Sweet Secrets: a cross referencing imagery index of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Krystel Madison

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Deborah Mix

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract:

Toni Morrison is one of the greatest modern writers of our time. Her arguably greatest work, *Beloved*, is rich with dense imagery that references such varying topics as African mythology and the *Bible*. Though there are many scholarly papers on the themes in *Beloved*, there are not so many that focus on the images in the novel. The articles that discuss imagery are not comprehensive; they only discuss one or two in detail. Therefore, the website I created attempts to index all of the major images in *Beloved* according to seven major categories: mythology, biblical references, color, nature, history, community, and milk. For each image, I included an explanation of the purpose, history, and possible meaning of it in lieu of *Beloved*'s major themes. As a whole, these images evoke the horrible conditions of slavery in the United States while at the same time respecting the lost culture and history of the enslaved Africans who managed to survive the Middle Passage. *Beloved* serves as a worthy memorial to the millions who died and the connection to a proud, ancient culture that died with them.
Krystel Madison
Author's Analysis

Sweet Secrets: a cross-referencing imagery index of Beloved by Toni Morrison

My honors thesis is an online cross-referencing imagery index on Toni Morrison's award winning novel, Beloved. I chose to create an imagery index because, to my knowledge, there was no extant imagery index for any of Morrison's novels. There are a lot of papers written about Morrison books, Beloved in particular, but most dwell on major themes. If imagery is discussed, only one image in a given article is explained in detail. I wanted to create an index to simplify research on Morrison; to combine discussion on the many images in her most critically-acclaimed novel because it is so dense and literary. The images are there to be discovered and analyzed, and I thought an index would do her work justice. I also believed that by creating an index I was providing academia--or at the very least, scholars of Morrison--with something new and insightful. It would cut down on searching and provide a foundation for more detailed research along the lines of imagery-based analysis.

Imagery-based analysis is decidedly different from the study of themes. Images are concrete and literal, such as corn, milk, and character names like Sethe. They give ideas in the novel a richer context; they are malleable and can individually allude to more than one theme. A theme is an over-arching idea that the author tries to convey: for instance, two related themes of Beloved are the national amnesia of the United States and the institution of slavery that the US wills itself to forget. Images such as the rape of Sethe's milk in the barn and the sound of doves Paul D hears every morning while working on a chain-gang in Georgia visually allude to the horrors of slavery because they strike at the reality outside of the novel where such stories are buried, forgotten, or
outright ignored by society. We do not read or hear about black women being treated like animals and suckled like cows; when we read about the sexualization of black slaves, it is the illicit, consensual kind that Thomas Jefferson purportedly shared with his slave, Sally Hemings. We accept that slavery meant arduous labor, but we do not often consider the dehumanizing tactics of prison guards who abused their prisoners the way it was described for Paul D.

It is a reasonable argument to say that Morrison focused on these themes due to the frustration she had trying to glean information about slavery in the United States. I read in an interview how Morrison could not find any literal relics or slave narratives in the United States that openly discussed and/or described what life was like for slaves in the Antebellum South. Slave narratives often apologized for mentioning any private, emotional reference; in Frederick Douglass's narrative, he apologized for mentioning the death of his grandmother and only made a passing reference to his engagement. These narratives simply refrained from discussing the daily horrors of slave life. Morrison's images strike out at the collective silence that was complicit in America's need to forget its own crimes. They highlight what really happened and underscore the complex points Morrison tries to make.

When dividing the images I planned to discuss, I started by re-reading Beloved and jotting down any major images that stuck out at me. Then, as I began conducting research on the images, I categorized them based on what they seemed to imply and what my research concluded they were meant to say. For instance: the chapter that describes Sethe's infanticide begins with a description of the four horsemen coming to capture Sethe and her children. "The four horsemen" reminded me of a passage in the Book of
Revelations in the Bible. I thus labeled one group of images "Biblical" images and any references I found in the text to the Bible I included in that group. As a result, I created seven groups of images, with many overlapping: the quilt with two orange squares that Baby Suggs looks at before she dies refers both to color and African American quilt-making, a community-based activity.

I made the imagery index a hypertext document for two reasons: first, by creating an online document I provided immediate online access to literally any individual with an internet connection to browse my work. By putting my index online, I would be able to reach more students than just those who have access to the Ball State Honors College or Bracken Library. Second, hypertext allowed me to link, as it were, images that might not immediately strike a reader as being connected or relevant. For instance: in a discussion about the character Beloved, I compared her combined sexual control and naivete to the enigma of women in traditional African folk tales. In the novel, she tells Paul D during an interlude that if he can say her name, she will leave him alone. He says "Beloved," but she does not leave. Her refusal to leave can be seen one of two ways: either she is very manipulative, which follows the traditional view of women in African mythology, or she cannot leave because Paul D does not know her name. Throughout my research I read references to the loss of shared history and culture African Americans endured from the genocide of sixty million or more Africans in the Middle Passage. I saw a link there: instead of arriving at an exclusive conclusion of Beloved either being one or the other, I provided both points of view in separate sections of my site (African myth and Historical context, respectively) and linked them so that a reader would be able to grasp the possible
connection between the two images. In other words, hypertext allowed me to draw more subtle connections and conclusions than a regular research paper would have.

Websites also give visitors academic autonomy. In a strict research paper, I lay down my hypothesis and follow it up with supported points that lead to an inevitable conclusion. Research papers are linear and direct the reader to a particular analysis. A website is nonlinear, though; a visitor can begin anywhere he or she wants and jump to any part of the site at will. Their conclusions will ultimately vary based on how they viewed the website and interpreted my research. Creating hypertext links allowed me to make points about possible imagery connections without overtly drawing attention to my opinion or forcing the reader into accepting my analysis of the text.

Ultimately, I chose to do an online imagery index on Beloved because webpage design is a hobby of mine; I enjoy reading and analyzing literature--articles in literary journals can be immensely interesting; and Morrison is hands-down my favorite author. I felt that by combining these three interests of mine I'd be able to create a scholarly, detailed, and easily navigable website that brings something new to the academic community and highlights my abilities as an honors English student.
"Denver's secrets were sweet." -- Beloved

· Enter ·
Welcome! My name is Krystel Madison and this website is my Honors Thesis for the Ball State University Honors College. It is a general imagery index for Toni Morrison's award-winning novel, *Beloved*.

When people read *Beloved*, they are often swept up in the major themes of the novel: slavery, motherhood, self-identity, et cetera. But some of the best gems in the book are the evocative images Morrison displays, like vivid colors, milk, trees, and the seamless integration of these images into a whole, complex work. Uncovering these images is very much like discovering the text's secrets, which is why I named my website after Denver's private playhouse in the woods.

In compiling images, I had to decide what constituted an 'image' and what did not. Thus, major themes and ideas are referenced to and/or touched upon, but they are not the focus of this site.

Thank you for visiting my website.

Last Updated: December 13, 2004

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The mythology of

African mythology woven into Beloved

According to Morrison in Playing in the Dark, she writes her books with “American Africanism” in mind. "It is an investigation into the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanlike (or Africanist) presence or persona was constructed in the United States, and the imaginative uses this fabricated presence served" (Morrison 6). She draws upon black culture to make her stories speak to the black experience. One way she does this is by invoking African mythology and folk tale into her stories. Major themes like yearning for a daughter, female sexual voraciousness, and a style of story-telling that allows the listener to frame his or her own meaning, allow for multiple interpretations of a single text. The layering effect both caters to black interpretation and lends richness to the story.
Beloved, The Calabash Child

One day, long before the first cock crowed, the King’s wife woke up and said her morning prayers. She, as always, asked God for a child and went to her farm to tend the crops. Then to her surprise, she saw a very beautiful girl squatting next to one of the mounds of calabash plants.

"Ojiefi" said the little girl. "Good morning."

"Good morning my child," replied the King’s wife. "What is a little girl like you doing in the farm this early in the morning? Where is your mother? She should know better than to leave you here unattended."

"This is my home," replied the little girl.

The King’s wife was confused. The farm was too far from any homes and she thought the girl was not sure of what she was saying. The Calabash Child, page 157

In African mythology, there is a popular story told in variations about a mysterious orphaned girl who comes out of nowhere to fulfill the desires of people who want children badly. Usually it is a member of royalty longing for an heir, and the child is a morph of a plant like a calabash.

The child is a young girl who only has vague memories of her past and speaks cryptically about it. The parents are overjoyed to have her in their life and protect her steadfastly. However, other people make fun of the girl and in the end she always returns to the wild, never to be seen again.

The moral of said stories is that you can't force your will on nature. If you aren't meant to have a child, then you shouldn't force the matter by willing a child into existence through unnatural means because the bottom line is, the relationship is false and doomed to fail. In the story "Apunanwu," the Chief prayed for a child to form out of a pot of palm oil. She appears, saying, "I have heard your cries and am here to comfort you" (Offodile 143). But one of the Chief’s wives became jealous and conspired to be rid of Apunanwu, who passively accepted her fate and melted away. "Then God decreed that no longer could one wish for a child to come out of an object. That is why nowadays, no one can get a child unless by natural means" (Offodile 145).

Beloved is comparable to these mysterious orphan girls of African folklore. She appears out of nowhere, seemingly to fulfill Sethe’s desire to have her child back again. In fact, she exists solely to be Sethe’s surrogate child in the same way Apunanwu and the calabash child act as surrogate children to their respective King-fathers. Beloved doesn’t know much about her past, doesn’t explain herself well, and passively accepts her fate when confronted by family outsiders, such as when the black women of town gathered in front of Sethe’s home to purge the house of Beloved’s spirit. She simply disappears, leaving Sethe as morose as the parents in the folktales.

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The Open-Ended Tale

The novel *Beloved* ends ambiguously, with variations of the line "It was not a story to pass on" repeating until finally we are left with only the ghost's name.

"A story to pass on" has many different meanings. It could mean that Beloved's tale is a story to pass on by, to hand to other people—each reader's interpretation is subjective and valid. This format in story-telling mimics the African folk tales that left the fables open-ended, often with a question for the listener. This enabled the listener to be an active participant in the story, and gives the story a fresh view every time it is told.

One example of an open-ended tale is *Who Has the Greatest Love?*

A man was once traveling with his three wives when a snake bit him. In a short time, he died in the forest. One wife said, "My husband is dead. I can't live without him." She went to the snake and let it bite her, and she died.

Another wife said, "Since this place is full of wild animals, I had better stay and guard the bodies." She did not rest at all and did not allow even a fly to touch the bodies.

The third wife said, "My husband and my co-wife whom I loved are dead. I will not rest till I find a way to bring them back to life." She went immediately to an old woman and asked her to help. The old woman gave her an enchanted cowtail switch and told her to touch the bodies with it three times. This she did, and the husband and dead woman came back to life and were just as before, just as if nothing had happened.

Tell me which of these three wives, then, loved her husband most.

This is a difficult question to answer, since we cannot automatically assume that the ingenious one who brought the husband and first co-wife back to life is automatically more full of love than the other two. In the same way, we cannot just easily write off Beloved's story as something to pass on, pass up, or pass by. The ending makes us reconsider the story we just read; we are invited to go over the story again, analyze it, and "re-memory" it in the sense that we redefine it by our own experiences.

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Woman, thy name is Temptress

A Tempting Fate

Beloved as a character is difficult to define: is she the ghost of Sethe's murdered 'almost-crawling?' baby, or a much-abused survivor of the Middle Passage? One of the events in the story that lends to her ambiguity is the way in which she drives Paul D out of Sethe's house.

She moved him.

Not the way he had beat off the baby's ghost--all bang and shriek with windows smashed and jelly jars rolled in a heap. But she moved him nonetheless, and Paul D didn't know how to stop it because it looked like he was moving himself. Imperceptibly, downright reasonably, he was moving out of 124. Beloved, page 134

He finds himself gravitating away from Sethe's bed to the rocker by the stove, then Baby Suggs' room, and finally the storeroom. Once there, Beloved lures him (for lack of a better word) into having sex with her against his will.

"You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name."

As long as his eyes were locked on the silver of 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. Beloved, page 137

Beloved in this instance acts as a manipulator; an evil temptress who sullies Paul D's best intentions (building a life with Sethe) with her wiles. Her mystifying actions (we only see what she does; we do not understand why she does it) echo a theme in African folk tales. Over and over again in these stories, women are seen as sexually promiscuous. They have insatiable appetites and cannot resist sex with multiple partners even when they're married:

"A man married a woman who was very beautiful. The woman was very beautiful and very clever. But the woman's desires exceeded all measure. Since the husband who had married her was unable to satisfy her, she seized every opportunity that her cleverness could devise to sleep with a friend or a handsome stranger. When the woman met a friend on her way to the market, she would have her joy of him. In the market she would search out a handsome stranger and was always able to find a hidden corner where she could take her pleasure with him."

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The Agellid went to his young wife and said: "Three men have come to me asking for work, a mason, a woodworker and a nsani. I do not know what a nsani does and whether I have any use for him." The young wife knew what a nsani was. She said: "A nsani asked you for work? That is very good. A nsani who can use his tool well can be of the greatest use. Spend no more time thinking about it, but take all three into your service. The wood-worker and the mason can work for you and I will give nsani many things to do." The Love Dealer, pages 30-31

They don't care how they manage to get sex so long as they do:

The young woman greeted him, saying: "I thank you for coming. My husband has left me with an unfinished baby and has gone on pilgrimage to Mecca without waiting to make a start on its limbs. I have asked you to come here so that you can complete the work in which you are said to be most skilled." The muezzin said: "I shall be happy to help you." The young woman said: "How long will it take you?" The muezzin said: "It cannot be done all at one go. This is work I want to do well, the more so since your husband is saying prayers for me in Mecca."

http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/mythology/myth3.htm 12/14/2004
In Beloved's case, when she commands Paul D to "touch her inside part" she sounds naive about sex. Furthermore, toward the end of the novel, as a literal human entity, she is pregnant and does not make a verbal connection that she is with child. Her innocence mimics the young wife in The Husband's Revenge. Likewise, her cunning appetite for sex even at the expense of Paul D's desires and position in the household (or perhaps because of it) suggests both the man-crazy wife and intelligent young bride who makes use of the nsani, or love dealer, against her husband's knowledge.

Often the women in the folk tales are caught at their philandering by their cuckolded husbands. Beloved is single and not subject to the charge of adultery. She also has a supernatural edge and is in that way beyond reproach. Paul D may not be able to resist surrendering his body to Beloved's designs, and he may resent her for it, perhaps even on some level be grateful for it. But he cannot stop her since he doesn't know her name, so the most he can do is store up his willpower against her.

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http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/mythology/myth3.htm
History's for the birds

According to SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information,

...the Sankofa Bird was chosen because of its symbolism for the past and the future... is based on the mythical bird that flies forwards [sic] with its head turned backwards. This is emphasizing the fact that even though the bird is advancing, it periodically makes it a point to examine/return to it's (sic) past, since this is the only way for one to have a better future. This reflects the Akan belief that the past serves as a guide for planning the future.

Though the Sankofa bird does not grace the pages of Beloved, its mythological aspects are completely in keeping with the theme of rememory in the story. Sethe suffers from being so mired in the past that she cannot see the future and chooses not to plan for it at all. The balance she needs to create, as exemplified by the Sankofa bird, is lost to her because she has no real ties to her mother or her African homeland. Due to the cultural break that is the Middle Passage, Sethe cannot glean knowledge or find succor in the wealth of past cultural history. She is as lost and bewildered as Beloved, who cannot be claimed because no one knows her name.

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The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Black History Month Page. 22 November 2004.
Falling Apart

Beloved looked at the tooth and thought, 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. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. Beloved, page 157

Beloved's character straddles the fence between her identity as either Sethe's murdered daughter or a survivor of the Middle Passage, but in the above passage she sounds suspiciously supernatural. And there is a lot of evidence to point to such a conclusion. Much like the ghost of the baby who terrorized 124 Bluestone, she manages to disappear without a trace while doing chores with Denver, exhibits such superhuman powers as the ability to move Paul D like a checker throughout 124, and has a very real fear of falling apart in the above passage, like a zombie.

Morrison uses traditional accounts of hauntings from many different sources: "Denver's vision of a white dress's embracing her mother parallels accounts of headless haunts, dressed in white, which appear frequently among the stories collected from blacks along the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina" (Schmudde 3). Morrison goes even further back than African American folklore: "situated between the Ohio River, which marks the boundary between slave and free territory; and a stream marking the watery boundary African myth places between the worlds of the living and the dead, 124 is a point of intersection" (Schmudde 4).

Beloved doesn't just act like a ghost; before her literal presence, she takes on the antics of a poltergeist. "Poltergeist outbreaks are most likely to occur in the house of a young person, most frequently female, usually healthy, of average or above average intelligence, sometimes suffering from hysterical attacks" (Schmudde 20). When Denver goes deaf rather than hear her mom tell her the gory details of her older sister's death, her fear and anger has no constructive escape route. Tellingly, her hearing returns to the sounds of her sister trying to climb the staircase. Afterwards, the baby ghost becomes that much more spiteful and violent. It acts out all of Denver's inner frustration toward Sethe.

Ghosts, in turn, take to haunting a place due to unresolved issues surrounding the death. The Suggs family suffers under the duress of the baby's venom for years. Finally, Sethe and Denver try to call out to Beloved from the other side. They hold a seance at the beginning of the novel; Sethe has the intention to placate the ghost—"if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her" (Beloved, 5)—but they inadvertently lift the veil in more ways than either of them could have imagined when she arrives at their doorstep. "Where Beloved comes from, we will find no individual spirits; there, identity and time are conflated. Denver and Sethe conjure a particular spirit, and expect it to play by their rules...as it turns out, however, in the spirit world our boundaries do not apply" (Broad 18). This lack of rules allows Beloved to take on many personas: she can be a poltergeist, a ghost, a lost memory, or all three. "Looking for their 'beloved,' Sethe and Denver get their people, too. All sixty million of them" (Broad 19).

According to Margaret Atwood, "in many traditions, the dead cannot return from the grave unless called, and it's the passions of the living that keep them alive" (Atwood 42). If Beloved is the living incarnation of the ghost that haunted Sethe and her family, then her physical form is tenuous at best. Her worry that she will fall apart when their attention from her was taken away is a legitimate one. She will fall apart in the absence of their presence because without their desire, she wouldn't exist in the first place. Her fear, though, speaks for more than just the feelings of a temperamental baby; it speaks for the millions on the other side, just as fraught with the condemnation of being forgotten as she.

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http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/mythology/myth5.htm 12/14/2004
Sethe: Godly roots?

According to "An introduction to the history and culture of Pharaonic Egypt," the god Seth was:

The Egyptian god of chaos who embodied the principle of hostility - he was the adversary of the god Osiris - or of outright evil, even if his role was not altogether negative: Only he could withstand the stare of the Serpent of Chaos and only he had the weapons to which its flint scales were vulnerable. He was associated with foreign lands where Maat, the rule of justice, was unknown.

Though Sethe is portrayed in a sympathetic light in the novel, she did murder her own daughter and is an unstated object of fear in the eyes of her surviving children. As Denver says, she feels she has to protect Beloved because "Maybe it's still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children. I have to tell her. I have to protect her" (Morrison 243). Sethe's love is "too thick" and comparable to a double-edged sword; a chaotic identity at best, much like the Egyptian god who shares her name.

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How the Bible figures into Beloved

Spirituality is one of the major foundations of the African-American community. Likewise, the Bible presented many comparisons upon which Morrison could draw for her characters. She uses well-known stories exemplifying Christ's message: the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, and his call to followers of His message to preach the Word, among others. These stories bring depth to her already complex work.
Amy, the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:33-35 - But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Amy Denver represents the Good Samaritan in the tenth chapter of the book of Luke because she is a white woman who helps Sethe in her hour of need. We are immediately drawn to the comparison by Amy's invocations to Jesus. "Amy's religion is eminently present, representing her sense of urgency and agency" (Mitchell 179). She is not the type of person a reader assumes will help a fugitive slave—though a runaway indentured servant herself, the social hierarchy dictates that she would not help Sethe. If anything, she could have turned Sethe in to the authorities for a reward. Instead, she gathered spider-webs to ease the whipping scars on Sethe's back; she massaged Sethe's feet back to life; she helped birth the baby girl who was christened with her surname.

John 4:9 - Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

In other words, voluntary acts of kindness were not expected between Jews and Samaritans during Biblical times any more than between blacks and whites in mid-1800s America. Sethe felt desperate and scared to have to turn to Amy at all—but Amy came through voluntarily, despite her position of enmity.

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http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/bible/bible_samaritan.htm 12/14/2004
Carrying the Cross

Matthew 27:32 - And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

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, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder. Beloved, page 93

Sethe is plausibly the transubstantiation of Christ: she bears the literal and figurative burden of the institution of slavery on her back in the same way Christ bore the world's sins to Calvary. "Her pain is both enactment and reenactment, the merging of present and past action, the price paid now by Sethe, embodying the price paid then by Christ. This is what I mean by transubstantiation" (Mitchell 177). She bears the sins of slavery for killing her child because she was driven by the fear of impending slavery to protect her children the only way she knew how.

She was motivated to destroy 'her very best thing' out of love. God loved the world so much he gave his son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice. Since Jesus was both the sacrifice and savior, his murder was committed so he could save the world. This came at the price of initial ostracization when he was brought to Jerusalem on trumped up charges. Sethe's infanticide leads to being ostracized by the community as well.

The charge against Jesus of whether or not he was the king of the Israelites was ultimately not about a desire for power and revolution; it was about loving his people enough to be responsible for them. In a similar fashion, Sethe's infanticide was not a simple question of murder, but the power struggles of slavery and the right to love and protect ones own. Sethe's actions scrutinize slavery in the same way Jesus's sacrifice makes people question their spirituality.

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http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/bible/bible_cross.htm 12/14/2004
Following the Call

First Corinthians 1:21 - For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Who decided 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...she became an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it...Uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence. Beloved, page 102

Religion provides more than merely helping people survive the hardness of life; it helps overcome the hardness and promises blessedness. Though it deals in the particulars of abstract concepts, the aid spiritual belief provides is very real. Baby Suggs' call to preach, then, is the personification of the principle: she has nothing left to give but her heart and claims in her ministry that the only salvation anyone can attain is what they can actually see.

Baby Suggs is an unorthodox minister; she is female, uncalled, unrobed, and unanointed. This could be because "Morrison suggests that the religion of the called, the robed, the anointed is insufficient to address the needs of those human beings who survived slavery" (Mitchell 182). The rigid laws and codes of organized religion do not address the very personal scars and experiences of an enslaved race, though ironically their faith is based on the beliefs of an enslaved nation. Baby's sermons left the people in attendance "exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath" (Beloved 103). Because she is capable of reaching out to the community, the spirit of God is able to wash through them and move them so. They are able to "experience 'the wildness of the divine'...liberation spirituality" (Mitchell 183).

In a way, the physicality of their spiritualness mimics the healing rituals that are common in African-American churches. First of all, Baby Suggs' sermons occur in a place called the Clearing. A clearing is a place that has had former parts of it removed, or cleaned, from it. So it is appropriate that Baby Suggs' ministry takes place in a place that represents "a symbolic rebirth of the sufferer" (Krumholz 14). The things her flock need cleansing from is the dirtiness and shame they feel from being subjected to the inhumanity of slavery. The story reveals some of the events, such as Ella's sexual lock-up for over a year, Paul D's oral services wrought by white guards, and the rape of Sethe's milk. "Baby Suggs conducts rituals outdoors in the Clearing, a place that signifies the necessity for a psychological cleansing from the past, a space to encounter painful memories safely and rest from them" (Krumholz 15).


When the four horsemen came...

Revelations 9: 13-17: And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them...

The beginning of the most harrowing chapter in Beloved begins with the arrival of the four horsemen, a throwback to the imagery of the Book of Revelations in the Bible. Besides alluding to the horrible events to follow—the angels are a precursor to the End Times—these four men who come to haul Sethe and her children back into slavery (Schoolteacher, his nephew, the sheriff and a slave catcher) represent the four angels who come down from Heaven to slay much of the Earth's wicked population.

While God's intentions are meant to clean the world of wickedness and bring about the Apocalypse that will elevate the meek of the Earth, the men on horseback in Beloved bring about a doom and destruction of the opposite kind. The world won't end if they succeed at catching Sethe, but it will certainly bring an end to her freedom and self-identity as a mother. Instead of ridding the world of wickedness, they spread evil: Sethe's subsequent violence is partially their doing because it is a reaction to their presence.
Samson--more than a horse

Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think—just think—what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. Or Chipper, or Samson. Suppose you beat the hounds past that point thataway. Never again could you trust them in the woods or anywhere else. You'd be feeding them maybe, holding out a piece of rabbit in your hand, and the animal would revert—bite your hand clean off. Beloved, page 176

Schoolteacher is so educated in his discrimination that he is blind to the underlying truth of his own words. He compares Sethe to Samson, a horse, but Samson is not just a horse. Samson is the name of a character in the Bible who was born to slay the enemies of the Hebrew people, the Philistines. Through his conniving wife, Delilah, he is undermined and taken prisoner by the Philistines, who gouge out his eyes. In a final moment of anger, he asks God to give him the strength to kill his oppressors: his request granted, he loosens the pillars of a house, causing the deaths of everyone inside.

By being the master of Samson the horse, Schoolteacher compares himself to the Philistine captors of the Biblical Samson who are cruel and unyielding. By comparing Samson to Sethe, schoolteacher pits himself against Sethe, a victim of him and the institution of slavery he represents. Samson lashed out at his captors in a final bid to make up for having his strength wrenched from him. Sethe lashed out at schoolteacher by 'outhurting the hurter'—destroying her children so that he could not. Like Samson, who died with the Philistines he murdered, Sethe's debilitating choice cost her greatly, for she lost one part of the 'best part of herself.'

http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/bible/bible_samson.htm

12/14/2004
A Parable of the Times

Matthew 14:19 - And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

Now to take two buckets of blackberries and make ten, maybe twelve, pies; to have turkey enough for the whole town pretty near, new peas in September, fresh cream but no cow, ice and sugar, batter bread, bread pudding, raised bread, shortbread—it made them mad. Loaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave who probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. Who had never been lashed by a ten-year-old whiteboy as God knows they had. Beloved, pages 161-2

What Baby Suggs, Holy, sensed the morning of The Misery was not schoolteacher's arrival, but rather the disapproval of the entire community. She had been blessed with freedom bought by her son, Halle; blessed with the safe passage of her daughter-in-law and grandchildren; and blessed with a bounty of food that she willingly shared. She crossed the line, however, when she shared her harvest because it came across as flaunting a charmed grace no one else seemed to have. Her apparent pride prodded the black community into coveting the very holiness they acknowledged she had. They left her on her own to see if she was truly as blessed as she appeared; never realizing that her blessedness came from the shared resources and support of an entire community. Her freedom was afforded by the labor of her son's selflessness; her family's arrival at 124 Bluestone Road was the result of many people ranging from Amy Denver to the Underground Railroad conductors; and the berries that filled the pies that started the whole celebration were a gift from Stamp Paid.

Beloved's blood is on the hands of everyone, then. Beloved's murder can be traced directly to the community's refusal to warn Baby Suggs and Sethe" (Hinson 18). The breakdown of the black community by its own self-hatred due to "institutionalized slavery (which) tended to disallow individuality and to categorize African Americans as a group without individual traits" left them with the inability to find the inner grace Baby Suggs' preached about, ultimately causing their own downfall.

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Lady Lazarus

John 11:11 - These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

John 11:14 - Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

John 11:43 - And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

"Make you a bet. You make it through the night, you make it all the way...Looks like the devil," said Amy. "But you made it through. Come down here, Jesus, Lu made it through. That's because of me. I'm good at sick things." (96-7)

According to the Biblical tale, Lazarus has been dead for four days by the time Jesus arrives to heal him. Lazarus's surviving sisters, Martha and Mary, chastise Jesus for not coming sooner. Jesus chastises them back, asking them pointedly if they have faith in him. He eventually calls Lazarus to come out of the cave he had been buried in. Lazarus steps out, alive and well.

Sethe, despite reluctantly leaning on Amy's presence for some support and aid, believes she is bound to die in the middle of the woods. Amy's prediction is ignored until Sethe wakes up the next morning, still very much alive. Amy certainly helped Sethe continue in her quest for Ohio, and that help undoubtedly kept Sethe alive, because she was in a lot of pain and probably on her last legs.
Sethe: duality of Cain and Seth

Sethe shares her namesake with a character in the Old Testament known as Seth. Seth was the third-born son of Adam and Eve, born to 'replace' the two who came before him: Cain and Abel. Abel was a sheep herder and sacrificed a sheep to God for his sins; God approved. Cain offered as sacrifice some of his crops because he was a farmer and that's what he tended; God was displeased. In jealousy, Cain slaughtered Abel and then ran away in shame and fear. He never mourned his brother's death and, indeed, tried to defend himself before God when he asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

There was a lot of responsibility riding on Seth's shoulders as the third son. He had to please God, deal with a legacy of murder, and surpass the bloody past that ushered in his life. Sethe of Beloved actually invokes both Cain and Seth. Like Cain, she committed a grievous murder in a moment of high emotion. To add insult to injury, she then "refuses to acknowledge the implications of her act and to mourn properly for her child. Her pride becomes a shield against her grief" (Jones 16). Just like Cain, she refuses to mourn for the death of her child and insists that she was always right in taking that life. However, unlike Cain and very much like Seth, she gets to literally re-memory the act of murder a second time to revise her own actions. Just as Seth was born to give Adam and Eve another opportunity at parenting, Sethe gets another chance to prove her love by striking out at the oppressor and not 'her best thing.' This revelation in personal accountability is gained from the responsibility she has shouldered as a single mother in lieu of her husband's disappearance, as well as the appearance of Beloved.

She continues to mirror Seth by making revolutionary, independent decisions: she is the first in her family and among the slaves of Sweet Home to carve a life for herself as a freed slave. Her violent response to schoolteacher mimics Cain's response to God's displeasure, but at the same time Sethe represents the part of the story involving Seth, because she must also live with the consequences of her actions; she can't just run away.

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Epigraph

I will call them my people,
which were not my people;
and her beloved,
which was not beloved. Romans 9:25

At first glance, this line calls to mind the apparent confusion Sethe, Denver, and Beloved share. Sethe and Denver believe the strange girl who sits on a stump in front of their house to be their long-lost daughter/sister, Beloved. Beloved, in turn, believes Sethe and Denver are her 'people' when in reality they are not (if her cryptic references to the inside of a slave ship are any indication). A downward spiral ensues as communication between the three unravels and eventually breaks down.

However, Thomas Broad offers an interesting interpretation of the quote that is more in keeping with the dedication to the sixty million or more who perished in the Middle Passage: the line from Romans is actually a verse paraphrased by Paul from the Old Testament book of Hosea. The prophet Isaiah says:

Hosea 3:1-5 - Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee. For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

The prophet speaks of the eventual liberation and freedom of the people of Israel. Paul, however, takes the verses and uses it against the Israelites to claim that the Gentiles are God's chosen people. His "words reek of the exploitation of a people's history in order to use it against them" (Broad 37). Beloved reveals the real lack of historical artifacts that testify to the sufferings of Morrison's African ancestors by revealing, through imaginative reconstruction, the inner life of one ex-slave. Instead of being a promise of hope, perhaps the Romans quote is reminiscent of "the struggle to reclaim one's people's history even while others distort, suppress, and deny it" (Broad 38).

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A factual basis

Toni Morrison gathered her ideas for *Beloved* from two main sources: The Black Book, which specifically talks about Margaret Garner, the woman who committed infanticide; and the Harlem Book of the Dead, which underlined Garner’s dangerous love with another kind of inexplicable selfish/selflessness. These stories are a part of US history. Morrison dedicated her story, however, to the blacks who never got to create a history within the United States: the “sixty million or more” who died in the Middle Passage. Their stories and the reality of their harrowing experiences is largely unaccounted for, much like Beloved’s history is unknown.

http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/history/history_index.htm

12/14/2004
The reality of Margaret Garner

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* did not spring out of thin air. Rather, it was based on the case of Margaret Garner, a slave who initially ran away from her master, but committed infanticide upon capture.

Margaret Garner was a slave of Archibald K. Gaines and Edward Marshall of Boone County, Kentucky. On the evening of January 27, 1856 Garner, along with her husband, four children, and parents-in-law, stole a sleigh and fled to Cincinnati, Ohio. That same evening, Gaines caught up with the group and, with the help of authorities, tried to reclaim them. Garner's husband and father-in-law tried to engage in a gun battle with authorities in a futile attempt to stave off their capture, but their bullets mostly missed and only grazed one officer. Margaret, seeing all of this transpire, decided to take matters into her own hands. She gathered up her children and grabbed a knife nearby (the group had retreated to a shed to hide). She asked her mother-in-law to help her kill the children, but the mother-in-law refused and hid under the bed instead.

Margaret managed to cut the throat of one child; she stabbed her two sons, but they were not critically injured. The toddler with the slit throat was light-skinned and believed to be Margaret's favorite child. She was apprehended before she could kill her other children. Abolitionists tried to get her indicted for murder:

"If enslaved persons were only regarded as property and... had no rights as persons,' then Margaret Garner's actions could be treated as evidence that slaves need the control and domination of slave masters to keep their less than civilized tendencies in check. If the enslaved mother was regarded as a person, then her actions revealed just how inhuman the peculiar institution was if it could drive a mother to commit so horrid an act against her own child" (McKenzie 8).

She was not tried for murder, however; she was convicted of theft—essentially stealing herself and her children away from their owner—and sent back to Kentucky.

The rest of her life is subject to speculation. Some reports say that while "being shipped back to Kentucky she jumped overboard with her baby; she was saved but her baby drowned" (Rushdy 574). Another account says that her and her husband worked on a plantation in New Orleans and she died of typhoid fever in 1858 (Rushdy 574).

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The Harlem Book of the Dead

Toni Morrison was an editor when she came up on the ideas for Beloved. She came across the clipping of Margaret Garner's case in The Black Book first. Though the idea fascinated her, it wasn't until she edited James Van der Zee's The Harlem Book of the Dead that the story came together. One particular picture in Zee's book clinched Morrison's fascination and provided the inspiration to write this story about a woman who loved her children obsessively enough to commit murder. As Morrison put it:

In one picture, there was a young girl lying in a coffin and he says that she was eighteen years old and she had gone to a party and that she was dancing and suddenly she slumped and they noticed and there was blood on her and they said, "what happened to you?" And she said, "I'll tell you tomorrow. I'll tell you tomorrow..." That's all she would say. And apparently her ex-boyfriend or somebody who was jealous had come to the party with a gun and a silencer and shot her. And she kept saying, "I'll tell you tomorrow" because she wanted him to get away. And he did, I guess; anyway she died. (Henderson 83)

She went on to say, "Now what made those stories connect, I can't explain, but I do know that, in both instances, something seemed clear to me. A woman loved something other than herself so much, she had placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself." (Henderson 83)

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http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/history/harlem.htm

12/14/2004
"Sixty Million and more"

That line is on the dedication page of Beloved. It is a poignant one because it refers to the millions of Africans lost en route to the United States in the Middle Passage. While no one is sure how many died, it is the best educated guess of the number of Africans who either died in Africa or on the slave ships. According to Morrison, "One account describes the Congo as so clogged with bodies that the boat couldn't pass" (Clemons 46). It was difficult for her to find information on an exact number of casualties or even the conditions the slaves had to endure en route to America as well as their lives after arrival. It was as if the whole experience was whitewashed and forgotten. "I went to slave museums, but they weren't much help: little handcraft things slaves had made. No chains or restraining devices. In Brazil, though, they've kept everything. I got a lot of help down there" (Clemons 46).

Beyond the every-day evidence of slavery, Morrison found it difficult to get any sense of a slave's 'inner life' from the multitude of slave narratives published after the Civil War had ended. "Whatever the level of eloquence of the form, popular taste discouraged the writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience" (Rohrkemper 52). To appeal to abolitionists who were sensitive to the gritty details, former slaves rarely discussed private matters of emotional or psychological significance. Beyond wanting to appease their audience, the stories they repeatedly failed to bring to light were "too horrible and too dangerous for them to recall" (Christian 40). Hence, Morrison's desire to write this novel.

The inability to find any significant information points to one of the glaring themes of the novel: re-memory, and the need to know one's history. In a way, Beloved represents the unknown history of those lost in the Middle Passage because she refers to being on one of the ships and losing her mother, who apparently jumped overboard without so much as a smile.

To see how a part of Beloved belongs to those millions lost, we can look at the passage where she seduces Paul D in the cold house. She promises to go away if he can say her name. But because he doesn't know her name, she will not go away. Likewise, because we cannot remember those people who died, they cannot be properly buried. In that sense, the past will never die.

African culture dictates the necessity of properly caring for the dead. Like many other cultures, the dead must be buried, but their lives must be remembered and passed on in stories. But because all these people died anonymously in the Middle Passage, they cannot be claimed and cannot be known. And because no one knows Beloved's name, no one claim her or restrain her. They are truly lost. So Morrison wrote this book to remember them; a memorial.

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A veritable rainbow

Color has significance in *Beloved* because it takes on an almost ethereal quality. Besides being the color of things, "color" becomes an ideal. For Baby Suggs, it is freedom from the daily grind that has obliterated her faith in life. It represents freedom for Amy Denver, too. It can be both happy and angry, but either way it speaks to more than mere description: it reveals the heart of the characters.
Sethe made a dress on the sly...

"Well, I made up my mind to have at the least a dress that wasn't the sacking I worked in. So I took to stealing fabric, and wound up with a dress you wouldn't believe. The top was from two pillow cases in her mending basket. The front of the skirt was a dresser scarf a candle fell on and burnt a hole in, and one of her old sashes we used to test the flatiron on. Now the back was a problem for the longest time. Seem like I couldn't find a thing that wouldn't be missed right away. Because I had to take it apart afterwards and put all the pieces back where they were. Beloved, page 70

African American quilt-making got its genesis during the time of slavery. Slaves had to make quilts for their masters that were

...traditional quilts in the same intricate, exacting, repetitive patterns and techniques cherished by white quilters. For their own beds, slaves also did patchwork, but these quilts required greater ingenuity, dexterity, and resourcefulness given the economy of means, time, goods that restricted their construction. Left only with the stolen or gift scraps of the fabric from the "good quilts" that slaves made for their mistresses or with the strips or squares they cut from their own worn out clothes or breeches, slave quilters were forced to improvise. (Hindman 103).

Black people who wanted to have some claim to ownership of their own handiwork as well as a practical, tangible part of domesticity had to make do with what they had, much like Sethe had to make do with the scraps she found for her wedding dress. Because slaves had to make quilts for their white owners that followed a rigid model of patterning techniques, slaves made their own quilts stand out by not following the rules of traditional 'white' quilt-making.

There wasn't any except for two orange squares in a quilt that made the absence shout. The walls of the room were slate-colored, the floor earthen-brown, the wooden dresser the color of itself, curtains white and the dominating feature, the quilt over an iron cot, was made up of scraps of blue serge, black, brown and gray wool--the full range of the dark and the muted that thrift and modesty allowed. In that sober field, two patches of orange looked wild--like life in the raw. Beloved, page 46

The result is that modern-day quilts in the African American community purposely exhibit helter-skelter patterns, scraps and fragments that don't fit into neat, interlocking squares, and erratic, broken lines. It is an assertion against the staid conventions of former white masters and their current social dominance. So when Baby Suggs wants to lay down and ponder color, her desire implies that she wants more than what blacks are traditionally allotted. Also, later on in the novel, when Sethe makes gaudy dresses made out of carnival colors for her and the girls to wear, their outfits mean more than just the gratifying of fickle whims. They are actively thumbing their noses at the world in a purely African American context.

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Life in the raw

"What I have to do is get in my bed and lay down. I want to fix on something harmless in this world."

"What world you talking about? Ain't nothing harmless down here."

"Yes it is. Blue. That don't hurt nobody. Yellow neither." Beloved, page 211

The quilt Baby Suggs' eyes feed upon for its desolate orange patches, while recalling the fugitive aspects of quilt-making (colorful patches were not readily available), also represents a craving for breaking out from the rigid patterns that dominated a slave's life.

White and black are not a part of the spectrum of colors. Ironically, the main power struggle in Beloved is between whites and blacks; specifically a rendering away from white oppression. Baby Suggs stops caring about 'life' as it were, and retreats to her bed to contemplate color. In a sense, the orange patches signify a life outside the boundaries of black and white polarity.

Despite her call to preach, her overwhelming generosity, and the sweat of her son that set her free, Baby Suggs could not rise above the petty machinations of whites who oppressed her and a black community that let it happen. All of her love could not keep the whites from coming into her yard. Exhausted and broken, she desired color; but more than that, she wanted a peace that simply wasn't attainable.
Carmine velvet

Get me some velvet. It's a store there called Wilson. I seen the pictures of it and they have the prettiest velvet. They don't believe I'm a get it, but I am...Well, Lu, velvet is like the world was just born. Clean and new and so smooth. The velvet I seen was brown, but in Boston they got all colors. Carmine. That means red but when you talk about velvet you to to say 'carmine'. Beloved, pages 40-41

Amy Denver's fascination with velvet--carmine colored--seems inexplicable and shallow, but in actuality her journey for a rich, vivid, and textured color is another metaphor for desiring 'life in the raw.' As an indentured servant, she is similar to Sethe; both are runaways looking for freedom. Freedom to Sethe is the right to be a mother to her children; freedom to Amy is actualized in a cloth that is neither black or white. Hers is a journey toward maturity and adulthood, a rite of passage; whether she makes it to Boston and gets her carmine velvet is not as significant as the fact that she undertook the trip at all.
The Joy of Technicolor

Sethe looked at her hands, her bottle-green sleeves, and thought how little color there was in the house and how strange that she had not missed it the way Baby did. Deliberate, she thought, it must be deliberate, because the last color she remembered was the pink chips in the headstone of her baby girl. After that she became as color conscious as a hen. (46)

To truly envision the environment of 124 Bluestone Road is to imagine a very muted place, color-wise. The house is in dire need of repair and, aside from the lightning white staircase, most of the house is drenched in dull shades of blue and brown. The dullness may attest to the equally dulled emotions of the inhabitants who for the longest time shored up their energy to fight against the terror of their collective past, but overly bright colors are a sign of imbalance as well. Therefore, a happy medium between no shades and blatant, shouting hues suggests harmony among the characters of the novel and their well-being.

Generally, the prime examples of such colors were in nature or pastoral scenes.

Happy memories are remarked upon by Sethe remembering the colors of Sweet Home: "I remember the peas still had flowers. The grass was long, though, full of white buds and those tall red blossoms people call Diane and something there with the leastest little bit of blue—light, like a cornflower but pale, pale. Real pale" (226).

When Paul D returns to 124 Bluestone Road after Beloved's exorcism, his return is announced by "the riot of late-summer flowers where vegetables should be growing. Sweet william, morning glory, chrysanthemums" (318). A return to tranquility is suggested by sunlight bathing the rooms with brightness: "There is too much light in this room. Things look sold" (319).

Paul D's journey to freedom was highlighted by a trail of blossoms: "So he raced from dogwood to blossoming perch. When they thinned out he headed for the cherry blossoms, then magnolia, chinaberry, pecan, walnut and prickly pear. At last he reached a field of apple trees whose flowers were just becoming tiny knots of fruit" (133).

Freedom and peace tend to be associated with nature and the mild palette of colors found within it. Communing with nature signifies a calm inner life; Sethe's fondest memories are of the rolling pastures of Sweet Home, which even manage to crowd out memories of her sons. Underlined is the idea that slavery is very unnatural and distorts the lives of those colored by it.
Angry Colors

Angry, Violent Hues

Blood, which pumped out of the 'crawling-already' baby's body as she died in her mother's arms, is the most recognizable instance of when the color is mentioned in Beloved. However, the novel mentions the starkness of blood red in several places:

"...summer had been hooted offstage and autumn with its bottles of blood and gold had everybody's attention." (136)
"It wouldn't harm me because I tasted its blood when Ma'am nursed me." (247)
"There was no blood. Mr. Garner came home bent over his mare's neck, sweating and blue-white. Not a drop of blood." (259)
"Roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe's shoulders." (109)

Blood red, as well as other typically warm colors, is often used as a description when ushering in particularly strong emotional sections. For instance: to illustrate Denver's excessive loyalty to Beloved, she says that she would give up "the most violent of sunsets, stars as fat as dinner plates and all the blood of autumn" to keep Beloved by her side (143). Bright colors are often associated with violent actions, flagrant emotions, and exaggeration. Stamp Paid makes his mistress blush when he all but admits that the master is sleeping with his wife. Sethe makes such ridiculously bright clothes for her girls to wear that they look like 'chipp(ies)'. "By the end of March the three of them looked like carnival women with nothing to do" (283). She decorates the staircase banister with such out-of-season flower arrangements that the house looks like it belongs to a tall child instead of a grown woman. On their way to the carnival, Paul D. Sethe, and Denver notice the decadent scent of fetid roses, planted to offset the "sin of slicing trees." Too bright colors hint at a lack of balance.

Bright, daring colors were beyond the means of most black people during the Reconstruction period. They had to make do with browns and blues; dull colors that were readily available to just about anyone. Starved for color, it makes sense that someone like Baby Suggs would yearn for new hues; but embracing these colors which are decidedly out of the ordinary suggests a pride and hubris that is out of bounds, a lack of self-control.

Other examples: Stamp's ribbon (213), the pool of red light at 124 (11), Sixo's lynching (212).

http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/colors/color_anger.htm

12/14/2004
Natural Inclinations

In *Beloved*, Morrison utilizes nature in unorthodox ways. Corn is a sensual symbol of the Sweet Home Boys' longing. Trees are more than shade; they're friends. And birds symbolize destruction, unhappiness, and insanity. Morrison takes these traditional symbols of strength, growth, and freedom and turns them on their heads. That we can't trust them to have conventional expectations underlines the strange and depraved institution of slavery. When inspected further, slavery is not natural, friendly, or free. Because the characters live with the context of slavery permeating every aspect of their lives, the setting of the story is colored by the strangeness of slavery too.
A twist on conventional interpretations

"Mister, he looked so... free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher. Son a bitch couldn't even get out the shell by himself but he was still king and I was... Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd still 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 sitting in the sun on a tub." Beloved, page 86

Instead of birds representing freedom, their placement in Beloved "emphasizes the brutality of slavery, in which men become less than barnyard beasts" (Kearney 2). The rooster Mister struts and puffs out his chest with pride as Paul D is led away in a bit. Paul D says that even cooking Mister wouldn't change the fact that a free bird was getting roasted; a direct contrast to Sixo finally realizing freedom when he gets burned alive. The rooster's freedom of movement ultimately underscores Paul D's lack of self-determination.

Doves

The dove's traditional role is also subverted in this text. Usually, it is a symbol of the Holy Spirit--a dove winged down from Heaven when Jesus was baptized to show God's approval. Doves tend to represent peace, gentleness, and purity. However, the juxtaposition of doves at a scene when white guards forced the black slaves to perform fellatio brings to mind anything but peace.

CHAIN-UP completed, they knelt down. The dew, more likely than not, was mist by then. Heavy sometimes and if the dogs were quiet and just breathing you could hear doves...He was looking at his palsied hands, smelling the guard, listening to his soft grunts so like the doves', as he stood before the man kneeling in mist on his right. Convinced he was next, Paul D retched--vomiting up nothing at all. Beloved, page 127

Cardinals

Cardinals, "associated with love because of the fidelity of mated pairs (become) an emblem of perverted love and hatred" (Kearney 4). In the novel, Beloved spots a cardinal in the woods and follows it with the same dogged determination she has toward being with Sethe--the same fidelity that nearly devours Sethe in its unending ravenousness.

Stamp Paid thinks he is plucking a cardinal feather out of the water when he actually picks up a ribbon tied to hair with a bit of scalp still attached. There is, in that scene, a juxtaposition of the hatred necessary to commit such a crime against another human being with the deep love a cardinal is supposed to signify.

Hawks

Hawks are usually viewed as predators who swoop down to catch their prey at high speeds, so much so that victims are caught by surprise. The irony in Beloved is that 'hawk' is the way Sethe is described when she flies through the yard to collect her children with the intention to kill them.

So Stamp Paid did not tell him how she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing, how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way...(185)

The last description a fiercely protective mother should have attributed to her with regards to how she treats her children is 'hawkish.' The description begs the question: if she is the predator, what is she protecting them from?

Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds, while they do not traditionally have a symbolic meaning, do serve to denote insanity in Beloved. Whenever Sethe feels that her children are threatened by slave catchers, she feels hummingbird beaks pecking at her head and she hears their wings fluttering in her ears:

http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/nature/birds.htm 12/14/2004
...when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher’s hat, she hear wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. (192)
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. (308-9)
"She had taken pains to keep them out, but knew full well that at any moment they could rock her, rip her from her moorings, send the birds twittering back into her hair." (222)

The interesting thing to note here is that Sethe is unable to describe her exact feelings at that moment any other way. The natural inclinations of hummingbirds is the only way for her to explain the deep-seated, frozen fear inside of her. If she must consider her situation in terms of birds, it would seem more understandable for her to think of her flight from Sweet Home with positive connotations. But she escaped with 'broken wings' in the sense that she was severely impaired physically and nearly died in the Kentucky woods.

Birds, humming ones included, represent freedom because they fly; they can soar above those who try to cage them. That Morrison uses bird metaphors for the exact opposite approach continues to show how slavery subverts any normal definition of freedom. Her characters are so far removed from any type of normalcy that they cannot even begin to imagine what freedom means.

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I've never seen a poem as lovely as a tree.

Trees

"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, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. They little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom." Beloved, page 93

Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to as he frequently did since way back when he took the midday meal in the fields of Sweet Home. Always in the same place if he could, and choosing the place had been hard because Sweet Home had more pretty trees than any farm around. His choice he called Brother, and sat under it... Beloved, page 25

According to African religion, trees are "considered as intermediaries between God and man—they are even worshipped by some tribes as God himself in his immanent aspect" (Bonnet 5). Trees are sacred and have life-giving properties. Paul D espouses their spiritual properties by referring to one of the trees at Sweet Home as his friend; trees also lead him to freedom. Baby Suggs preaches from a Clearing surrounded by trees, and Denver smells the vibrancy of life from her emerald ring of boxwood.

Sethe has a tree on her back; it is opposite from her breasts, which receive all of her attention. When she tells Paul D how she was raped in the barn by schoolteacher's nephews, he tries to ask her about her back; she concentrates on her breasts instead and the milk she carried in them for her children. Her narrow focus on her breasts, at the expense of the chokecherry tree on her back, causes her to ignore the spiritual properties trees hold for her culture. This detail might be easily dismissed "were it not emphasized by the remark she adds when first describing it: 'I've never seen it and never will.' There could be no clearer hint that she is going to disregard the lesson imprinted on her back" (Bonnet 32). Instead of cherishing life, she can only pay attention to her body as a commodity; her milk is the only measure of her worth.

Other examples of trees: the Georgia aspen (260), sick chestnuts in the yard (210).

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http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edu/beloved/nature/trees.htm 12/14/2004
Knee-high by the 4th of July

...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." Beloved, page 33

The above passage is a highly eroticized account of Sethe's first time making love to her husband, Halle, in the cornfield at Sweet Home. He thought he was offering them privacy, but in truth everyone from the crows to the other slaves were able to tell what was going on from the movement of the corn.

The imagery is obviously sexualized, and the reason for such sexualization of the corn at first appears obscure. But a closer look reveals that the corn "mediates not only satisfaction but also deprivation both in the remembered past and in the present act of remembering" (Harding 11). The scene in which Sethe and Paul D recall their experiences at Sweet Home is one of disconnection and connection; they lie in bed sharing the same thoughts, but from different perspectives and without any communication. Their stance mirrors their past, when they shared a common experience of Sethe making love in the field with Paul D completely aware of it. Sethe enjoyed the sex with Halle, but did not enjoy the felled corn on his back. Paul D enjoyed the felled corn from the love-making session, but did not enjoy having a sex act blatantly played out before him with no release for himself.

Their inability to gain complete closure from the memory "respond(s) both to the dehumanizing pressure of the institution of slavery and the necessity...to assert humanity" (Harding 9). They have a driving desire to connect with one another, especially in a sexual way, but the end result is less than satisfactory because it does not occur on their own terms. Paul D waits 25 years to make love to Sethe just to discover that it wasn't the wonderful experience he imagined it would be. And for Sethe, their sexual act lacks the intimacy she imagined she'd had with Halle in her youthful innocence. For them, an act of physical unity cannot join their psychological states any more than physical enslavement can make them accept themselves as slaves.

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The joy of Technicolor

Sethe looked at her hands, her bottle-green sleeves, and thought how little color there was in the house and how strange that she had not missed it the way Baby did. Deliberate, she thought, it must be deliberate, because the last color she remembered was the pink chips in the headstone of her baby girl. After that she became as color conscious as a hen. (46)

To truly envision the environment of 124 Bluestone Road is to imagine a very muted place, color-wise. The house is in dire need of repair and, aside from the lightning white staircase, most of the house is drenched in dull shades of blue and brown. The dullness may attest to the equally dulled emotions of the inhabitants who for the longest time shored up their energy to fight against the terror of their collective past, but overly bright colors are a sign of imbalance as well. Therefore, a happy medium between no shades and blatant, shouting hues suggests harmony among the characters of the novel and their well-being.

Generally, the prime examples of such colors were in nature or pastoral scenes.

Happy memories are remarked upon by Sethe remembering the colors of Sweet Home: "I remember the peas still had flowers. The grass was long, though, full of white buds and those tall red blossoms people call Diane and something there with the leastest little bit of blue--light, like a cornflower but pale, pale. Real pale" (226).

When Paul D returns to 124 Bluestone Road after Beloved's exorcism, his return is announced by "the riot of late-summer flowers where vegetables should be growing. Sweet william, morning glory, chrysanthemums" (318). A return to tranquility is suggested by sunlight bathing the rooms with brightness: "There is too much light in this room. Things look sold" (319).

Paul D's journey to freedom was highlighted by a trail of blossoms: "So he raced from dogwood to blossoming perch. When they thinned out he headed for the cherry blossoms, then magnolia, chinaberry, pecan, walnut and prickly pear. At last he reached a field of apple trees whose flowers were just becoming tiny knots of fruit" (133).

Freedom and peace tend to be associated with nature and the mild palette of colors found within it. Communing with nature signifies a calm inner life; Sethe's fondest memories are of the rolling pastures of Sweet Home, which even manage to crowd out memories of her sons. Underlined is the idea that slavery is very unnatural and distorts the lives of those colored by it.
What milk means to Sethe

Milk is how Sethe contextualizes her place in society as well as her relationship to others, especially her children. Schoolteacher, for instance, was bad enough, but stealing her milk was the ultimate degradation. In his one indirect act--allowing his nephews to steal her milk--he stripped her of identity (mother), ownership (milk), and freedom (to love her children by giving them her milk).
Sethe's milk was her own

I'll tend her as no mother ever tended a child, a daughter. Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children. I never had to give it to nobody else--and the one time I did it was took from me--they held me down and took it. Milk that belonged to my baby. 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. I'll tell Beloved about that; she'll understand. She my daughter. The one I managed to have milk for and to get it to her even after they stole it; after 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. Beloved, page 237

Sethe describes from memory several events that shaped her perceptions of the world. As a baby she was denied her own mother's milk and given only the leftover milk a slave named Nan could give her after being suckled by the white babies of the plantation. As an adult she views herself as a mother and her children as her best things. She may have been considered a commodity to the rest of the world, but in her mind her most precious commodity was the milk she carried for her babies.

Sethe's self-image was shattered, however, by the cruelty of schoolteacher, who allowed his nephews to hold her down and suckle her breasts. In that fixed moment, Sethe was robbed of not only her milk, but her identity. Though by the institution of slavery that held her down, she was never allowed to make such claims in the first place.

Black slaves were forbidden to own anything, let alone themselves. If anything, ownership of self was shared by the community. Unlike Sethe, whose fictional life offered some insulation from the horrors many actual slaves faced, slave families were often torn apart, sold off to different slaveholders. These broken groups had to rely on a community of kinfolk to 'raise' their young. While they could not claim a particular family lineage or name, since all that information was essentially lost in the Middle Passage, they could claim ties to others, albeit loose ones.

Hence, community was necessary for any semblance of a family structure to persevere within black society. And family is represented, at the heart of this story, as a bond between a mother and daughter, literalized by the mother's milk.
Milk defines motherhood

So I sent you all to the wagon with the woman who waited in the corn. Ha ha. No notebook for my babies and no measuring string neither. What I had to get through later I got through because of you. Passed right by those boys hanging in the trees. One had Paul A's shirt on but not his feet or his head. I walked right on by because only me had your milk, and God do what He could, I was going to get it to you. You remember that, don't you; that I did? That when I got here I had milk enough for all? Beloved, page 233

As an adult, Sethe views herself as a mother and her children as her best things. Above everything else, she wants to be a mother to them and provide them with her milk. If she doesn't have milk to feed her young, then she isn't mothering them and cannot call herself a mother. In truth, society withheld that identity from her. But loving her children in spite of not being allowed and fighting to provide them with milk was Sethe's way of taking back her identity. Having "milk enough for all" is her way of repairing her own sense of neglect from her childhood and the the loss of her self-identity at the hands of schoolteacher.

Beloved's first appearance is marked by Sethe's intense need to pee: "the water she voided was endless" (Morrison 61). It is matched by Beloved's immense thirst: "All three were inside--Paul D and Denver standing before the stranger, watching her drink cup after cup of water" (Morrison 61). It "suggests a mother being drained by her child's greedy, excessive need" (Schapiro 160). This example highlights the dysfunctional relationship Sethe actually has as a mother to her child(ren). Even though she wants to bridge the gap between herself and Beloved to make Beloved understand how much she was loved, Sethe cannot overcome the consequences of her desperate act, a decidedly un-maternal thing to do.

She felt she had to kill her children rather than let them return to slavery. Slavery as an institution kept her from exercising normal and acceptable parental decisions. Slavery as an institution treated her as animal whose milk could be removed from her by force, suckled like a cow in the barn by two white boys. Her milk was the core essence of her self and by taking it away from her it also removed any usual restrictions a parent might otherwise have. It allowed her love to grow wild and destroy, as well as cultivate a love in her ghost child that threatens to destroy her.

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Milk is freedom

Milk as a symbol of freedom

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. Beloved, page 54

Milk symbolizes freedom because in Sethe's eyes it represents her love for her children. Slaves weren't allowed to love because the institution of slavery inhibited any attempts to express love; one's family could easily be sold off arbitrarily; a mother's milk was a commodity, not a birthright of her children. Even Sethe's own mother did not get to nurse her for more than a couple weeks. Thus, creating such bonds was risky because it would inevitably result in much pain; taking the risk of loving someone else was therefore a freedom most slaves afforded themselves. But it is the freedom Sethe claims for herself:

"Too thick?" she said, thinking of the Clearing where Baby Suggs' commands knocked the pods of horse chestnuts. "Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all." (194)

Escaping Sweet Home with 'milk enough for all,' Sethe's literal representation of love for her children is the milk she stores up for them. When the nephews with mossy teeth steal her milk, it is one more slap in the face to her that she is not a human with equal rights and autonomy; she is no better than the animal schoolteacher believes her to be. Rashly loving her children in excess is a counterpoint to the accusation that she has no right to love them or show her love for them by feeding them. Unfortunately, she goes so far to the extreme of thick love that she denies her children their own autonomy, and risks truly being the animal she despises being labeled as.
"You may as well know it all. Last time I saw him he was sitting by the churn. He had butter all over his face." Beloved, page 83

And how sweet that would have been: the two of them back by the milk shed, squatting by the churn, smashing cold, lumpy butter into their faces with not a care in the world. Feeling it slippery, sticky--rubbing it in their hair, watching it squeeze through their fingers. Beloved, page 84

Insanity is not only represented by hummingbirds, but it is also described in Beloved by an abuse of milk. Milk abuse is perpetuated twice in the novel: first, Nan has to give her milk to the whitebabies of the plantation first, leaving black babies like Sethe with little or no milk at all. Nan's breast milk was therefore squandered. Second, Sethe was robbed of her milk at Sweet Home under the command of schoolteacher. His nephews held her down and suckled her like a cow.

The first instance partially drove Sethe to the zealous possessiveness of milk that she has, and the second instance drove her helpless husband, Halle, insane. She overemphasizes the importance of her milk to the exclusion of all her other qualities (so she only sees herself as a mother), which in turn leads to the infanticide she commits against her 'crawling already?' baby. Halle misuses curdled milk by mashing it into his face to show the pain he felt over the violation he saw beneath him in the barn.

Milk is meant to nourish and help babies grow. While its positive connotations remain intact within the novel, the abuse of milk (products) proves to be as detrimental as the lack of it.
A Makeshift Family

Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, 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 she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. *Beloved*, page 28

Black slaves were forbidden to own anything, let alone themselves. Ownership of self was shared by the community. Unlike Sethe, whose fictional life offered some insulation from the horrors many slaves faced, families were often torn apart and sold to different slaveholders. Disenfranchised parents had to rely on a community of kinfolk to 'raise' their young. While they could not claim a particular family lineage or name, since all that information was essentially lost in the Middle Passage, they could claim ties to others, albeit loose ones.

Part of what makes up the community is ritual: "Ritual functions as formal events in which symbolic representations--such as dance, song, story, and other activities--are spiritually and communally endowed with the power to shape real relations to the world" (Krumholz 9). Therefore, community provided the semblance of structure and balm from the cruel, outside world.
A crazy patchwork quilt

Sethe made a dress on the sly...

"Well, I made up my mind to have at the least a dress that wasn't the sacking I worked in. So I took to stealing fabric, and wound up with a dress you wouldn't believe. The top was from two pillow cases in her mending basket. The front of the skirt was a dresser scarf a candle fell on and burnt a hole in, and one of her old sashes we used to test the flatiron on. Now the back was a problem for the longest time. Seem like I couldn't find a thing that wouldn't be missed right away. Because I had to take it apart afterwards and put all the pieces back where they were. Beloved, page 70

African American quilt-making got its genesis during the time of slavery. Slaves had to make quilts for their masters that were

...traditional quilts in the same intricate, exacting, repetitive patterns and techniques cherished by white quilters. For their own beds, slaves also did patchwork, but these quilts required greater ingenuity, dexterity, and resourcefulness given the economy of means, time, goods that restricted their construction. Left only with the stolen or gift scraps of the fabric from the "good quilts" that slaves made for their mistresses or with the strips or squares they cut from their own worn out clothes or breeches, slave quilters were forced to improvise. (Hindman 103).

Black people who wanted to have some claim to ownership of their own handiwork as well as a practical, tangible part of domesticity had to make do with what they had, much like Sethe had to make do with the scraps she found for her wedding dress. Because slaves had to make quilts for their white owners that followed a rigid model of patterning techniques, slaves made their own quilts stand out by not following the rules of traditional 'white' quilt-making.

There wasn't any except for two orange squares in a quilt that made the absence shout. The walls of the room were slate-colored, the floor earthen-brown, the wooden dresser the color of itself, curtains white and the dominating feature, the quilt over an iron cot, was made up of scraps of blue serge, black, brown and gray wool--the full range of the dark and the muted that thrift and modesty allowed. In that sober field, two patches of orange looked wild--like life in the raw. Beloved, page 46

The result is that modern-day quilts in the African American community purposely exhibit helter-skelter patterns, scraps and fragments that don't fit into neat, interlocking squares, and erratic, broken lines. It is an assertion against the staid conventions of former white masters and their current social dominance. So when Baby Suggs wants to lay down and ponder color, her desire implies that she wants more than what blacks are traditionally allotted. Also, later on in the novel, when Sethe makes gaudy dresses made out of carnival colors for her and the girls to wear, their outfits mean more than just the gratifying of fickle whims. They are actively thumbing their noses at the world in a purely African American context.

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http://klmadison.iweb.bsu.edulbeloved/ colors/color_quilt.htm 12/14/2004
A community of readers

Beloved argues that redemption is attained through revising history so that we 'pass on' more than simply the master narrative. The characters understand the importance of not letting one narrative take precedence over others, such as when Paul D thinks, "Watch out. Watch out. Nothing in the world more dangerous than a white schoolteacher." (314) The story also highlights the healing properties of community. It suggests that the balm for painful shared histories is gained through communal retellings. These ideas are combined by Morrison drawing readers into the story to become part of a larger community that will ingest this revision of slavery in the US, revise it in their minds as they (re)read it and absorb it, and pass it on by the very act of taking it on. "It was not a story to pass on," but Beloved and her story continue to thrive in our minds.

The story invites revision by its lack of conclusive endings. We don't know what happened to Beloved at the end of the novel; she is on one hand described as "flying apart" while on the other hand her footprints continue to be seen in the ground, only to disappear. At the most literal level, Beloved was pregnant when she disappeared, and we don't find out if she gave birth, or what she gave birth to. Speaking of motherhood, we don't find out what became of Sethe; at the end of the novel, Paul D tells her that she is her own best thing, but she responds with a single question: "Me? Me?" (322) This can be interpreted many ways: she could be questioning her own worth, accepting Paul D's assertion, or doubting him entirely. Another aspect of the story that invites questioning is the disappearance of Halle. We can reasonably assume that he's dead, but we can't know for sure, and our conclusions create our own revisions and approach to the text as well.

The ability to revise the story and make it our own is due to the fact that it is written in the black oral tradition, specifically call-and-response patterning. They "both value improvisation and demand that new meanings be created for each particular moment. The valuing of these characteristics suggests that importance lies not only in what is said, but also in how it is said" (Sale 178). Examples of this abound in the novel, such as when Baby Suggs calls her flock to the Clearing:

The 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 your children see you dance," she told them, and 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. (103)

Another example of call-and-response patterning is the exorcism in Part III, when thirty women in the black community come forward to save Sethe from herself: "Instantly the kneelers and the standers joined her. 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." (305)

Instead of just having the characters call and respond to each other, Morrison calls to us at the end of the novel with the message "this was not a story to pass on" in order to get us to respond in our own individual, particular ways.

A Parable of the Times

Matthew 14:19 - And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

Now to take two buckets of blackberries and make ten, maybe twelve, pies; to have turkey enough for the whole town pretty near, new peas in September, fresh cream but no cow, ice and sugar, batter bread, bread pudding, raised bread, shortbread—it made them mad. Loaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave who probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. Who had never been lashed by a ten-year-old whiteboy as God knows they had. Beloved, pages 161-2

What Baby Suggs, Holy, sensed the morning of The Misery was not schoolteacher's arrival, but rather the disapproval of the entire community. She had been blessed with freedom bought by her son, Halle; blessed with the safe passage of her daughter-in-law and grandchildren; and blessed with a bounty of food that she willingly shared. She crossed the line, however, when she shared her harvest because it came across as flaunting a charmed grace no one else seemed to have. Her apparent pride prodded the black community into coveting the very holiness they acknowledged she had. They left her on her own to see if she was truly as blessed as she appeared; never realizing that her blessedness came from the shared resources and support of an entire community. Her freedom was afforded by the labor of her son's selflessness; her family's arrival at 124 Bluestone Road was the result of many people ranging from Amy Denver to the Underground Railroad conductors; and the berries that filled the pies that started the whole celebration were a gift from Stamp Paid.

Beloved's blood is on the hands of everyone, then. "Beloved's murder can be traced directly to the community's refusal to warn Baby Suggs and Sethe" (Hinson 18). The breakdown of the black community by its own self-hatred due to "institutionalized slavery (which) tended to disallow individuality and to categorize African Americans as a group without individual traits" left them with the inability to find the inner grace Baby Suggs' preached about, ultimately causing their own downfall.

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Credits

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