Seven-O! because his Thirty-Mile Woman got away with his blossoming seed. What a laugh. So rippling and full of glee it put out the fire. And it was Sixo's laughter that was on his mind, not the bit in his mouth, when they hitched him to the buckboard. (229)

He later wonders why he had not "jumped in the fire with Sixo and they both could have had a good laugh" (219). Paul D, unlike Schoolteacher, understands Sixo's reactions and recognizes that Sixo's worth is inestimable.

As for Sweet Home, there is still more of it which Paul D will have to remember and try to forget. Before he is sold from Sweet Home, he encounters Halle. He later tells Sethe, "Last time I saw him he was sitting by the churn. He had butter all over his face" (69).

Halle had been caught up in the attic and had seen the nephews steal Sethe's milk and lash her back to pieces. What Halle saw "broke him...broke him like a twig" (68). Paul D can understand how Halle was broken and explains to Sethe,

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. (69)

Paul D cannot help Halle, for he is held by the bit; the sight of Halle's face remains inside of him, combined with the loss of Sixo and his own loss of self, things inside which Paul D cannot chop down.

The memory of the bit, as terrible as a bit is, is not what plagues Paul D. It is Sixo, Halle and a rooster which haunt him. When he finally reveals his feelings about the rooster, he tells Sethe that he has "never talked about it. Not to a soul. Sang it sometimes but I never told a soul" (71). He tells her that it was the rooster named Mister. Paul D himself had assisted in Mister's hatching. Mister is the king of the roosters at Sweet Home and has a comb as big as a man's hand which is "some kind of red" (72). As Paul D is taken away to his new owner, he sees Mister sitting on his "throne" looking at him. Paul D remembers thinking that Mister smiled at him. Paul D describes Mister:

[He was] free. Better than me. Stronger,  
tougher...Mister was allowed to stay and be what he was. But  
I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you  
cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But  
wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead.  
Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that  
something was less than a chicken sittin in the sun on a tub.  
(72)

This painfully ironic situation expresses the hurt and debilitation, the heart-destroying facts of life as Paul D experiences it. It is not only Halle and Sixo who are "gone," but Paul D realizes that he is too. The rooster is a "Mister" but Paul D feels he will never have a formal title; he does not even have a full name, sharing his with his three brothers. Animals retain their autonomy and identity, but Paul D's are broken to bits. A forest of metal begins to form inside of Paul D which he cannot chop down.

Paul D is sold to a man named Brandywine, whom he tries to kill. One wonders if Paul D has learned defiance, but all Paul D reveals about this is that "He didn't know exactly what prompted him to try--other than Halle, Sixo, Paul A, Paul F and Mister" (106). After this, he is taken to Alfred, Georgia where he works in chain-up and sleeps in a box in the ground. Paul D begins to shake. The trembling shakes him inside at first, but when he is alone, his "hands quit taking instruction. On there own, they traveled. Nothing could stop them or get their attention" (107). Paul D's hands are out of his control, although they work for the master. In Alfred, the loss of whatever fractured sense of self and wholeness Paul D still holds inside him seems certain.

The slaves, forty-six in all, are housed in wooden boxes buried in the earth with barred roofs that lift on hinges. Paul D has "Two feet of it over his his head; three feet of open trench in front of him with anything that crawled or scurried welcome to share that grave calling itself quarters" (106). A rifle wakes them. They emerge

one by one in order:

When all forty-six were standing in a line in the trench, another rifle shot signaled the climb out and up to the ground above, where one thousand feet of the best hand-forged chain in Georgia stretched. Each man bent and waited. The first man picked up the end and threaded it through the loop on his leg iron...As the chain was passed on and each man stood...the line of men turned around, facing the boxes they had come out of. Not one spoke to the other. At least not with words. The eyes had to tell what there was to tell: 'Help me this morning; 's bad': 'I'm a make it'; 'New man'; 'Steady now steady'. (107)

Following this, they kneel down and wait for "the whim of a guard, or two or three. Or maybe all of them wanted it" (107). The guards take the mouths of the slaves, who mostly obey unless someone is willing to take "gunshot in his head as the price...of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus" (108). Alfred is brutal and sickening. Paul D has lost all autonomy; caged, buried, his body which was once owned and used is now truly not his. To read about it is enough, but to know that human beings were treated in this manner is horrifying and heart-breaking. One can only imagine what one would be and feel if one survived.

When the guards are satisfied, the man called "Hi Man" yells "Hiiii!" signaling the slaves to stand. Paul D wonders how the man knew when to shout, and he "believed to this day that the 'Hiiii!' at dawn and the 'Hoooo!' when evening came were the responsibility Hi Man assumed because he alone knew what was enough, what was too much, when things were over, when the time had come" (108). As the men work, they pound their sledge hammers and sing. They "sang it out and beat it up" about what life had meant. The description of what they

beat and what they sing cannot be forgotten:

Singing love songs to Mr. Death, they smashed his head. More than the rest, they killed the flirt whom folks called Life for leading them on. Making them think the next sunrise would be worth it; that another stroke of time would do it at last. Only when she was dead would they be safe. The successful ones--the ones who had been there enough years to have maimed, mutilated, maybe even buried her--kept watch over the others who were still in her cock-teasing hug, caring and looking forward, remembering and looking back. (109)

This passage has the power of expressing what happens to humans who are treated worse than animals. They work to destroy all hope, all feeling, all life, all memory of the past, all hope for the future, all caring. But death, however much one may want it personally, cannot be had without risking the lives of all forty-six.

After eighty-six days "Life was dead. Paul D beat her butt all day every day till there was not a whimper in her" (109). Then the rain starts. The guards do not want to walk in the mud and work is suspended. The men are locked in their boxes, chained together. Creatures begin to drop into their boxes as the water level in them rises. Their terror grows, as the threat of this kind of death brings the instinct for survival back to life. Paul D describes:

[He] thought he was screaming; his mouth was open and there was this loud throat-splitting sound--but it may have been somebody else. Then he thought he was crying. Something was running down his cheeks. He lifted his hands to wipe away the tears and saw dark brown slime. Above him rivulets of mud slid through the boards of the roof. When it come, he thought, gonna crush me like a tick bug. (110)

Then the chain that imprisons them becomes the way in which they communicate and save themselves. With the yank of the chain, each knows what to do. As the mud begins to cave in, Hi Man yanks the

chain and each man down the line dives under the bars through the mud. If one does not make it, none do, but they all survive and surface "Like the unshriven dead, zombies on the loose" (110) in the wet darkness. They run. Paul D experiences the community of men as a life saving power as Sethe does the community of women.

They finally find a camp of sick Cherokee. They wait for a long time before any one approaches them. Then a Cherokee comes to look at them, sees their chains and gets some axes. Separated, with some mush in them, they now have to figure out what to do. Paul D fixes on the idea of heading North, and the Cherokee tell him "Follow the tree flowers...As they go, you go. You will be where you want to be when they are gone" (122). And so Paul D leaves, following spring blossoms North. He reaches Delaware, finally, crying; although he occasionally stops, he just keeps on moving for years. This chapter ends as follows:

It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. (113)

His experience of what he has to remember has changed his heart into a tobacco tin where with an effort he can hide all of it, bury it, and try to survive the pain of it by letting the tin rust shut. He has lost everybody, and has lost almost everything inside him, but has gained the new ability to just move on, which he does.

Paul D looks back on his wandering, and remembers:

After Alfred he had shut down a generous portion of his head, operating on the part that helped him

walk, eat, sleep, sing. If he could do these things--with a little work and a little sex thrown in--he asked for no more, for more required him to dwell on Halle's face and Sixo laughing. To recall trembling in a box built into the ground....The box had done what Sweet Home had not, what working like an ass and living like a dog had not: drove him crazy so he would not lose his mind. (41)

Anything above and beyond the barest physical needs of life he does without. There can be no meaning, purpose or hope. His alienation from his past and his inner self is too deep, thick and painful to broach.

During his wandering, some important things happen to Paul D. First, when his original blossom trail ends in Wilmington, he asks help from a woman who feeds him and lets him sleep in her bed. This is the first time Paul D has ever slept with a woman or slept on sheets. He describes that event thus:

Crawling out of the woods, cross-eyed with hunger and loneliness...Later, when he saw the pale cotton sheets and two pillows in her bedroom, he had to wipe his eyes quickly...so she would not see the tears of a man's first time. Soil, grass, mud, shucking, leaves, hay, cobs, seashells--all that he'd slept on. White cotton sheets had never crossed his mind. (131)

He stays with this woman for eighteen months, but moves on to the Northpoint Bank Railroad Company. From there he runs away to join the 44th Colored Regiment in Tennessee, but finds himself in a different regiment which is in an uproar because the commander cannot figure out what to have them do since they cannot go out and kill white men. He is recaptured by Northpoint Bank and taken to Delaware again. He then works for the Rebels in Alabama, sorting the live Confederates from the dead and smelting. Paul D thinks that even as an escaper, he is a failure. He tried to escape five times, "from

Sweet Home, from Brandywine, from Alfred, Georgia, from Wilmington, from Northpoint" (268), but he never stays "uncaught."

When Paul D describes these brief escapes, and remembers his feelings, he thinks:

in all those escapes he could not help but be astonished by the beauty of this land that was not his. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water and tried not to love it. On nights when the sky was personal, weak with the weight of its own stars, he made himself not love it...Anything could stir him and he tried hard not to love it. (268)

To allow himself to feel, to love, is to recall what is rusting in his tobacco heart. He cannot afford to let his heart resurface or he might regain his mind and go crazy. He has no right to love anything, he has no freedom to own his desire or to place that desire where he might want, so he loves small and keeps moving. Yet it is testimony to the heart of this man, even when rusted shut, that he still is moved, awed, touched, stirred by what beauty and goodness he can see.

Paul D is working at the foundry in Selma when the war ends. When he and two others make their way out of Selma towards Mobile, they find the roads littered with the bodies of black women and children. Paul D ends up in New Jersey having seen "more dead people than living ones" (269). It is here that he earns his first money. He is free, and now owns who he is and earns for what he does. This is a miracle to him. He helps a man unload two trunks and receives a coin. Paul D does not know what to do; "not sure what it could buy...and if anybody would sell him anything" (269). He finally buys some turnips, and is shocked to get change:

His first purchase made him glow, never mind  
 the turnips were withered dry. That was when he decided that  
 to eat, walk, and sleep anywhere was life as good as it got.  
 And he did it for seven years till he found himself in  
 southern Ohio...(269-70).

As a free man, or a supposedly free man, he still cannot shake free  
 of what he has come out of. He figures that he can stay in one place  
 for only three months before moving on, because "walking off when he  
 got ready was the only way he could convince himself that he would no  
 longer have to sleep, pee, or swing a sledge hammer in chains" (40).

Paul D's wandering provides the reader with glimpses of what  
 life is like for newly freed African-Americans at the time. He sees  
 so much pain and loss, in such magnitude, that it is impossible to  
 describe. For example, he remembers:

Odd clusters and strays of Negroes wandered  
 the back roads and cowpaths...Dazed but insistent, they  
 searched each other out for word...Some of them were running  
 from family that could not support them, some to family; some  
 were running from dead crops, dead kin, life threats, and  
 took-over land...configurations and blends of families of  
 women and children, while elsewhere, solitary, hunted and  
 hunting for men men, men, men. Forbidden public  
 transportation, chased...they followed secondary  
 routes...when they met one another they neither described nor  
 asked about the sorrow that drove them from one place to  
 another. The whites didn't bear speaking on. Everybody knew.  
 (52-3)

During the years he spent wandering, he sees the truth of the  
 Reconstruction as he lives it. Paul D is not alone in his buried  
 pain. When he describes what he has seen, he describes his own  
 experience:

he had seen Negroes so stunned, or hungry, or  
 tired or bereft it was a wonder they recalled or said  
 anything. Who, like him, had hidden in caves and fought owls  
 for food; who, like him, stole from pigs; who, like him,

slept in trees in the day and walked by night; who, like him, had buried themselves in slop and jumped into wells to avoid regulators, raiders, paterollers, veterans, hill men, posses and merrymakers...He saw a witless coloredwoman jailed and hanged for stealing ducks she believed were her own babies. Move. Walk. Run. Hide. Steal and move on. (66)

With the familiar 'laugh-cry' attitude which one learns to recognize as Paul D's, he knows that "If a Negro man got legs he ought to use them. Sit down too long, somebody will figure out a way to tie them up" (10).

When Paul D eventually comes to Ohio and finds Sethe there, he describes that "he could not account for the pleasure in his surprise at seeing Halle's wife alive...The closed portion of his head opened like a greased lock" (41). He realizes that "it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you [Sethe]" (46). Sethe looks at him, and describes him:

Except for a heap more hair and some waiting in his eyes, he looked the same...For a man with an immobile face it was amazing how ready it was to smile, or blaze or be sorry with you. As though all you had to do was get his attention and right away he produced the feeling you were feeling. With less than a blink, his face seemed to change--underneath it lay the activity. (7-8)

The reader becomes aware that Paul D is very empathetic and attentive to others, that he is sensitive to the needs of others, and one wonders how he can be, with what surrounds him and what is inside of him. If his head is opening, one wonders if perhaps he can regain his heart.

After a short time of treating Sethe to "a mild brotherly flirtation, so subtle you had to scratch for it" (7), Paul D steps right into the dramatic scene at 124 Bluestone. Stepping through the

red ghost's light at the door, "a wave of grief soaked him so thoroughly he wanted to cry" (9). Soon afterwards, he meets Denver. She makes her dislike of him obvious, and so begins the first emotional release of his stay at 124 with Denver crying and Sethe laying out what she has gone through and what she refuses to go through again. Paul D's blessedness, which enables others to 'let go' in his presence forms the foundation of trust in others and in himself which he will need to release his own inner self. He learns of Sethe's tree, of her stolen milk, of the deep motivation which drove her on to Ohio. He approaches Sethe, stands behind her and embarks on an exploration of what has happened to her. It is at this point that the reader has a description of how others feel about Paul D.

Not even trying, he had become the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could. There was something blessed in his manner. Women saw him and wanted to weep--to tell him that their chest hurt and their knees did too. Strong women and wise saw him and told him things they only told each other... (17)

Although Paul D does not understand why this is so, he is not surprised that Denver and Sethe both cry. He bends behind her, "his body an arc of kindness" (17). He "rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches" and when he sees the full tree, all he can say is "Aw, Lord, girl" (17). He can find "no peace" until he kisses every part of her back (18). Paul D's spirit, with his caring and understanding for others, make one realize further what it must have

taken to destroy his care and understanding of himself. That self, that heart, even while beaten and rusted shut has power.

When the ghost attacks the house in anger, Paul D thinks that he has begun shaking again as he did in Alfred. But it is the house which is shaking, and Paul D reacts by screaming and bashing everything he can. He screams, "Leave the place alone! Get the hell out!...You want to fight, come on!...She got enough without you. She got enough!" (18). And as it stops, so begins the desire between Paul D and Sethe, and they go upstairs. Paul D is transported back to the yearning he felt during the year at Sweet Home when Sethe was deciding who to marry. He thinks, "Merely kissing the wrought iron on her back had shook the house, had made it necessary for him to beat it to pieces. Now he would do more" (20).

Afterwards, they are "sorry and too shy to make talk" (20). As he lies looking at Sethe's back and her tree, he remembers what a real tree looks like; he thinks about the tree at Sweet Home which he named Brother and which he "could trust and be near." He remembers Sixo's efforts to meet the Thirty-Mile Woman and the day Halle and Sethe had consummated their marriage in the corn field. Sethe also thinks of that day, of the cornstalks and cornsilk and husk.

The narrative of memories breaks to state, "How loose the silk. How jailed the juice" (27). Paul D thinks, "What he did remember was parting the hair to get the tip, the edge of his fingernail just under, so as not to graze a single kernel" (27). Sethe thinks, "The pulling down of the tight sheath, the ripping sound always convinced

her it hurt" (27). The discourse continues:

As soon as one strip of husk was down, the rest obeyed and the ear yielded up to him its shy rows, exposed at last. How loose the silk. How quick the jailed-up flavor ran free. No matter what all your teeth and wet fingers anticipated, there was no accounting for the way that simple joy could shake you. How loose the silk. How fine and loose and free. (27)

Both Sethe and Paul D feel the need for care and caution in the opening of the corn. Besides symbolically suggesting the sensual, this passage can be seen to reflect the way in which Sethe and Paul D will continue with their relationship. The opening of it has been painful and ripping, but they are beginning to share themselves with each other. The silk, the outer layers, are free, but the juice, the deepest essence, is jailed. The juice does not run easily, but once it is released, it is the prize. In a way, the silk can also be seen as a symbol of these individuals' desires and needs, which are numerous and which they can have as much of as they can stand; but the juice--the actuality and the reality of obtaining these desires and needs--is not something which they can achieve as slaves. The symbolism of the corn also reflects their inner and outer selves; the outer is free as cornsilk but the inner is tender, its juices jailed. Now, Paul D and Sethe have the chance to let the "jailed-up flavor run free."

The next morning, Paul D sings while he fixes what he had smashed. He opens himself to the possibility of staying for a while, considering that "this was not a normal woman in a normal house. As soon as he had stepped through the red light he knew that, compared

to 124, the rest of the world was bald" (40-1). But he wonders what Sethe and Denver think. Sethe wants him to stay, but Denver is another matter. Denver finally asks him for how long he is going to "hang around". For Paul D, this is a very hurtful phrase. Sethe is also angered by Denver, but refuses to let Paul D criticize her daughter. Paul D tells Sethe, "Tell her it's...making space for somebody along with her. You got to say it. And if you...mean it, then you also got to know you can't gag me" (45). Paul D is beginning to take an active role in both Sethe's and Denver's lives, he is feeling ready to consider making the leap to letting the 'juice' run free.

Paul D is ready to make plans. In a poignantly beautiful moment he tells Sethe that he understands her, that she can depend on him. He tells her that she can go inside of herself again. He says:

Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out. I'm not saying this because I need a place to stay. That's the last thing I need...We can make a life, girl, a life. (47)

Paul D wants to try. He makes the first step of asking her to go to the carnival with him and spend his two dollars. And they do, but the question one asks is who is how is Paul D going to go as far inside his rusted shut self as he needs to, and who will catch him or make sure that he gets out?

The carnival day is a day in which Paul D shines. He is truly and infectiously happy, saying "howdy to everybody within twenty

feet" (47). Paul D's pleasure is irresistible; people respond to him. It looks like they are going to have a life, after all. But Beloved is waiting for them on the stump as they return. Paul D sees her and remembers what he has seen during his wandering, and so does not question her. He thinks that she may have cholera, and so Beloved takes up residence at 124 while she recovers. Paul D is shocked at his "ungenerous feelings" towards Beloved, and knowing this makes him irritated, but he feels that there is "Something funny 'bout that gal" (56). He knows that she is strong, but she acts sick, and he tells Sethe so. Denver lies to protect Beloved, ending the brief camaraderie between Paul D and Denver. And Beloved becomes a source of disagreement and tension between Paul D and Sethe.

While Beloved ignores Paul D for five weeks, he watches her. He sees that she is "shining," like the Thirty-Mile Woman had shone with Sixo, so much so that he wonders if Denver and Sethe can see that she is "aroused" (64). It is not clear who she is shining for. Paul D reacts to this by "having Sethe on waking, so that later, when...she made bread under Beloved's gaze, his head was clear" (64). Beloved's adoration for Sethe irritates him so much that it prompts him to question her. Beloved does not like him, and he does not like her--this much is clear, and she does not want to answer any of his questions. When she is rescued by Denver from having to answer him, Paul D feels that "a large, silver fish had slipped from his hands the minute he grabbed hold of its tail. That it was streaming back off into dark water now, gone but for the glistening marking its

route" (65). Paul D is very disturbed.

When Paul D tries to find the source of his reaction, and thinks that it might be the "timing. She had appeared and been taken in on the very day Sethe and he had...gone out in public and had a good time--like a family...It had begun to look like a life" (66). He thinks that the solution will be to find her a place in town, when just as this enters his mind, Beloved begins to choke, falling to the floor. Denver takes the opportunity to move Beloved into her bedroom, and Beloved is there to stay. Paul D's feeling does not go away, and leads to further arguments with Sethe, but at the same time the two are sharing deeper things and more deeply than ever before. Paul D, however, cannot go too deeply into himself because he has to keep that heart of himself buried in his tobacco tin. He knows:

He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut. He would not pry it loose now in front of this sweet sturdy woman, for if she got a whiff of the contents it would shame him. And it would hurt her to know that there was no red heart bright as Mister's comb beating in him. (73)

Just as Sethe is not yet ready to share her most secret pain, Paul D cannot open his tobacco tin. Someday, however, it will have to be opened; his heart cannot remain dead and inaccessible forever when he is allowing someone into it, and the pain and horror will have to be expunged.

The fight over the heart of the beloved begins in earnest. Beloved wants Sethe and wants Paul D out, and Paul D wants Sethe and wants Beloved out. Whereas Paul D has his tobacco tin of a heart

rusted shut so that "nothing in this world could pry it open" (113), Beloved has the power to change the whole situation. Beloved begins to "move" Paul D (114). She moves him so that "Paul D didn't know how to stop it because it looked like he was moving himself...moving out of 124" (114). First he stops sleeping with Sethe, taking to the rocker in the kitchen. Then one night he finds that he cannot get comfortable there, and does not want to go upstairs, so he moves to Baby's room. He continues to have sex with Sethe, but cannot sleep with her. But when he cannot sleep in Baby's room, he begins to wonder. Maybe he was feeling house-bound and wanted to wander again, but he associates that feeling with the woman who kept him in the house, and he knows that this does not concern Sethe, whom he "loved a little bit more every day" (115). It is simply that "He just could not, would not, sleep upstairs or in the rocker or, now, in Baby Suggs' bed. So he went to the storeroom" (115). Finally, he is forced out of the house into the cold house, and he realizes that "the moving was involuntary. He wasn't being nervous; he was being prevented" (116). He knows who is moving him, so he waits. He waits for Beloved's next move, full of shame at his lack of autonomy, and when she comes, "he wanted to knock her down" (116).

When Beloved comes to the ice house, he hears her enter but refuses to look at her. He asks her what she wants, and she responds "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name" (116). Beloved arranges her clothes and looks at him as the turtles had looked at each other. But Paul D will not look at her and tells

her that as Sethe has been good to her and loves her, she should "try to be good back" (116). Beloved moves in closer and tells him, "She don't love me like I love her. I don't love nobody but her" (116). Paul D asks her again why she came and she repeats her request. He tells her to leave, but she refuses. He knows:

As long as his eyes were locked on the...lard can he was safe. If he trembled like Lot's wife and felt some womanish need to see the nature of the sin behind him; feel a sympathy, perhaps, for the cursing cursed, or want to hold it in his arms out of respect for the connection between them, he too would be lost. (117)

Paul D is hanging on a thread, knowing that this is not an ordinary encounter, but he does not suspect the importance or magnitude of what will happen. For when Beloved tells him that if he calls her name, she will go, he does. But she does not leave:

She moved closer with a footfall that he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, "Red heart. Red heart," over and over again. Softly and then so loud it woke Denver, and then Paul D himself. "Red heart. Red heart. Red heart." (117)

The meaning of this coupling between Paul D and Beloved is difficult to discern. Certainly, this act offends the reader's sense of loyalty to Sethe which one expects from Paul D. It also reveals the dark and frightening part of Beloved. Symbolically, through this act Paul D internalizes Sethe's past pain and becomes intimately connected with it; he 'knows' Sethe's inner suffering through its resurrection in Beloved although he has not consciously understood its entirety. One also can see that beyond the manipulation of Beloved there is a plea

which rings true. And one feels the multiple and mysterious levels and sides to Beloved which catch Paul D's depth unawares and pry open his tobacco tin. One wonders what the "connection between them" is, what it is that breaks him open. There is more to Beloved than the baby ghost returned, but in any case she is the reincarnation of the past, and whether simply the past of the baby girl or much more, it is painful. Of Beloved, Barbara Christian writes:

[Morrison] moves us into those spaces that we do not want to remember, into the spaces where there are no names but Beloved--those forgotten ones of the past even to the sixty million anonymous ones of the Middle Passage, those terrible spaces, those existing spaces... (340)

Paul D has not only those nameless Beloveds, but a whole rusted heart full of the past, of pain, of space which he tries at all cost never to enter. He also has no community, no heritage, no recognition of the culture of his ancestors and what they have suffered. Perhaps it is the collision between the past which Beloved represents and the past which Paul D personally trying to bury as well as the past which he does not know belongs to him. Beloved will not allow him to forget; she is the past, trying not to erupt into separate parts with the lack of present acceptance and re-memory of her. If one does not acknowledge one's own past, those not remembered are rebuked, their lives come to mean nothing, and the self which forgets may start to erupt into separate parts. Beloved has forced Paul D to open up his rusted tobacco box and yearn for his red beating heart, to acknowledge her, to name her, to enter her and through her, the past.

Paul D's response to Beloved's power over him takes him deep

inside to ponder his manhood. He wonders if he ever was a man, or if all this time Schoolteacher was right and he is an animal, less than a rooster. He tries his hardest to stop it, to end her power over him. But he feels humiliated:

[Being] picked up and put back down any time by a girl young enough to be his daughter...It was being moved, placed where she wanted him, and there was nothing he could do about it. For his life he could not walk up the...stairs...stay in the keeping room, in the storeroom at night. And he tried. Held his breath the way he had when he ducked into the mud; steeled his heart the way he had when the trembling began. But it was worse than that...He who had eaten raw meat barely dead...Because he was a man and a man could do what he would: be still for six hours in a dry well...watch another man, whom he loved better than his brothers, roast without a tear just so the roasters would know what a man was like. And it was he, that man, who had walked from Georgia to Delaware, who could not stay put where he wanted to in 124--shame. (126)

Paul D reconsiders all of the things which he has survived, the things which have made him believe in himself and his ability to survive, the things in which he has found pride in himself. He now has to wonder whether they mean anything if he cannot control himself in this situation.

Paul D decides that if he cannot control his actions, he can control his words, and decides to tell Sethe what is happening to him. But still it sounds ludicrous, unless Beloved is "a lowdown something that looked like a sweet young girl" (127). As he thinks about telling Sethe, he knows that his sexual relationship with Beloved is not what is important to him. He describes what concerns him most:

not being able to stay or go where he wished in 124, and the danger was in losing Sethe because he was not

man enough to break out, so he needed her, Sethe, to help him, to know about it, and it shamed him to have to ask the woman he wanted to protect to help him do it... (127)

He waits with his love, his hope, his shame and his shattered sense of self for Sethe to get off work. As he builds up to telling her, he sees that she thinks he is leaving her. He knows "he was not leaving her, wouldn't ever" but "the thing he had in mind to tell her was going to be worse" (128). He cannot do it. He sees Sethe's face and "He could not say to this woman who did not squint in the wind, 'I am not a man'" (128). Instead he tells her he wants to have a baby with her. They spend the walk home sharing affection, Paul D steeling his resolve, but as they near 124 Beloved meets them and Sethe walks with Beloved. Paul D feels "an icy cold in the place Sethe had been before Beloved came" (130).

When Sethe makes it clear that Paul D is to sleep with her that night, things seem to be improving. The "warmth of Sethe's smile" makes Beloved's "malice" harmless (131). He is grateful, feeling like he had been "plucked off the face of a cliff and put down on sure ground" (131). But when Stamp Paid shows him the newspaper clipping, the face in the picture whose mouth was not Sethe's becomes stranger and stranger to him. He still is ready to accept it as a huge mistake, and asks her about it with the "ever-ready love...in his eyes--easy and upfront...with love that you don't have to deserve" (161). As Sethe explains it to him, and reveals the depth and strength of her love, Paul D faces the difference between them but understands what she expresses. He thinks:

[You] protected yourself and loved small.

Picked the tiniest stars out of the sky to own...Grass blades, salamanders, spiders, woodpeckers, beetles, a kingdom of ants. Anything bigger wouldn't do. A woman, a child, a brother--a big love like that would split you wide open in Alfred, Georgia. He knew exactly what she meant: to get to a place where you could love anything you chose--not to need permission for desire--well now, that was freedom. (162)

Paul D himself is trying to reach that point himself, it seems, although he still is afraid of splitting open, afraid that he is not a free man, that he is not a man.

Yet, he cannot understand the Sethe who "talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began...'Your love is too thick,' he said" (164). Paul D reels with the new knowledge, with the new Sethe which he sees. But more than this, he feels Beloved's presence; "That bitch is looking at me; she is right over my head looking down through the floor at me" (164). As he argues with Sethe, claiming that there had to have been another way, that she has two feet not four, "a forest sprang up between them" (165). He makes a careful exit. But later he wonders what had prompted him to say these things and whether it was Beloved watching him through the ceiling. He thinks of "How fast he had moved from his shame to hers. From his cold-house secret straight to her too-thick love" (165). Paul D, for all his conviction that he would never leave this woman, has taken his leave; but it is not only Sethe--it is Beloved and his own secret shame which push him. Once again, it is a tribute to his unique sense of the world that he can face what is his responsibility, cannot judge others without recognizing his own faults.

Paul D moves into the cellar of the church, another dark

underground, and begins to disintegrate into the memories which plague him.

He held his wrist between his knees, not to keep his hands still but because he had nothing else to hold on to. His tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their play and prey. (218)

He rehashes the important events in his life, from Sweet Home to the present, and is troubled by the question of his manhood. Is he a man, or was he only defined as a man by the naming of Garner, and if Garner had not named him to be a man, would he be one? He knows that Sixo and Halle were men. But he had survived, made it through "resigned to life without aunts, cousins, children. Even women, until Sethe" (221). He reveals to the reader how he feels about Sethe:

Passing by that woman's life, getting in and letting it get in him had set him up for this fall. Wanting to live out his life with a whole woman was new, and losing the feeling of it made him want to cry and think deep thoughts that struck nothing solid. When he was drifting, thinking only about the next meal and night's sleep, when everything was packed tight in his chest, he had no sense of failure, of things not working out. Anything that worked at all worked out. Now he wondered what-all went wrong, and starting with the Plan, everything had. (221)

Now his "doubt, regret and every single unasked question" (221) let loose from his packed chest plague him.

Stamp Paid, who feels responsible for what has happened between Sethe and Paul D, comes to see him and apologize. He tries to explain to Paul D that Sethe was not crazy, but Paul D does not want any of it. He tells Stamp that "Sethe scares me. I scare me. And that girl in her house scares me the most" (234). As he considers this, he says, "She [Beloved] reminds me of something. Something, look like,

I'm supposed to remember" (234). As Stamp Paid tries to get information about Beloved out of him, Paul D reacts:

A shudder ran through Paul D. A bone-cold spasm that made him clutch his knees. He didn't know if it was bad whiskey, nights in the cellar, pig fever, iron bits, smiling roosters, fired feet, laughing dead men, hissing grass, rain, apple blossoms, neck jewelry, Judy in the slaughterhouse, Halle in the butter, ghost-white stairs, choke-cherry trees, cameo pins, aspens, Paul A's face, sausage or the loss of a red, red heart. (235)

This long free-floating web of concern and pain trails through Paul D, and he asks Stamp, "How much is a nigger supposed to take?". When Stamp Paid replies "All he can," Paul D can only say "Why?" (235). What can he do, what more can happen, how can he continue?

When Paul D learns of the scene at 124 Bluestone, he asks Denver about it and learns that Sethe is not doing well. He heads back to the house perhaps out of the need to verify that Beloved is gone, perhaps out of the need to confront what had happened, and perhaps out of his need to see Sethe again. What he does know is that he cares about his own leaving and the reasons for it. He seems to have come to an understanding of "thick love" and feels it himself; he also feels shame for his "thin love" which allowed him to judge and abandon Sethe. He is afraid as he enters the house in the reverse of his leaving, starting with the cold house, that Beloved will appear. But she is not there, and he finds that he cannot even imagine it anymore:

he can't imagine...the desire that drowned him there and forced him to struggle up, up into that girl like she was the clear air at the top of the sea. Coupling with her wasn't even fun. It was more like a brainless urge to stay alive. Each time she came...a life hunger overwhelmed

him and he had no more control over it than over his lungs. And afterward, beached and gobbling air, 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)

In his desperate union with Beloved, he had dived deep into the past, into his heritage, represented through her; not only his personal tin-full, but into the true depths. For Paul D to find his red heart, he must not only empty his tin, but go beyond that to the millions of lives and stories which came before him, to the past out of which his life has come. The path of the peoples leading to his life is as rich as it is painful. His entrance into acknowledgement of this past, along with the past which Beloved represents, is perhaps the healing of his severed ties to the past which along with the healing of the present will restore his heart to him.

When he finds Sethe in Baby Suggs' bed, his emotions race from fear for her, to anger at her, and on to love for her. He realizes that she has given up and shouts at her, "Don't you die on me!" (271). It is after this that he makes up his mind about what to do. He tells her, "I'm a take care of you...Starting now" (272). Paul D wants to reclaim his love in all its 'thickness' for her. Paul D reenacts her past by wanting to bathe her and rub her feet, thus entering the realm of Baby and Amy. Empowered by his transformation in the church cellar, he can bring to her the ritual of life-giving and cleansing water. Paul D has entered into and shared the ocean depths of Sethe's pain through Beloved and now can share with her a new water which is as deep but brings rejuvenation rather than drowning. When she looks at him, she sees "it--the thing in him, the

blessedness, that has made him the kind of man who can walk in a house and make the women cry" (272). As she cries and expresses those things she can only tell to him, Paul D comforts her. He sits down and thinks:

There are too many things to feel about this woman. His head hurts. Suddenly he remembers Sixo trying to describe what he felt about the Thirty-Mile Woman. "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. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind." (273)

He realizes that Sethe is all of these things to him, and more. She, and only she, could have left him his manhood, and she has. She has the power to help him heal his brokenness, and has the power to coax from him the best things he can share and give. He decides that he wants to "put his story next to hers" and he tells her, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (273). He claims their freedom from the past. With her he feels that he has found a meaningful way to live, and knows that they have a future, together. In a typical gentle and loving gesture which signals not only his ability to care for another, but also his care for Sethe, he tells her "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (273). And in a reflection of this insight, perhaps Paul D has discovered the same truth about himself.

Paul D's spiritual journey in Beloved is riddled with pain and desecration but also with haunting beauty; his life is one which evokes a 'cry-laugh.' His years at Sweet Home under Garner provide a bittersweet beginning from which his life disintegrates. At Sweet

Home, Paul D's 'cradle,' he is respected, trusted, encouraged and made to believe in his manhood, in his worth. Paul D feels that he is special; he has a strong belief in himself. This cradle proves to be a crucible for Paul D and his fellow slaves. Schoolteacher makes it his duty to reverse what Garner had started, and forcefully breaks his slaves. Paul D's life falls to pieces and keeps on breaking until he can gather the pieces into his tobacco tin of a heart and let it rust shut. At Sweet Home he feels that it was only Garner's definition of him as a man that made him think he was a man, but schoolteacher has a new and terrible definition of Paul D which he cannot accept. In expressing his autonomy and running, he encounters the great pain and debilitation. The things he holds inside of him, his sense of himself, the meaning he finds in life, and even his body is broken to pieces. Alfred, Georgia hammers him into smaller pieces and greater pain until he feels that to live he has to stop all access to those spiritually important parts of himself. Eating, sleeping and walking are the only needs he allows himself to feel. But he cannot help his reactions to the beauty he sees, cannot help but be stirred and love small. When he ends his walking with Sethe, he is truly stirred. He takes the risk of learning to feel again. He learns what it is to have a meaningful intimate relationship, and what it means to love. The parts of himself not locked in his tobacco tin begin to get pieced together again, but those parts which are rusted in contain pain and those things that make him ashamed of himself. When Beloved disintegrates his tin and his semblance of

control, his pain and shame and losses flood back. Although he has internalized Sethe and her personal past, he does not know what to do with his own. He has also recovered his communal past through Beloved, gaining a heritage which is beautiful and painful. He retreats to the church basement. He is forced to face the pain and loss which has escaped his tobacco tin. He comes to a new understanding of himself and his life; he experiences a purification of himself, cleansed of what had been hidden in his tin. He is reborn into a new awareness of meaning in his life. He is renewed and can put the past behind him, free to share his blessedness and love with Sethe. Paul D's heart will be bright and red as he and Sethe share in a relationship which is grounded in reciprocal love, trust, commitment and support.

## CHAPTER VII : BELOVED

In a novel where the natural and supernatural are so intimately blended and known, the reader learns to adjust her vision and understanding to share the characters' "other way" of knowing. But the reader is, in the case of *Beloved*, privileged with knowledge the characters do not share. When the baby ghost has been dispelled by Paul D, and one reads that "A fully dressed woman walked out of the water" (50), it is clear that this figure is not a normal one. The possibility of a new kind of haunting has been opened in the reader's mind. This idea is strengthened with each new understanding gained about the character of *Beloved*, although realistic explanations are thought up which leave the reader guessing.

The reader first learns that *Beloved* is thirsty and drinks water "as though she had crossed a desert" (51). She is not from "around here" and her name is *Beloved*, which she spells out letter by letter in a voice which is "so low and rough each one looked at the other" (52). Sethe, Denver and Paul D notice her "gravelly voice and the song that seemed to lie in it. Just outside music it lay, with a cadence not like theirs" (60). She is indeed not like them, and the mention of her name seems to confirm the suspicion that she is the baby ghost returned, taking her name from her headstone. Her unusual

behavior could, however be related to cholera, but the evidence against this grows. Beloved is not what she seems to be. Here Boy, the dog, disappears; her skin is "new...lineless and smooth" (50); she "Acts sick, sounds sick, but she don't look sick," she has "Good skin, bright eyes" and she is "strong as a bull" (56). She knows about the diamond earrings (58), she had breath like fresh milk (98). Her identity seems sure, for all of these things add up to the murdered baby returned.

In response to Paul D's questioning, she says "I don't have nobody" and that she came because "I was looking for this place I could be in," Beloved had come to 124 because "She told me. When I was at the bridge, she told me". Beloved explains, "I walked here. A long, long, long, long way. Nobody bring me. Nobody help me" (65). In her conversations with Denver, she confirms our suspicions. Beloved reveals that she has her name because "In the dark my name is Beloved." She acknowledges that she has been "over there" where it was "Dark" and "Hot. Nothing to breathe down there and no room to move in...A lot of people down there. Some is dead". She is "small in that place" (75). Her words correspond with ideas of what one could imagine the "other side" of life to be--death.

Beloved's obsession with Sethe reminds one of how a baby might respond to finding its mother. She tells Denver that she came back "To see her [Sethe's] face...She left me behind. By myself" (75). Her adoration for Sethe is obvious, as is her urgent need to be with

Sethe. When Sethe looks in Beloved's eyes, the "longing she saw there was bottomless. Some plea barely in control" (58). She is also very possessive of Sethe, and hates Paul D for taking Sethe's presence and attention away from her (100). But one knows that the baby ghost was spiteful, was "Lonely and rebuked" (13) and had had its throat slit by her mother. The fact that Beloved feels that she was abandoned makes one wonder what else she feels for Sethe.

When something unseen tries to strangle Sethe in the Clearing, after which Beloved rubs and kisses Sethe's neck, the reader tends to agree with Denver that Beloved is involved. Beloved's response to Denver's accusations, however, initiates new questions about Beloved. She says, "I kissed her neck. I didn't choke it. The circle of iron choked it" (101). Circle of iron? This is more than the reader expects a murdered baby to know of. When Paul D believes that Beloved "moves" him, one believes him. When Beloved comes to him and asks him to touch her "on the inside" and call her name, one feels deeply her betrayal of Sethe, but there is also something in her request which reveals a plea, a loneliness, a need which is deeper than a simple maneuver to remove Paul D. Denver's experience with Beloved in the cold house confirms the 'other-ness' of Beloved, and the reader learns that Beloved has powers that exceed expectations, for Beloved can disappear into thin air (122). Denver, who is traumatized by her fear of Beloved's leaving, begs her not to leave them when Beloved returns, smiling. Beloved tells her, "I don't want that place. This

is the place I am" (123) and pointing out a ray of sunlight says "I'm like this." Beloved then looks at the darkness and sees something which Denver cannot. Beloved says, "Over there. It's her face...Me. It's me" (124).

Beloved's "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" reveal the fullest understanding of her. In her discourse, she reveals that she is surely "more" than Sethe's daughter, although she has the memories of that too. Beloved also has memories of the darkest experiences of the African-American people. She remembers being captured in Africa and the Middle Passage. As such, she carries in her the memories of the experiences Sethe's Ma'am would have had. In this way she represents not only Sethe's daughter but also Sethe's mother. It is through her discourse that the reader knows that she is a "composite symbol" (TO, 83); Deborah Horvitz describes her thus:

[She is an] inter-generational, inter-continental, female ghost-child....as such, she is, unlike mortals, invulnerable to barriers of time, space, and place. She moves with the freedom of an omnipresent and omnipotent spirit who weaves in and out of different generations within the matrilineal chain. (158, 157)

The discourse in which Beloved's dimensions are revealed is not easy to enter into; it is broken, painful, dark, and disrupts all conventions of narrative structure--past, present and future have no meaning and even the differentiation between self and other is left behind.

Yet, Beloved's mythic and historical dimensions do not deny her specificity. Horvitz expresses:

She is rooted in a particular story and is the embodiment of specific members of Sethe's family. At the same time she represents the spirit of all the women dragged onto slave ships in Africa....(157)

Even in her discourse, the reader finds connections between Beloved's experience of the past and her present, specific place. For example, she remembers that the woman in Africa picked flowers, and "the flowers she picked are on the quilt" (214), the quilt which was Baby Suggs.' Beloved also gives the reader a description of what is likely to be her arrival at 124 Bluestone:

I need to find a place to be the air is  
heavy I am not dead I am not there is a house there  
is what she whispered to me I am where she told me I am  
not dead I sit the sun closes my eyes when I open them  
I see the face I lost Sethe's is the face that left me  
Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile her smiling face  
is the place for me it is the face I lost she is smiling  
at me doing it at last a hot thing now we can join a  
hot thing (213)

Mixed into what the reader can see is her rendition of events and things described in the novel are layer upon layer of different personae and places joined. The discourse moves beyond human barriers; death and the bowels of a ship, Africa and America, women "swallowed" by the sea and Sethe--all are interchangeable and described in the same voice.

Beloved describes how she and others are "crouching" on a ship where there is no room; she is too hungry to eat the bread and there is so little water that even though the "men without skin" (white) give them their urine, she cannot make tears. There is a pile of

bodies that the "men without skin" push off of the ship with poles. She wants the teeth of the man who died on her face so that she can bite the circle of iron off of the woman's neck, the woman who has her face. But the woman, who was going to smile at her, jumps into the sea, leaving her alone.

Beloved uses the same terms to describe her experience on the ship and the other experience which one assumes is the "other side." She has the voice of different personae, but these voices describe the same feelings and abuses. Comparing her voices, the one "from the sea" and the one in the "dark," one voice describes that "the man on my face is dead" (210) and the other says "dead men lay on top of [me]" (241). The violation is described; "he puts his fingers there" (212), and the "ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in [me]" (241). In both, Beloved is left alone; at sea "they do not push her she goes in...she was going to smile at me" (212), and "she accused her [Sethe] of leaving her behind...of not smiling at her" (241). Beloved, with her memories of different generations of African-American women and her expression of mother-daughter relationships, embodies matrilinear disruption while creating a matrilinear connection from the past in Africa to the present in America.

When Beloved first appears from the water, one believes that she has come because her haunting has been stopped, and that on the other side she has been unbearably lonely, hungry for her mother;

perhaps she is afraid that without her aggravation Sethe will be free to bury her memory of her baby. But Beloved's love and yearning for her mother is more than this and develops into a wish to possess Sethe, merge with Sethe and be her. Beloved, again and again, uses the phrase "the hot thing." Mostly, the phrase appears in reference to her burning desire to fuse with the woman who left her, the woman who is her mother. Her passion, "the hot thing," is to become one with her mother, to be both self and other, to regain the lost beloved by owning her, becoming her.

The first words in Beloved's discourse are "I am Beloved and she is mine" (210). This is the only sentence in the whole discourse; the statement is elliptical, but it is also a pronouncement. Beloved continues:

I am not separate from her there is not  
place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there  
in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too  
a hot thing...my face is coming I have to have it I am  
looking for the join I am loving my face so much my dark  
face is close to me I want to join she chews and swallows  
me I am gone now I am her face my own face has left me  
I see me swim away a hot thing...I am alone I want to be  
the two of us I want the join (210-13)

Both the voice which could be Sethe's mother and the one which is her daughter's voice merge to shout "I am not dead...Sethe's is the face that left me...it is the face I lost she is my face smiling at me...now we can join a hot thing" (213). Beloved's expression of the magnitude of her loss and abandonment is as powerful as her passion to merge with the other.

The pain of being left is expressed in itself, but it also finds expression in her wish to merge with the one who leaves her and in her anger at being left. Beloved describes:

Three times I lost her: once with the flowers  
because of the noisy clouds of smoke; once when she went into  
the sea instead of smiling at me; once under the bridge when  
I went in to join her and she came toward me but did not  
smile. (214)

Of these three, the one which the reader knows the most about is the leaving on the ship. Beloved tells of her efforts to be with her mother, her wish to help her, and her inability to do so which hurts her:

In the beginning I could see her...I look hard  
at her so she will know that the clouds are in the way I am  
sure she saw me I am looking at her see me she empties out  
her eyes I am there in the place where her face is and  
telling her the noisy clouds got in the way...if I had the  
teeth of the man who died on my face I would bite the circle  
around her neck bite it away I know she does not like it  
(211)

But regardless of what she wants to do, she is left. Beloved expresses:

she is going to smile at me she is going to  
they do not push the woman with my face through she goes in  
they do not push her she goes in...she was going to smile at  
me she was going to a hot thing...she goes in the water  
with my face...she took my face away there is no one to want  
me to say my name (212)

After Paul D has left the house, and after Denver has been forgotten, Beloved's need for Sethe changes from the long awaited regaining of Sethe's love, recognition, and attention to one of convincing Sethe of the pain and anger she had caused her, although it wavers. Beloved

cannot have enough, she is insatiable with the emptiness and grief of a long long time. Her desire to become the other is just as strong.

As Denver watches the arguments accelerate, she hears Beloved accuse Sethe:

[She accused Sethe of] leaving her behind...of not smiling at her. She said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her? When she cried, there was no one...Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light. (241)

The anger and pain intermingle and are both inflicted on Sethe. It is ironic to note that as in the past white slavers had called Beloved "beloved in the dark and bitch in the light," Paul D has in the present. But in the past, Beloved had been the victim, powerless and abused, whereas with Paul D it is Beloved who has the power and in some ways abuses and victimizes Paul D. The glove is on the other hand.

As the situation grows worse at 124 Bluestone and Beloved accuses Sethe for her betrayal, there is one description which stands out because it reveals the other sides of Beloved's inner torture:

sometimes she screamed 'Rain! Rain!' and clawed at her throat until rubies of blood opened there...other times Beloved curled up on the floor, her wrists between her knees, and stayed there for hours...Afterward she would go to Sethe, run her fingers over the woman's teeth while the tears slid from her wide black eyes. (250)

Beloved cannot escape the thirst of the ship, the sleep of the infant, the pain of being left, the simultaneous anger at and love for her mother.

The girl in Africa, who could have been Sethe's grandmother, the girl on the ship, who could have been Sethe's mother, Sethe herself, and Beloved, who is Sethe's daughter, have all experienced the pain of feeling betrayed or left by their mothers. The agony of being alone and bereft is very real. It is terrible yet ironic that Sethe's mother lets all of her children die except Sethe because of the evil of slavery, and Sethe tries to kill her children because of the evil of slavery. Sethe is unable to think of her mother, for if she does, she must remember the ultimate pain of knowing that her mother may have abandoned her, but if the girl on the ship reflects Sethe's mother's experience, she saw abandonment herself. Beloved, who is loaded with mother-daughter relationships has the memory both of having her mother kill herself and of having her mother kill her because of slavery. The loss of the "face" signifies the death of a woman and a mother; it signifies the many generations of mother-daughter relationships which were destroyed and broken. These mothers are killed in more than one sense; because of, or by, the institution of slavery and because the pain of the memory is so terrible that their daughters cannot live with it.

Beloved, however, can remember, cannot forget, will not let Sethe forget, will make Sethe remember. Like Sula and Guitar, two pivotal characters in other works by Toni Morrison, she can be spiteful and destructive, she can enslave. Beloved makes demands, desires more than Sethe can give her, "complains...orders...takes the

best of everything" (241). Beloved begins to grow larger, her stomach protrudes. She begins to imitate Sethe, and takes over her persona; as Denver sees it, "Beloved ate up her [Sethe's] life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it" (250). The "hot thing" exacts its price. The last sight of Beloved before she vanishes is revealing:

a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat...Thunderblack and glistening, she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight. Vines of hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling. (261)

She stands on the porch, holding Sethe's hand, looking at the crowd of women there, hearing them make the "sound" as Mr. Bodwin rides up. Sethe darts out to her own way of protecting Beloved, but Beloved sees it as another betrayal, another loss.

But now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand...Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin. He is looking at her. (262)

Beloved is pregnant, but the meaning of this is deeper than the fact that Paul D has had intercourse with her. Perhaps Beloved is going to give birth to, give existence to, the stories, memories, lives of the past she represents in a physical gesture which is fitting of matrilinear relationships. Perhaps she is, in an ironic way, the daughter who will give birth to her mothers, to make the memory of them present in the future. The reader never sees the result of her

pregnancy, for Beloved disappears.

From what Beloved thinks as this scene unfolds, it is a replaying of the loss of the girl on the ship. The man without skin is looking at her and she disappears, leaves 124 Bluestone. Knowing Beloved's experience, it would seem to be a natural reaction. If Sethe has indeed remembered and named Beloved and what she represents, and by this final act which symbolically attacks an instrument of slavery, thus atoning for her killing of Beloved, then perhaps Beloved has gotten what she came for. In any case, Beloved has changed the lives of those who knew her. Where she enslaved Denver, Denver has gained her independence as a woman. Where she in some ways broke Paul D, she helped to give him back his heart. And where she has punished, consumed and left Sethe heartbroken, Sethe has had the chance to exonerate herself with this final action and can learn to forgive herself.

At the heart of Beloved the novel and Beloved the character is the importance of memory. The characters all have memories which are too painful to live with, and in their place have no memories of what their lives should or could have been. Barbara Christian writes that memory is what slaves have very little access to:

If memory were central...it would take them back to the past, beyond their personal history to stories their mothers told them, possibly back to the Middle Passage, so horrendous a memory that Morrison dedicated Beloved to those anonymous "sixty million or more". (332)

Slave owners, however, knew the power of memory, and deliberately

separated their slaves' families so that the slaves would have no chance of knowing their parents or children; there was no possibility of knowing their parents or their memories or knowing their children and passing down their memories. Christian writes:

To acknowledge that slaves had memory would threaten the ground of slavery, for such a memory would take them back to a culture in Africa where they existed..."in terms other than the ones" imposed on them in America. (332)

If slaves were considered to be sub-human, or animals, then the only memory they could have would be the type which animal have which enable them to be trained. Slave owners in most cases would not consider the slaves' lives in Africa to have any culture. And so Sethe, Paul D and Baby Suggs cannot even remember their mothers' names.

Beloved is a catalyst for memory in the novel. Sethe and Denver both know that storytelling is a way to feed Beloved, stories are what she craves (58). Beloved, however, specifically demands stories which tell of Sethe's experiences with her mother and the story of the killing in the woodshed. She does not want to know about Sweet Home. With Beloved's arrival, Sethe's memory opens up; she begins to remember what she had buried too deeply to recall, and she begins to speak about things that she had previously thought unspeakable. In their search for self-understanding, the characters must search through their memories. And so Sethe begins to understand herself and her past more clearly, as does Denver who hears for the first time of

a grandmother other than Baby Suggs.

In typical plots, the hero leaves his home, accomplishes something and returns, but in Beloved the characters leave their memories behind, live without them, and then have to return to memory and work through it; without this they cannot understand their past. To be whole, the past has to be recalled in its wholeness, what one wants to forget, and what one wants to remember. Characters develop and are revealed through what they want to remember and value as well as what they want to forget. Beloved is the reincarnation of the past, and as such causes the characters to remember, to reexamine the past, good and bad.

It is Beloved's demand that she be re-membered and remembered. As Sethe's daughter, she demands to be given life, in physical form perhaps because her death destroyed her life in Sethe's memory. As the composite return of those women who died in Africa and during the Middle Passage, she returns because her existence, reality, death and sacrifice has been denied, her memory lost. The heritage has been broken, but there is a responsibility for those living to remember it. In her article, "Beloved: A Spiritual," Karla Holloway writes:

If Beloved is not only Sethe's dead daughter returned, but the return of all the faces, all the drowned, but remembered faces of mothers and their children who have lost their being because of the force of that Euro-American slave-history, then she has become a cultural mooring place, a moment for reclamation and for naming...[The epigraph deliberately emphasizes] I will call. I will name her who was not named. "I need to find a place to be," Beloved's discourse insists. Her being depended on not losing herself

again. "Say my name," Beloved insists to Paul D. She demands to be removed from her nothingness, to be specified, to be "called". (522)

Beloved needs to find a place to be, she needs a place in their memory at the very least. Without a name, unrecognized, buried in water or earth or memory, she is nothing. Paul D, who calls her name, knows that something has changed within him; he says, "he was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he had once belonged to" (264). For how can a people be whole or recover their selves if they do not call, name, claim that which is their blood, their heritage, their history, even if it is beyond painful and has been deliberately disrupted?

Beloved, as a physical body, has a terror of falling apart, exploding, being chewed, and being swallowed. In the present, when she loses a tooth, she thinks:

this is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once...she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed. (133)

Beloved's fear is one from the past in Africa and the Middle Passage.

Morrison describes Beloved's experience in Africa thus:

In the place where the long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away. (274)

On the ship, Beloved experiences:

I am going to be in pieces    he hurts me where  
 I sleep    he puts his finger there    I drop the food an break  
 into pieces...in the night I hear chewing and swallowing and  
 laughter    (212)

This is most obviously the opposite of being whole. It reflects the way in which women who lost the ownership of their bodies as slaves must have distanced themselves from their bodies to live through the abuse they received, from being eaten, chewed up, spit out, their bodies swallowed by the sea. It also reflects the emotional aspects of slavery, the emotions breaking into pieces, exploding, flying apart and finally being broken. There is more to this, however; Beloved finds it harder to keep herself from breaking into pieces when she is alone, when she is forgotten. Perhaps her fear would be eliminated by being remembered, being whole, being loved in the minds of those who she yearns for. Just as if one dis-remembers the past, one is disconnected, is not whole, and may fall to pieces. On the last two pages of Beloved, a narrator describes that phenomenon:

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody  
 knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot  
 be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they  
 were, how can they call her if they don't know her name?  
 Although she has claim, she is not claimed. (274)

The women Beloved represents are nameless, lost, unclaimed, disremembered in the senses that they are not remembered, dismembered, cut apart, cut off, and have not been given back their member, their membership, their place. Beloved is forgotten, even though they could remember her. But they know that "things will never

be the same if they do" (275).

If anyone tries their feet in her "familiar" footprints, they will fit, but "Take them out and they disappear again as though nobody ever walked there" (275). As *Beloved* has made Sethe, Paul D, and Denver remember her and what she represents, has made them name her so that "things will never be the same" again, has made them search for self-understanding and wholeness, Morrison has done the same for the reader. Morrison has made the reader put his or her foot in the footprint, made the reader remember, made the reader name *Beloved* so that (at least in the case of this reader) "things will never be the same." Between the final paragraphs, Morrison states "It was not a story to pass on...It was not a story to pass on...This is not a story to pass on" (274-5). This connotes different meanings; that this story will not die or pass on, that this story will have to be examined and cannot be passed over, that this story will be passed on to others. The story, like *Beloved* will live, be heard and understood, and be told. The characters in the novel have gained new insight; they have learned to see themselves, their past and their future in a new way, they have gotten the use of an eye back. The readers of *Beloved*, likewise, will at the very least have their eyes opened, and perhaps will have learned to use their inner eye.

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