"To be Loved and Cry Shame": A Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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The struggle for psychic wholeness is a continuous one in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a novel situated in slavery and its aftermath. It is a process which requires access to painful memories; the characters in the novel reintegrate, achieve "the join" so desperately wished for in Beloved's soliloquy chapter, *re-fuse*, when they no longer *refuse* the deepest knowledge of the meanings of their individual and historical pasts. But much of the novel explores the extraordinarily anguishing interlude of time during which virtually all the protagonists, not just Sethe, exist almost as dreamwalkers in a state of dissociation and denial as they remain determined to expend their psychic resources keeping the past at bay. No longer able to endure the endless succession of losses, faced with the death or disappearance of all eight of her children (including Sethe's husband Halle), retaining as her sole and astonishingly poignant memory of her first-born child, Ardelia, the solitary knowledge of how much she loved the burned bottom of bread, Sethe's mother-in-law, the great unchurched preacher, Baby Suggs has a "sadness. . . at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home" (140). Eventually, she gives up preaching and dies of grief, while Sethe's daughter Denver lives psychically paralyzed inside her own mind. After Sethe acknowledges to Denver the veracity of Nelson Lord's grisly re-telling of the story of Sethe's murder of Denver's sister, Beloved, to keep her from being returned to slavery, Denver takes on a synesthesiac version of hysterical blindness: she becomes deaf, musing in her soliloquy chapter: "Made me have to read faces and learn how to

figure out what people were thinking, so I didn't need to hear what they said" (206).

While maternal love is certainly one focus of the novel, the male protagonists in this novel also struggle towards a definition of appropriate loving within which they can survive. In the absence of that stipulation, namely, survivability, Halle loves too much, and ends up with his face in the butter; Sethe's companion and lover Paul D, haunted by the consequences of what he sees as Halle's, and later, Sethe's, "too thick love," is determined to love small and suffers enormously for the consequences of his decision.

Sethe's consciousness, and the consciousness of Denver, Paul D, and the twenty-year-old Beloved (the spectral and apparently embodied adult presence of her murdered two-year-old daughter) are suffused with a truncated, relentless, disrupted chronology common to persons so severely abused that they suffer from Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) or disassociative states. Despite the fact that she was not captured in Africa but rather born in America and therefore could have no rational explanation for remembering in vivid detail her own ordeal on a slave ship during Middle Passage, Beloved repeatedly returns to memories of Middle Passage, the primal scene for sixty million Africans, the slave ships on which captives suffered and died.[1] Throughout the novel, Denver and Paul D frequently do not know if they are dreaming or awake. Sleep and the comfort of Baby Suggs' nearness protects Denver at night in 124, but during her waking hours, during consciousness, she is almost unsure if she is alive, breathing, in her own body. In Denver's soliloquy chapter, she muses, "I was safe at night in there with [Baby Suggs]. All I could hear was me breathing but sometimes in the day I couldn't tell whether it was me breathing or somebody next to me" (207). And in an understated echo of the normal response to profound deprivation, Paul D doesn't know if it is mud or his own tears that are the moisture on his face: "Paul D thought he was screaming; his mouth was open and there was this loud throat-splitting sound—but it may have been somebody else" (110).

All four of these characters, and, to some extent, every black character in the novel who believes he or she has seen Beloved (as well as Bodwin, the one white character who also sees Beloved), experiences Beloved either as a fractured aspect of Sethe's psyche

or as a kind of *doppleganger* for his or her own feelings of loss, grief, confusion, and rage, and, in the case of Bodwin, feelings of accountability, culpability, and guilt. The story not to be passed on, the story not told in traditional slave narratives, is that of psychosis, dissociation, of climbing out of one's body to forget "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" (251).

This reading is not meant to exclude or even necessarily to contradict other readings of who Beloved is. The question of the identity of the mysterious young woman who appears on a stump not far from the house on Bluestone Road is crucial to almost any reading of the novel. Yet Toni Morrison herself has been explicit in encouraging her readers to arrive at readings which may or may not coincide with those intended by the author; in her essay "Unspeakable Things, Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," Morrison makes the case for a reading of *Beloved* consistent with what Holloway has called a "plurisignant" (Holloway 618) text, one with "the concurrent presence of multiple as well as ambiguous meanings" (Holloway 629):

> These spaces, which I am filling in, and can fill in because they were planned, can conceivably be filled in with other significances. That is planned as well. The point is that into these spaces should fall the ruminations of the reader and his or her invented or recollected or misunderstood knowingness. The reader as narrator asks the questions the community asks. (Morrison, "Unspeakable" 29)

The characters believe that Beloved is the ghost of the "crawling already? baby," but Morrison makes the question of who Beloved is so ambiguous that the characters as well as the readers are frequently confused as to Beloved's identity. Most readers and critics of the novel assume that Beloved is who Morrison herself has claimed she is. When asked who summons the spirit, Morrison replies that Beloved "is a spirit on one hand, literally she is what Sethe thinks she is, her child returned to her from the dead. . . [S]he is also. . . a survivor from a true, actual slave ship," further explaining that Beloved could be both one who returned from Middle Passage and the ghost of "the crawling already? Baby" be-

cause "the language of both experiences—death and Middle Passage—is the same" ("In the Realm" 5-6).

Who Beloved is, fittingly, is not merely ambiguous but multiply inscribed. Simultaneously, she represents many things, many people, each of which is true. For Sethe, Paul D, Stamp Paid, Ella, and the thirty women of the community who come to exorcise her, the adult Beloved is a catalyst for healing who functions as a version of the beautiful African woman wearing a canary yellow dress who spits on Jadine in *Tar Baby*: she is a doppleganger, an alter ego, a shadow, a darker and more authentic version of the self. Morrison describes the African woman as the "original self—the self we betray when we lie, the one that is always there. And whatever that self looks like. . . one measures one's self against it" ("An Interview" 422).

While none of the residents of 124 and the surrounding community appear to welcome the precursor to the adult Beloved, the poltergeist-like spirit of the murdered "crawling already? Baby" (except for Denver who thinks of the ghost as a kind of playmate, a mischief-making ally who among other things will assist her in preventing Paul D from displacing her as the entire focus of her mother's attentions), the description each character supplies about the spiteful two-year-old provides the first major clue in the novel that the residents of 124 unconsciously summon the disembodied spirit, and, later, the apparently incarnated Beloved, in order to displace onto a shadow self the knowledge of feelings too painful to otherwise allow to surface to consciousness.

Paul D's response to the ghost, which, as for the other characters, reflects his own repressed emotions about the past, about his personal history, is to inquire, "Good God. . . what kind of evil you got in here?" (8). His memories are so suffused with terror, humiliation, and physical, sexual, and emotional violation that it is not surprising that his response to something associated with his feelings about the past, and his own capacity to remember as well as to feel, is simply to condemn it as evil. Denver contradicts this description of the ghost with a definition of her own, explaining that the ghost is, as she experiences herself, "rebuked. Lonely and rebuked"(13).[2] And despite the fact that Paul D tells Denver that Sethe has described the ghost as "sad. . . not evil," Sethe offers the final pronouncement on the ghost's character by denying the

ghost's loneliness, as she denies her own, acknowledging instead only the anger that acts as an armor for the sadness that lies beneath it: "I don't know about lonely. . . . Mad, maybe" (13).

R.D. Laing and other psychologists, particularly those who have written about Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), have described schizophrenia and other mental illnesses as coping strategies, as the only "sane" response to a world gone mad, as "a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation" (79). Morrison's world view in this regard is not unlike Laing's: madness is not only not a sign of weakness or failure, but it is an act of sanity, resistance, and survival.[3] The meaning of characters in *Beloved*, whose lives have been so devastated by the unspeakable abuse of slavery that they exhibit clinical signs of MPD, is therefore not simply an indictment of pain, but an acknowledgement of power, of African Americans leaping generations and continents to claim self as other and other as self, a black female vision of reciprocity and reincarnation. The characters in *Beloved* not only take on ancestral pain, but their struggle for individual wholeness becomes a struggle for ancestral healing. At the moments during which characters bump up against one another's painful rememories and experience one another's suffering, Morrison evokes not only shared sorrow, but the possibility of tribal and ancestral healing through the transformational healing of individual characters.

For healing to take place, dissociation must give way to the full reclaiming of that wounded self, the reintegration of that denied self as part of the core of one's being. Each character in *Beloved* goes through a process by which he or she gains not only an awareness of that shadow, but an introspective awareness of the psychological origins of the split-off self. The shattering and reclaiming of memory proceeds in similar ways for most of the central protagonists of the novel. The memory of what has happened to them is pushed aside, externalized, repressed, placed in a box, given over to someone else. But where psychic disintegration has taken place, each character splits into a "core self" and "alters," none of whom possess the others' memories. Within each individual, there is no memory/knowledge that a split has taken place.

Eventually, in each of these characters, memory returns unbidden. Without choosing consciously to be aware, Sethe, Denver,

Paul D, Ella, and even Bodwin, as dissociative persons, become gradually aware of at least one alternate self in the person of Beloved. As evidence of the existence of an alternate self or selves begins piling up, it becomes so compelling that the characters have to acknowlege the existence of these selves. In the process of rememorying, which in *Beloved* is equivalent to the process of healing, each character begins to realize who is doing what, which psyche is in effect "up at bat." To achieve psychic wholeness, each character must come to accept his or her memories. When each begins to remember and acknowledge their alter selves as part of their core self, they reintegrate.

The theme of the splitting self is a familiar one in Morrison, all of whose novels to some extent explore the split within the individual caused by the juxtaposition of a self-definition and that grotesque parody of human status by which perpetrators of slavery, racism, and sexual violence have attempted to define African Americans. As Morrison herself insists, "the trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self, and has always seemed to me a cause (not a symptom) of psychosis" ("Unspeakable" 16). Morrison observes that Pecola, the protagonist of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, "is not *seen* by herself until she hallucinates a self" ("Unspeakable" 22). In this regard, she serves as a prototype for Sethe and other characters in *Beloved*, who also remain invisible to themselves until each of them hallucinates a kind of alter self in the form of the young woman who, calling herself Beloved, appears on Sethe's doorstep. Pecola's hallucinated self appears only after Cholly's second rape of his daughter and offers to Pecola an explicit explanation for her sudden emergence in Pecola's life and thus in the novel; she tells Pecola that she didn't come before because "you didn't need me before" (152), an explanation that also sets the stage for the reader to understand Beloved's appearance as a self or alter initially willed by Sethe and then gradually taken on by many members of the community within and beyond the confines of 124.[4]

The willing of necessary spirits in *Beloved* is prefigured in Sethe's description of Denver as "a charmed child" (41) who, while in the womb, sensing that Sethe would die without help, wills the appearance of Amy Denver, literally "pull[s] a whitegirl out of the hill" to act as midwife and healer for her mother (42).

Beloved, the willed self, is needed not only by Denver to conquer her fear of being abandoned (or murdered) by Sethe and her fear of stepping off the edge of 124, but needed by Sethe to resolve her guilt over the murder of her daughter, and by Paul D to unlock his heart. Beloved is all the characters' unspeakable thoughts, unspoken.

That Beloved exists as the repository of unresolved feelings is suggested by the fact that Stamp Paid confirms that initially Beloved is seen only by Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and himself, each of whom has an enormous burden of guilt, shame, sadness, and fear. When Paul D tells Stamp that he doesn't know where Beloved comes from, Stamp tellingly reveals Beloved's mercurial visibility: "Huh. Look like you and me the only ones outside 124 lay eyes on her" (234). When Paul D asks Denver about the identity of Beloved, "you think she sure 'nough your sister?" Denver responds, "at times. At times I think she was—more" (266). Finally, Paul D. asks the crucial question at the center of my contention about the novel: "but what if the girl was not a girl, but something in disguise ?" (127).

Beloved

The character Beloved provides the most complicated challenge to an attempt to theorize her as a dissociative double for characters in the novel who have suffered greatly under slavery, for she also appears in the novel as a character in her own right, a character who wrestles with her own demons. The novel's four soliloquy chapters (200-204, 205-209, 210-213, and 214-217), spoken sequentially in the dissociative voices of Sethe, Denver, Beloved, and a merged chapter containing both Beloved and Denver's voices, summon the most agonized memories of each of the characters as they journey through their actual and ancestral pasts, as each attempts to claim Beloved as a part of themselves, as each names her "mine."

Both Beloved and Sethe are on the slave ship, dying of thirst, so hungry that paradoxically they cannot eat the bits of rotting sea-green bread that are proffered them. Some of the captive Africans die and are pushed into the sea; others jump. Under unspeakable conditions, a disassociative split takes place, and each person splits off into all those whom they have loved and splits off pieces of

themselves as well: the heart Baby Suggs commands them to love may disappear into a tobacco tin: one's face becomes not one's face. Willing oneself to forgetfulness, to amnesia, to numbness, one's self feels lost forever.

Beloved's soliloquy includes a nightmare exploration of the sexual assault of children, a subject almost entirely silenced during the original narratives, yet allusively present in the work of writers like Harriet Jacobs, whose *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* provides many clues that the interstices in such texts are as important as that which is written explicitly.[5] The speaker in this chapter of *Beloved* who cannot differentiate her face from another's, who repeatedly murmurs "I am not dead. . . I see her face which is mine . . . she is my face smiling at me," breaks into pieces, splits off, dissociates, becomes a nineteenth-century African American Sybil, a multiple personality whose childhood is maimed by the man who sexually enters her, who "puts his finger there," who "hurts where [she] sleep[s]" (212). The place where Beloved sleeps is both a geographic and a psychic location: literally the physical place in which she lies down, but also the site of her body itself, her vagina, her vulva, her clitoris, the place in which her innocence sleeps, the place in which she is still unawakened sexually. This reading is confirmed by the reappearance of this image in an even more explicit passage: "[Beloved] said when she cried there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. That she had nothing to eat. Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light" (241). Beloved rememories, merges with and becomes, all the unnamed African women and girls during Middle Passage who, raped by their captors, are called "beloved" at night and "bitch" in the morning.

The dead man who sleeps on Beloved's face is an emblem of those who literally have died in the holds of the ships during Middle Passage, ships packed so tightly that the bodies of the dead frequently obstructed the breath and movement of the living. In addition, each captive also has a "dead man" sleeping on his or her face: the ghost of one's self, a self which has been strip-mined of vitality, dignity, humanity, of life itself. Denied the right to keep her own body inviolate, Beloved breaks into pieces, shatters into a core self and alters:

> 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. . . the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts. (274-75)

Beloved is repeatedly described as fragmented, split off, shattered; unlike Sethe, Beloved has knowledge of the splitting self, which Morrison indicates when the narrator in the novel observes that "among the things [Beloved] could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces" (133).

In fact, all the African American girls and women in the novel are versions of Beloved, and finally, so too are the men. Beloved serves as a wrenched-open version of himself for Paul D and as the exposer of his less virtuous impulses to Stamp Paid. Despite the richly ambiguous suggestions about who Beloved is, Morrison is explicit in describing Beloved as a projection of the thoughts and feelings of every character who actually sees her:

> After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her. It took longer for those who had spoken to her, lived with her, fallen in love with her, to forget, until they realized they couldn't remember or repeat a single thing she said, and began to believe that, other than what they themselves were thinking, she hadn't said anything at all. So, in the end, they forgot her too. Remembering seemed unwise. (274)

It is for this reason that Beloved's given name, although referred to explicitly by Denver, is never revealed in the novel: Beloved is everyone's Beloved.[6] Beloved's lack of name signifies that she is everybody, the powerfully loved baby, while it simultaneously suggests a figure of absence, loss, and powerlessness.

Sethe

Morrison has borrowed from a traditional African religious belief to suggest that one person can appear in another's guise: thus the murdered "crawling already? Baby" is in the body of the twenty-year-old woman who appears at the stump. Yet if it is not a

conflict for Beloved to appear in the body of a stranger, it would seem even less of a conflict to imagine Beloved as reappearing in the body of the one person who mourns her loss most: Sethe.[7]

Beloved is the part of Sethe whose job it is to be a witness to her own pain, to ancestral pain, to Middle Passage. Beloved as Sethe, whose name alludes to the Biblical Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, the "appointed" or "granted" or "subsituted" son who replaces the murdered Abel, replaces the lost, the dispossessed, the murdered others who died during slavery, Middle Passage, and beyond.[8] She is also the subsituted self, the one who, in order for the child to survive, as a double or alter replaces the wounded child and takes on all of the child's vulnerability, pain, and traumatic experiences, especially the experiences of sexual and physical abuse.

Sethe's fanatical preservation of her children, a love so possessive that Baby Suggs "beg[s] God's pardon" for it, is also Sethe's attempt to keep a part of herself unsullied (203). Beloved as a double thus becomes not only the child who takes on the abuse, but the child who was never abused, who never witnessed the "headless, feetless torso" (250) of the remains of a lynching, who never worked the slaughterhouse yard as a prostitute: "The best thing [Sethe] 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" (250). Earlier, Sethe hints at a connection between her own experience of sexual abuse and her fear that she would end up a prostitute, not entirely surprising given that childhood sexual abuse (especially incest) is the most frequently cited causal factor in studies of both MPD and prostitution: "I got close. I got close. To being a Saturday girl. I had already worked a stone mason's shop. A step to the slaughterhouse would have been a short one" (203-204).

It is not only the ten minutes that "were longer than life" which Sethe spends with her "knees wide open as any grave," enduring the cemetery engraver's violation of her body in order to provide her daughter with that among the most precious of all African American possessions: a name and therefore an identity,[9] which causes Sethe to fear becoming so numb that prostitution becomes a possible livelihood (5). If we accept Beloved as Sethe's double, then Beloved's explicit accusations of childhood sexual abuse sug-

gest that this devastation is one that Sethe, too, endured under slavery. The ten-minute exchange with the engraver may well be one which triggers a much earlier memory of sexual violation. In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," Morrison provides a clue to this possibility; she echoes in the essay lines from the novel *Beloved* to reveal that in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye,* sexual violence, the rape of Pecola by her father, is the secret, the silence, which is "an unspeakable thing, spoken at last" (220).

In Sethe, Morrison has created a character who reproduces in extraordinary fidelity a clinical pattern of someone experiencing MPD. Like survivors of the Holocaust, veterans of the war in Vietnam, and political refugees from countries like Chile, El Salvador, Uruguay, or Uganda, which have practiced systematic torture on civilian and military populations alike, Sethe's emotional state also echoes in almost textbook fashion the syndrome known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), not surprising given that Sethe's creator once described slavery as akin to "two hundred years of World War II" (Bragg). In PTSD, symptoms include "recurrent and intrusive recollections about the traumatic events, dissociative episodes, intense distress when exposed to events that resemble or symbolize the traumatic event, inability to recall important aspects of the trauma, restricted range of affect, hypervigilance [and] feelings of detachment or estrangement from others," all symptoms also frequently present in persons with MPD.[10]

It is Paul D who most clearly observes the nature of Sethe's splitting self. In contemporary critical terminology, Paul D is a good reader of facial texts; his repeated refrain, "THAT AIN'T her mouth" when confronted with Stamp Paid's newspaper clipping of a drawing of Sethe after the murder of her "crawling already?" baby reveals a stunning truth, not a willful denial.[11] For Sethe to initiate the act of murdering her child, she must summon someone else to do it, and that someone is another self, an alter, someone whom Paul D has never seen.

Paul D's earlier arrival at 124 sets the stage for the reader's discovery of Sethe's splitting self. While Sethe's controlling consciousness appears to welcome the arrival of Paul D, the fractured aspect of Sethe, which manifests itself initially as the ghost and later as Beloved, opposes Paul D's arrival because his presence will enable Sethe to imagine a future without experiencing the ne-

cessity of exploring the anguish of the past. That is why the spirit intrudes on Sethe and Paul D's lovemaking, and then reappears in the guise of a "helpless coloredgirl" whom Paul D would not be heartless enough to cast out into the dangerous Klan-infected Ohio countryside (66). Paul D could and did chase the dematerialized "crawling already?" baby's spirit out of the house, but he is too compassionate to similarly chase out what appears to be a flesh-and-blood woman whom the residents of 124 believe to be an adult incarnation of that spirit. It is the presence of that spirit in the guise of Sethe's returned adult daughter which is necessary in order for Sethe to confront her past. In Beloved's soliloquy when she insists "I am not dead," Morrison suggests not only that the part of Sethe whom Sethe keeps trying to murder, the past, is not dead, must not die, must not be forgotten or sealed off, but she also indicates that the passage also obliquely functions as a way for Beloved to reveal to Sethe that she is in fact a part of Sethe and is not the returned dead daughter (213).

There are numerous clues that Morrison scatters throughout the text that yield this alternative reading, that rather than the incarnated adult version of the dead baby's ghost, Beloved is literally an aspect of Sethe. For instance, in the opening lines of the novel, the reader is told of a house that is haunted, a house that is "full of a baby's venom," yet it is Sethe, not Beloved, who is later described as a poisonous snake: "down in the grass, like the snake she believed she was, Sethe opened her mouth, and instead of fangs and a split tongue, out shot the truth" (17). While fleeing Sweet Home, poised to strike an intruder who turns out to be Amy Denver, Sethe also specifically refers to herself as "like a snake. All jaws and hungry" (31). The symbolism here is not accidental. Beloved's arrival heralds Sethe's rebirth; the snake in classical mythology is an agent of rebirth (See Henderson and Oakes).[12] Beloved is that serpent aspect of Sethe who is magical, dangerous but necessary, and potentially healing; she is taboo: "forbidden but unconsciously willed" (Otten 158).[13]

In Sethe's soliloquy chapter, Morrison hints of the absence of boundaries, of an absolute psychic merger between Beloved and Sethe, when Sethe muses about why Baby Suggs "pondered color" during her last years:

> Now I know why Baby Suggs pondered color her last years. She never had time to see, let alone enjoy it before. Took her a long time to finish with blue, then yellow, then green. She was well into pink when she died. I don't believe she wanted to get to red and I understand why because me and Beloved outdid ourselves with it. Matter of fact, that and her pinkish headstone was the last color I recall.
>
> (201)

Sethe's anguished, desperate wish for Beloved to understand and forgive the one act for which she herself cannot imagine granting absolution, leads Sethe to imply Beloved's complicity in the blood-soaked scene in which Sethe, and Sethe only, outdoes herself with red. Sethe attaches onto the two-year-old Beloved active participation in Sethe's singular act, the act which ends Beloved's life, for the red that Sethe and Beloved allegedly outdo themselves with is the baby blood that "soaked [Sethe's] fingers like oil"(5) as Sethe's handsaw slashes Beloved's throat.

Other clues to Beloved as a double for Sethe include Beloved's incredible thirst and her alleged pregnancy, both of which are prefigured by Sethe. When Sethe is found by Stamp Paid within hours of Denver's birth, Stamp gives her some smoking hot eel, but thirst overtakes her, she refuses the food, and instead "She begged him for water and he gave her some of the Ohio in a jar. Sethe drank it all and begged more" (90), an act mirrored by Beloved, who, on arriving at 124, "gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more" (51).

Similarly, when Toni Morrison responds to interviewer Marsha Jean Darling's question, "How is Beloved pregnant?", with the answer, "Paul D," and suggests that this is possible because "ghosts or spirits are real" ("In the Realm" 6), we as readers should remember that it is Sethe whom Paul D asks to have a child with him, not Beloved. Beloved's pregnancy is actual or literal (if it isn't in fact metaphorical, like the false pregnancy of Alice Walker's character Harpo in *The Color Purple* who eats because he is trying to get as big as Sofia) because as an aspect of Sethe, and perhaps *only* as an aspect of Sethe, Beloved has been lovers with Paul D.

Pregnancy serves as an almost perfect metaphor for the psychic metaphor of multiple personality, for a pregnant woman carries not

self and other, but self and an other which is in fact experienced as an aspect of self within her own body. As Kristeva suggests:

> Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech. This fundamental challenge to identity is then accompanied by a fantasy of totality. . . . The arrival of the child. . . leads the mother into the labyrinths of an experience that, without the child, she would rarely encounter: love for an other. . . the slow, difficult, and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself. (31)[14]

While pregnancy thus creates for many women the illusion of an undifferentiated and relatively unconflicted fusion between mother and child, slavery makes impossible both in pregnancy and in its aftermath, the ideal experience of mothering, the "slow, difficult, and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself." The fugitive Sethe, pregnant with Denver, and carrying Beloved on her already brutally latticed back, defines her experience of maternity as one of a splitting self: "Beloved asleep on my back. Denver sleep in my stomach. Felt like I was split in two" (202).

Sethe's split psyche is a function not just of her ruptured motherbond with her daughter Beloved, but with her own ma'am. Sethe's imagined dialogue with the adult Beloved fuses Beloved's childhood memories and fears with her own:

> Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons [for fleeing Sweet Home without Beloved at her side]: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. That she would trade places any day. Give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back just one of Beloved's tears. Did she know it hurt her when mosquitoes bit her baby? That to leave her on the ground to run into the big house drove her crazy? That before leaving Sweet Home Beloved slept every night on her chest or curled on her back? Beloved denied it. Sethe never came to her, never said a word to her, never smiled and worst of all never waved goodbye or even looked her way before running away from her. (241-42)

Surely, if Sethe were accurately responding to Beloved's emotions, Beloved's censure, fear, anger, and sense of betrayal over Sethe's killing her would have more cathexis for Beloved than her feelings of abandonment; it is *Sethe's* own overwhelming memories of abandonment which she projects as Beloved's. Sethe's mother labored in the fields and had no choice but to allow her daughter to be wet-nursed by Nan, the one-armed slave who functions as a surrogate mother for Sethe. Denied her mother's succor when she was alive, Sethe lives with an even greater deprivation when her mother is hanged: not only the absolute loss of her mother's continuing concern and love, but the terrible knowledge of her mother's apparently deliberate choice to leave Sethe behind.

Sethe's determination to beat back the past is not simply an attempt to deny her knowledge of Beloved's murder but also her knowledge of maternal abandonment and the loss of maternal love.

> [Sethe] had to do something with her hands because she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross. "Why they hang your ma'am?" Denver asked. (61)

Sethe is haunted by the knowledge that her mother was hanged. Since the usual reason in the plantation owner's mind for destroying such a valuable piece of property was to serve as a warning and a deterrent for others tempted to run away, Sethe may safely assume that her ma'am was hanged for running away. But if her ma'am ran, then at least on some level, she chose to leave Sethe behind, to abandon her, a possibility the adult Sethe only allows herself to ponder when Beloved returns: "Because she was my ma'am and nobody's ma'am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she, now?" (203).

Sethe wills or hallucinates Beloved's return because she associates the chance to be a mother with the longed for opportunity to be ma'am's child. Sethe's wish is not merely to gain absolution from Beloved but to re-experience herself as a cared-for child, to be mothered herself. Until Sethe can confront the neediness of her maternal love, the degree to which it borders on the pathological, Beloved's love as a projection of her own need will remain rapa-

cious, not reciprocal; Beloved's ravenousness is a parody of Sethe's own possessive love.

Sethe's splitting self emerges not just in her own soliloquy chapter but in the first of Beloved's two soliloquy or stream-of-consciousness chapters; the speaker's voice seems to be Beloved's but it also echoes many of Sethe's thoughts. In this chapter, differentiated characters merge historically, spiritually, and psychologically. There is a constant alchemy, an exchange in which Sethe and Beloved collide with one another's memories. The chapter is suffused with images of maternal abandonment and its corollary consequence, dissociation. Beloved re-experiences ancestral/Middle Passage abandonment when Sethe kills her to keep her from being destroyed by slavery, just as an important source of Sethe's dissociation is her experience of abandonment by her own ma'am who is hanged for running away.

The she who "is going to" (212) do something so unspeakable that it is not named, the one who is not pushed but who, in one last defiant gesture of autonomy, goes in, the mother who abandons her child by leaping into the ocean on the slave ship, is a mirrored image of Sethe who, believing that she is not her own best self and that she does not possess a self worth saving, takes a handsaw to her beloved child instead of herself. That the suicidal "she" of this passage is a *doppleganger* of Sethe is confirmed by the references to Sethe's "diamonds," her earrings, the totem jewels which are all that is left of Sethe's marriage to Halle. The "hot thing" which brands Sethe, Sethe's ma'am, and Beloved disrupts chronology and consciousness here, threatening not to cauterize but to sear.[15]

For much of the novel, Sethe is in high denial about the meaning of Beloved's identity. At one point, apparently denying any personal relationship to Beloved, she refers to her simply as "Denver's friend" (173). Yet Sethe tacitly acknowledges in her soliloquy chapter that Beloved does function for her as a kind of alter or other who witnesses her tragedies, who takes on her pain, announcing, "my girl come home. Now I can look at things again because she's here to see them too" (201). Whether Beloved is a projection of Sethe's imagination or an embodied twenty-year-old, her appearance as Sethe's daughter enables Sethe to minister to the lost daughter within herself as she reassures and comforts Beloved: "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" (203).

Beloved's reappearance in the novel as a double or alter for Sethe enables her to break through the icy numbness within her, expressed in the novel through images of snow, cold, thaw, and melting, images associated with Denver, Beloved, and Paul D, as well as with Sethe.[16] As she returns repeatedly to the most terrible moments of her entire existence, to incidents of overwhelming pain, Sethe is able finally to come to terms with them, to experience them as having happened to her, and thus finally to begin to be free of the hold they have had on her while she remained in denial.

Ironically, the clearest indication Morrison provides about Sethe's healing and reintegration comes in the form of her seemingly irrational attack on Bodwin. The first time Schoolteacher, a white man, comes into her yard, Sethe commits self-murder; she kills a part of herself by killing her child. But some eighteen years later, when Bodwin appears in her yard on his horse-drawn cart—a dead ringer, in Sethe's eyes, for Schoolteacher—she attacks him, claiming for herself a kind of wholeness by attacking, instead of a part of her self, a white man, emblem of the original threat. And Edward Bodwin is revealed to be an appropriate candidate for Sethe's rage for more than skin color alone: even the kindly Bodwins, the antislavery Bodwins, who procured 124 for Baby Suggs and Sethe, of whom their servant Janey says "I wouldn't trade them for another pair" [of white people], surely a backhanded compliment, are revealed to be racists, the possessors of a grinning icon straight out of the film *Ethnic Notions*: "Denver left [Bodwin's house] but not before she had seen, sitting on a shelf by the back door, a blackboy's mouth full of money. . . . And he was on his knees. . . . Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words 'At Yo Service'" (255).

The scene in which Sethe attacks Bodwin is especially significant because so much of African American literature explores how legitimate rage is choked off and displaced. Consider, for example, Bigger Thomas's murder of his lover, Bessie Mears, in Richard Wright's *Native Son* or the ten young black antagonists swathed in white blindfolds in the "Battle Royal" scene in Ralph Ellison's *In-*

visible Man, bloodying one another instead of the sadistic white men who have arranged the afternoon's "entertainment." In Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly is unable to protect Darlene from the white men who transform the young couple's lovemaking into a violation, and so he turns his anger on her; similarly, in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Brownfield spews out a spigot of hatred onto the one woman who truly loved him and whom he once truly loved, his wife Mem.

But in *Beloved*, Morrison uses repetition to offer the possibility of healing. Sethe's compulsive cinematic rememorying of the theft of her breast milk is coupled with a second compulsive return to a primal scene, her failure to attack schoolteacher and the murder of her "crawling already? baby." In this case, she has a chance to play out the scene with a completely different outcome. When she attacks Bodwin, the present and the past fuse, as Sethe floats psychically, geographically, and temporally between these two events. Sethe figuratively returns to the murder of Beloved and erases from her life some of the overwhelming impact of that action, giving herself a chance to reintegrate her profoundly fractured psyche. It is almost as if there is no longer a fleshmemory of her murder of her child. Intellectually Sethe knows it happened, but the memory of it functions like a demagnetized tape recording; traces of the recording remain perhaps, but they can no longer play themselves out at anything like original volume.[17]

Denver

Denver's psychological disintegration originates not just in her willed deafness to the news of Sethe's murder of Beloved nor in the isolating shunning of 124 by the townspeople, but in Denver's fear that Beloved will not be the only sacrifice to Sethe's handsaw. Denver's waking life as well as her dream life is punctuated with a recurring nightmare, experienced by Denver as fact, and therefore reported to the reader as fact:

> She cut my head off every night. Buglar and Howard told me she would and she did. . . . She looks over at Buglar and Howard—see if they all right. Then she comes over to my side. 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 for a minute 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. . . . The scary part is waiting for her to come in and do it. Not when she does it, but when I wait for her to. (206)

Denver attempts to displace her loneliness and her fear of her mother with silenced rage and thus finds herself "long[ing] for a sign of spite from the baby ghost" (12). After two years of hearing nothing at all, Denver's hearing returns when she hears "close thunder crawling up the stairs" (103), the imagined sound of the baby ghost's footsteps. Denver is returned to hearing when she acknowledges the self she has silenced, the shadow self who has knowledge of her mother's violent act. With Beloved's arrival as a potentially even more spiteful presence than the ghost, Denver is released to acknowledge her rage at spending her infancy in a dank jail cell, at spending her childhood afraid that Sethe would take a handsaw to her too, and at the community's rejection of the family.

Denver inhales Beloved, breathes her in, loves her in a way that she has never allowed herself to love her mother; Beloved's return is the antidote to Denver's "original hunger," the period in her life in which she is cut off from Lady Jones' schoolroom and the world outside 124 after Nelson Lord tells her what her mother has done:

> 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. She will forgo the most violent of sunsets, stars as fat as dinner plates and all the blood of autumn and settle for the palest yellow if it comes from her Beloved. (121)

Denver's terror in the cold house at the idea of losing Beloved again strongly suggests that Beloved functions as a double for Denver, that for Denver to lose Beloved is literally not just to lose a much loved sister but to lose her own physical, actual self:

> Beloved is not there. There is no point in looking further, for everything in the place can be seen at first sight. Denver looks [for Beloved] anyway because the loss is ungovernable. . . . If she stumbles, she is not aware of it because 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. . . . This is worse than when Paul D came to 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. (122-23)

Despite the chaos Beloved brings, Beloved's arrival finally frees Denver to have compassion for Sethe. In telling the story of her harrowing birth to Beloved, Denver tells it to herself and experiences her first real feelings of empathy. She begins to imagine what Sethe must have felt, feared, experienced. She imagines Sethe not as an all-powerful figure who has claimed the right of Jehovah in choosing who shall live and who shall die, but as a terrified pregnant young woman who attempted, against all odds, to protect her family:

> Now, watching Beloved's alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions about the color of things and their size, her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it: there is this nineteen-year-old slave girl—a year older than herself—walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker's quiet step.
>
> Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. (77-78)

Beloved, initially willed by Denver as a potential agent of revenge, becomes an agent instead of forgiveness and healing.

Paul D

Beloved is associated throughout the novel with water and other liquids: urine, sweat, amniotic fluid, the salt water both of Middle Passage and of tears, the salt water that rusts iron and creates the flakes of rust that fall away from Paul D's tobacco tin heart when

he makes love to Beloved and his tinned heart opens up. She is the drowned self, the wounded child of the men in this novel, as well as the women.[18]

Tense and distanced, complex and difficult, passionate and deeply tender, sexuality between Paul D and Sethe ignites in each of them an awareness both of the splitting self and of the possibility of healing. It is the function of Beloved, as an aspect of Sethe, to provide healing in this novel, which explains the seeming betrayal of Paul D when he has sex with Beloved as well as Sethe. Although there are many points in the novel which seem to clearly suggest that Paul D literally has sex with the twenty-year-old Beloved, it is my belief that the compulsive and confused lovemaking between these two characters is really a veiled suggestion of Paul D's disorienting experience of making love with Sethe as she floats in and out of more than one personality. Only the wild, tormented, profoundly feeling aspect of Sethe that is Beloved can provide Paul D access to his own past: "She reminds me of something. Something, look like, I'm supposed to remember" (234). Knowledge of the past and of his separate selves shatters not only Paul D's consciousness, but opens up the rusted-shut seams of his tobacco tin, allowing his red red heart to emerge (14). The something Paul D is reminded of is the self whom he has suppressed, the self who is unafraid to love big.[19]

This reading is at least partially confirmed by the fact that in the most sexually explicit passage about Paul D and Beloved, it is clear that rather than making love to Beloved, Paul D is *dreaming* that he is having sex with Beloved.

> "Call me my name."
> "No."
> "Please call it. I'll go if you call it."
> "Beloved." He said it, but she did not go. She moved closer with a footfall 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, then Paul D himself. "Red heart. Red heart. Red heart." (117)

As Paul D dreams he is making love to Beloved, his heart is opened up; he is awakened not only from a literal dream but from a waking nightmare, a prolonged period of dreamwalking, of dissociation. Mirroring Sethe's revulsion at schoolteacher's attempts to describe her "animal" characteristics, sex with Beloved arouses Paul D's most terrifying fear: being made into an animal, into something smaller and more unmanned than a rooster. Initially, Beloved is Paul D's nightmare, a projected other who serves as a confirmation of his worst sense of himself; believing Beloved to be the adult incarnation of Sethe's murdered daughter, he nevertheless seems unable to control his sexual desire for her, and thus sees himself as bestial, deformed, "beached and gobbling" (264).

Paul D may be shamed, but he is "thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to" (264). The dream reveals a healing which has taken place within Paul D's consciousness. The "inside part" that he enters in this dream is not Beloved's body, and possibly not Sethe's either, but the feeling part of himself. For Beloved is not only an aspect of Sethe but a fractured aspect of Paul D as well. He touches himself, his *own* inside part, when he touches her. When Beloved apparently breaks her promise to go if Paul D will call her name, perhaps she does not go because the name Paul D calls her, "Beloved," is not her only name; her name is also Sethe—and Paul D, an identity suggested by the passage in which Morrison observes of Beloved that "SHE MOVED HIM. . . and Paul D didn't know how to stop it because it looked like he was moving himself" (114).

One final piece of evidence that suggests that Beloved does indeed function as an alter in the novel is that as Sethe and other characters begin to reintegrate through the healing process of "rememorying," Beloved transforms from someone loving to someone destructive. An explanation exists for this in the current theoretical perspectives about MPD. If Sethe reintegrates, and absorbs Beloved into her core self, Beloved will cease to exist as a separate entity. As Beloved ceases to exist as a projection of other characters' interior lives, as she becomes an integrated part of each character's life, she is in effect metaphorically at risk to be killed again and, fighting for her life as a separate being, she unconsciously wishes to destroy those who would "destroy" her. Since the integrated self is by definition the end of the alter self or selves, Be-

loved disappears at the novel's end, evidence of the profound healing achieved by each of the protagonists and also of the promise of the healing that Baby Suggs calls on all African Americans to claim as their own: "More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize" (89).

Notes

This essay is for Tex, who helped facilitate my apprehension of the meanings of Multiple Personality Disorder.

1. See Clemons, who defines the allusion to sixty million as "the best educated guess at the number of black Africans who never made it into slavery—those who died either as captives in Africa or on the slave ships" (75).
2. Mobley notes that "the obsolete meaning of the word rebuked—repressed—not only suggests that the ghost represents repressed memory, but that, as with anything that is repressed, it eventually resurfaces or returns in one form or another" (195).
3. In *Sula*, Morrison's second novel, the townspeople of the Bottom accept, and in their own way, respect, the peculiar behavior of the shell-shocked World War II veteran Shadrack; they "knew Shadrack was crazy but that did not mean that he didn't have any sense or, even more important, that he had no power" (15).
4. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola prays to God to make her disappear when her parents are fighting (39), a wish that prefigures Beloved's transtemporal memory of the agonized withdrawal and dissociation of the captives during Middle Passage who "are all trying to leave [their] bodies" (210).
5. "I was subjected to such insults as no pen can describe. I would not describe them if I could; they were too low, too revolting" (Jacobs 77). In "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Morrison suggests that in her own work "what is left out is as important as what is there" (341).
6. See Denver's revealing acknowledgement of Beloved's given name: "Look like 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 stonecutter for—I knew" (208).
7. Berry and Blassingame have explored the prominent role that ghosts play in African cosmology and religious beliefs, and their discussion offers valuable insight on the spiritual and psychological function of Beloved as a ghost:

> Viewed as the indwelling spirit or soul of a man which departs his body on his death, the ghosts retain an interest in the affairs of the living and punish or frighten them for misdeeds, aid descendants, remain in the vicinity of their graves, and sometimes inhabit the body of newly born infants. The African's belief in ghosts is part of the

> process of honoring ancestors and functions to preserve social order. Many features of African cosmology regarding ghosts were retained in the Americas. . . . The main function of the ghost in the quarters was, as in Africa, to engender respect for the dead. The slaves universally believed, according to many nineteenth-century observers, that if the living neglect in any way their duty to the dead, they may be haunted by them. (247-48)

Christian (whose main source in her essay is John Mbiti) has also suggested the usefulness of approaching *Beloved* "from an African perspective" (11).

8. See Genesis 4:25: "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel for Cain killed him."

I would like to acknowledge with a great deal of pleasure the work of one of my undergraduate students, Kathyrn Martin, whose interest in Biblical images and allusions in *Beloved* provoked me to think about the ways in which Biblical allusions might be relevant to an exploration of the psychological themes I am exploring in the novel. Her essay provides a wonderful alternate reading to the meaning of Sethe's name: "Replacement is. . . suggested in that Seth replaced Abel, who was murdered by Cain. In her rebellion against Schoolteacher and the Fugitive Slave Law, Sethe refuses to allow her children to bear the 'mark of Cain,' the scriptural misinterpretation which allowed the whiteman to rationalize slavery. Instead, she subsitutes herself, defiant and strong, for the women who were forced to submit to the masters, and who watched their children being led away, sold, or destroyed. Morrison's use of the name, and the image, of Seth emphasizes Sethe's power and strength; she has been created for freedom, humanity, and motherhood, and will allow nothing to destroy that appointment."

9. "If you come from Africa, your name is gone. It is particularly problematic because it is not just your name but your family, your tribe. When you die, how can you connect with your ancestors if you have lost your name? That's a huge psychological scar" (Morrison, "Language" 28).

10. Chilean political activist and theorist Pat Cofre, board member of Amnesty International, personal communication, San Diego, April 1992.

11. My thanks to Professor Frances Smith Foster, who, in response to a considerably earlier draft of this paper, made the observation that Paul D was a good reader of facial texts. Personal communication, March, 1991, San Diego, California.

12. Note also that snakes are important to voodoo. A snake and a person may be bound together as if they have only one soul. See Hyatt.

13. The image of Sethe as a snake, and the multiple metaphors of shadow selves are also interesting in terms of thinking of the novel *Beloved* as a kind of progression from *Tar Baby*. Otten's description of Son as "a shadow figure of each character's undiscovered self" (156) serves as well as an apt depiction of the function of Beloved, especially so in his further description of Son as a "serpent figure" who is "forbidden but unconsciously willed, possessing healing powers but potentially destructive" (158).

14. Kristeva's remarks about pregnancy being a merger of self and other lend further insight into Toni Morrison's observation that her original intention for the novel that became *Beloved* was to write a novel about self-murder. See Bragg. My thanks to Chalapith Wasuwat for bringing the Kristeva article to my attention.

15. If the "hot thing" is a branding iron, a thing which sears the flesh, it is also a doppleganger for a physically less destructive but spiritually equally destructive implement, schoolteacher's pen, which inscribes black people as subhuman. Surely Morrison intended a textual allusion to Williams' character Nehemiah in *Dessa Rose*. Among others, Mae Henderson has suggested an intertextual relationship between *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* (73).

16. See for example, the following passages: "[Beloved] hoped Denver's arm around her shoulders would keep them from falling apart. The couple upstairs, [Sethe and Paul D] united, didn't hear a sound, but below them, outside, all around 124 the snow went on and on and on. Piling itself, burying itself. Higher. Deeper" (134). Paul D's blood is described as "frozen like an ice pond for twenty years" (106). And of course, the scene in which Sethe lunges at Bodwin with an ice pick is one in which she is "breaking a lump of ice into chunks" (261).

17. Snead offers a description of repetition compulsion that lends a great deal of insight into Sethe's psychology:

> [I]n repetition compulsion, as Freud describes it, repetition—an idiosyncratic and immediate action—has replaced memory, the 'normal' access to the past. Instead of a dialogue about a history already past, one has a restaging of the past. Instead of relating what happened in his or her history. . . the patient re-enacts it with all the precision of ritual. This obsessive acting-out of the repressed past conflict brings the patient back to the original scene of drama (67).

18. Rust (the rusted shut tobacco tin of Paul D's heart) as a mixture of iron and salt water evokes not only salt tears, and the salt water of Middle Passage, but the iron of Paul D's neck jewelry, the iron circle that Beloved hallucinates as surrounding the collective neck of herself and Sethe. See also the explicit reference to drowning: "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).

19. Paul D, whose Biblical name means "little" or "small," sees his own capacity to love profoundly as something profoundly dangerous to an African American man in captivity:

> Listening to the doves in Alfred, Georgia, and having neither the right nor the permission to enjoy it because in that place mist, doves, sunlight, copper dirt, moon—everything belonged to the men who had the guns. . . so you protected yourself and loved small. Picked the tiniest stars out of the sky to own; lay down with head twisted in order to see the loved one over the rim of the trench before you slept. Stole shy glances at her between the trees at chain-up. 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 (162).

Paul D's sees loving big as equally dangerous for African American women, and muses to himself that Sethe's large love for her daughter Denver was a danger to her own survival:

> Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one. (45)

The metaphor of black people being forced to love small, never more savagely painful in Morrison's *oeuvre* than in this novel, has nevertheless been prefigured by Milkman's mother, Ruth, in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison's third novel; Morrison describes Ruth as a "frail woman content to do tiny things; to grow and cultivate small life that would not hurt her if it died: rhododendron, goldfish, dahlias, geraniums, imperial tulips. Because these little lives did die. The goldfish floated to the top of the water. . . the rhododendron leaves. . . lapsed into limp yellow hearts" (64).

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