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NAMELESS GHOSTS: POSSESSION AND DISPOSSESSION IN *BELOVED*

Deborah Horvitz*

Toni Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved* (1987), explores the insidious degradation imposed upon all slaves, even when they were owned by, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's term, "a man of humanity."[1] The novel is also about matrilineal ancestry and the relationships among enslaved, freed, alive, and dead mothers and daughters. Equally it is about the meaning of time and memory and how remembering either destroys or saves a future. Written in an anti-minimalist, lyrical style in which biblical myths, folklore, and literary realism overlap, the text is so grounded in historical reality that it could be used to teach American history classes. Indeed, as a simultaneously accessible and yet extremely difficult book, *Beloved* operates so complexly that as soon as one layer of understanding is reached, another, equally as richly textured, emerges to be unravelled. Morrison has referred to her novel as a "ghost story"[2] and begins and ends with Beloved, whose name envelopes the text.

The powerful corporeal ghost who creates matrilineal connection between Africa and America, Beloved stands for every African woman whose story will never be told. She is the haunting symbol of the many Beloveds—generations of mothers and daughters—hunted down and stolen from Africa; as such, she is, unlike mortals, invulnerable to barriers of time, space, and place. She moves with the freedom of an omnipresent and omnipotent spirit who weaves in and out of different generations within the matrilineal chain. Yet, Morrison is cautious not to use Beloved as a symbol in a way that either traps the reader in polemics or detaches one from the character who is at different times a caring mother and a lonely girl. Nor is Beloved so universalized that her many meanings lose specificity. She is rooted in a particular story and is the embodiment of specific members of Sethe's family. At the same time she represents the spirit of all the women dragged onto slave ships in Africa and also all Black women in America trying to trace their ancestry back to the mother on the ship attached to them. Beloved is the haunting presence who becomes the spirit of the women from "the other side."[3] As Sethe's mother she comes from the geographic other side of the world, Africa; as Sethe's daughter, she comes from the physical other side of life, death. There is a relationship, too, between Beloved's arrival and the blossoming of Sethe's memory. Only after Beloved comes to Sethe's house as a young woman does Sethe's repression

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of countless painful memories begin to lift. Beloved generates a metamorphosis in Sethe that allows her to speak what she had thought to be the unspeakable.

In *Beloved* the ghost-child who comes back to life is not only Sethe's two-year-old daughter, whom she murdered eighteen years ago; she is also Sethe's African mother. This inter-generational, inter-continental, female ghost-child teaches Sethe that memories and stories about her matrilineal ancestry are life-giving. Moreover, Beloved stimulates Sethe to remember her own mother because, in fact, the murdered daughter and the slave mother are a conflated or combined identity represented by the ghost-child Beloved.

Mother-daughter bonding and bondage suffuses Morrison's text. Sethe's nameless mother is among the African slaves who experienced the Middle Passage and, late in the text, she relates that ordeal through a coded message from the ship revealing that she too is a Beloved who, like Sethe, has been cruelly separated from her own mother. This cycle of mother-daughter loss, perceived abandonment, betrayal, and recovery is inherent in and characterizes each mother-daughter relationship in the novel. But in the present tense of the novel—Ohio in 1873—Sethe barely remembers, from so long ago,

> her own mother, who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones—pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field. Patiently Sethe waited for this particular back to gain the row's end and stand. What she saw was a cloth hat as opposed to a straw one, singularity enough in that world of cooing women each of whom was called Ma'am (p. 30).

This is mainly how she remembers her mother, simply as an image, a woman in a field with a stooped back in a cloth hat.

Sethe does, however, have one other quite specific memory of this obscure mother, of what may have been their only interaction following the two weeks the nameless Ma'am was allowed to nurse her. She remembers that Ma'am

> picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, "This is your ma'am. This," and she pointed. "I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark." Scared me so. All I could think of was how important this was and how I needed to have something important to say back, but I couldn't think of anything so I just said what I thought. "Yes, Ma'am," I said. "But how will you know me? How will you know me? Mark me, too," I said. "Mark the mark on me too" (p. 61).

Because Sethe is not marked,[4] she thinks she has no link with her mother. In fact, before Beloved helps Sethe's memory unfold, Sethe firmly believes that because Ma'am is physically dead, they are not emotionally tied. When

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her mother was hanged, Sethe did not know why. Probably Ma'am was caught trying to escape from the plantation, but the daughter born in bondage refuses to believe her mother could have run. It would mean that she left Sethe behind, emphasizing in this generation the continuous pattern of severed mother-daughter relationships. In other words, her memories of Ma'am are buried not only because their relationship was vague and their contact prohibited but also because those recollections are inextricably woven with feelings of painful abandonment. If Sethe remembers her mother, she must also remember that she believes her mother deserted her.

As Sethe tells this story to Denver and Beloved,[5] she becomes frightened: "She was remembering something [Ma'am's language] she had forgotten she knew" (p. 61). Murky pictures and vague words begin to creep into her mind and she knows that they come from that place inside her—the place Paul D. refers to as the locked and rusted tobacco tin—that stores, but can never lose, forgotten memories. Ma'am's language erupts into her conscious mind signaling the beginning of Sethe's slow metamorphosis. "Something privately shameful . . . had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the . . . circled cross" (p. 61), and she remembers that she does or did have a link with her mother that transcends the cross in the circle. She is afraid to remember but ashamed not to. Recollections of "the language her ma'am spoke . . . which would never come back" creep into her consciousness (p. 62). She remembers one-armed Nan, the slave who was in charge of Sethe and the other children on the plantation where Sethe grew up. Nan "used different words" (p. 62), words that expressed her mother's native African, and these words link Sethe back both to her mother and to her mother's land, the place where women gathered flowers in freedom and played in the long grass before the white men came:

> Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home except singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. But the message—that was and had been there all along. Holding the damp white sheets against her chest, she was picking meaning out of a code she no longer understood. Nighttime (p. 62).

Although Sethe has forgotten the words of her mother's language, they continue to exist inside her as feelings and images that repeatedly emerge as a code that she relies on without realizing it. This code holds animated, vital memories, such as the one of her mother dancing juba, as well as the most painful fact of Sethe's life: her mother's absence.

Sethe is shocked as she continues to find meaning in a code she thought she no longer understood. She remembers that she felt the dancing feet of her dead mother as she was about to give birth to Denver. Pregnant and thinking she is going to die because her swollen feet cannot take another step, she wants to stop walking; every time she does so, the movement of her unborn child causes her such pain that she feels she is being rammed

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by an antelope. Although Sethe wonders why an antelope, since she cannot remember having ever seen one, it is because the image of the antelope is really an image of Ma'am dancing. Sethe's antelope kicking baby and her antelope dancing mother are one and the same:

> Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope. The men as well as the ma'ams, one of whom was certainly her own. They shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like this one in her stomach (p. 31).

Stored in childhood but only now unlocked, the link between the unborn Denver's kicks and the dead ma'am's kicks as she danced the antelope erupts in Sethe's memory. As she bears the next generation in her matrilineal line, Sethe keeps her mother's African antelope dancing alive: she links the pulses of her unchained, vigorously moving mother and her energetic, womb-kicking daughter forever.

A second and perhaps the most crucial part of this story from her past is that Sethe, as Nan tells her, is the only child her mother did not kill:

> She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without name she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe" (p. 62).

Conceived with a Black man in love, rather than with a white master through rape, Sethe, named after her father, is the only child her mother allowed to survive.

Significantly, she is flooded with these memories in response to questions from her own daughter, Beloved, who wants to know everything in Sethe's memory and actually feeds and fattens on these stories. What Beloved demands is that Sethe reveal memory and story about her life before Sweet Home, memory about her African speaking, branded mother and her life right after Sweet Home when she cut Beloved's throat. In other words, because they share identities, the ghost-child's fascination lies in the "joined" union between Sethe's mother and herself. Sethe's memory is being pried wide open by Beloved's presence. She forces Sethe to listen to her own voice and to remember her own mother, her ma'am with the special mark on her body, along with her mother's native language, songs, and dances.

This cycle of mother-daughter fusion, loss, betrayal, and recovery between Sethe and her mother plays itself out again in the present relationship between Sethe and Beloved. Beloved transforms from a lonely, affectionate girl into a possessive, demanding tyrant, and her ruthlessness almost kills Sethe. There is even a connection between this ruling Beloved and the slave-driver. Because any attempt to possess another human being

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is reminiscent of the slave-master relationship, Denver links Sethe and the slave-drivers when she warns Beloved that Sethe, like "the men without skin" from the ship, "chews and swallows" (p. 216). Beloved is furious and ferocious. When she first comes to the farmhouse where Sethe and Denver live, she appears because the other side is lonely—devoid of love and memory. She yearns for Sethe and cannot take her eyes off her. "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (p. 55). But what starts out as a child's love and hunger for a mother from whom she has long been separated turns into a wish to own Sethe, to possess her, to merge with her and be her. Beloved gets rid of Paul D. and eventually excludes Denver from their play. Just as the disembodied baby ghost Beloved hauntingly possessed Sethe, so the flesh-and-blood adolescent Beloved tries to own and dominate her. Sethe is as haunted by the girl's presence as she was by her absence because possession of any kind involving human beings is destructive.

These "possessive" attachments raise the important moral dilemma underlying Sethe's act; either Sethe must be held accountable for Beloved's death or the institution of slavery alone killed the child. If Morrison wants to humanize and individualize the "great lump called slaves,"[6] then perhaps she is suggesting that Sethe, like any individual, is answerable and responsible for her own actions. The namesake for Beloved's Sethe is the biblical Seth, born to replace his brother, the murdered Abel. Perhaps Morrison's Sethe, too, is a "replacement" for her brothers and sisters murdered by the system of slavery and lost to her nameless ma'am. If so, then the inevitable confrontation between Sethe, the replacement child saved by her ma'am, and Beloved, the protected child murdered by hers, represents the impossible choice available to the enslaved mother.

Certainly one reason Beloved comes back is to pass judgment on Sethe. When Sethe first realizes that Beloved is the ghost of her third child, she wants desperately for the girl to understand that she tried to kill her babies so that they would be protected from captivity forever. Sethe assumes Beloved will forgive her. She does not. For Beloved, her mother's protection became the act of possession that led to her own death, which was murder. Beloved becomes mean-spirited and exploits her mother's pain. Sethe gives Beloved story after story of her love and devotion to her. She tells her how nothing was more important than getting her milk to her, how she waved flies away from her in the grape arbor, how it pained her to see her baby bitten by a mosquito, and how she would trade her own life for Beloved's. Sethe tries to impress upon her how slavery made it impossible for her to be the mother she wanted to be.

For Sethe her children are her "best thing" (p. 272), yet they have all been ruined. The murdered Beloved torments Sethe, Howard and Buglar have left home, and Denver is so afraid of the world that it is only starvation that forces her off the front porch. Sethe begs the ruling Beloved not

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only for forgiveness for the obvious but also for the return of her "self." But Beloved does not care:

> She said when she cried there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. That she had nothing to eat. Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light. Sethe never came to her, never said a word to her, never smiled and worst of all never waved goodbye or even looked her way before running away from her (p. 242).

What is most striking here is that Beloved responds to Sethe's entreaties not only in the language of the murdered daughter but also in the tortured language of the "woman from the sea" (p. 62). Death and the Middle Passage evoke the same language. They are the same existence; both were experienced by the multiple-identified Beloved.

To appreciate fully Beloved's attack on her mother, it is important to look back to Morrison's previous pages, written without punctuation, composed of some lines written in complete sentences with spaces after them, while others are not (pp. 210–14). The writing is fluid, open, created in the first person with no names and no reference to time or place. This rhetoric communicates what may at first appear to be an unintelligible experience, a story of images which the reader must grope and finally fail to figure out. In fact, breaking the barriers of form, this key passage, much like Morrison's ghost moving beyond human barriers, communicates the death-like Middle Passage suffered by Sethe's mother. She, Sethe's mother, is the woman "from the sea."

In the remembered ghost story, a woman is crouching on a ship where there is not enough room; there is bread that she is too hungry to eat and so little water that she cannot even make tears. Prisoner on a rat infested ship where she is urinated on by the "men without skin" (p. 210), which is how the clothed white men look to her, she uses words almost identical to the ones Beloved shouts at Sethe: Beloved says "dead men lay on top of [me]" (p. 241); the speaker "from the sea" says "the man on my face is dead" (p. 210). Beloved tells Sethe that "ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in [me]" (p. 241); the woman from the ship says that "he puts his finger there" (p. 212). Beloved blames Sethe for not coming to her, not smiling and not waving goodbye before she left her; the woman on the ship says "she was going to smile at me she was going to a hot thing" (p. 212). The point is that "Beloved" exists in several places and has more than one voice. While in the pages of unpunctuated writing she is the voice of the woman on the ship, thirty pages later she uses almost the same words as Sethe's daughter, and each voice shouts to a Sethe.[7] At the end of this section, the collective voice screams: "I am not dead Sethe's is the face that left me Sethe sees me see her now we can join a hot thing" (p. 213). The "hot thing," referred to repeatedly by both voices, expresses the passion that permeates the text, the fantasy that it is possible to join with and possess the lost Beloved. It expresses the desperately writhing and

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thwarted wish to be both "self" and "other" so as to regain the lost Beloved by becoming her. This is what each means when she says "her face is my own," or "the woman is there with the face I want the face that is mine" (p. 211). The "hot thing" expresses the wish to join, merge, and fuse with the lost mother.

Referring to the dead slaves being dumped overboard, the voice of the woman from the sea says "the men without skin push them through with poles" (p. 211), and then the speaker, Sethe's mother, enraged and mournful, protests: "The woman is there with the face I want they fall into the sea if I had the teeth of the man who died on my face I would bite the circle around her neck bite it away" (p. 211). Terrified and outraged by the iron collar placed on the slaves, she wants to "bite the circle around her neck bite it away" because she knows the woman hates its being there. The "woman with the face I want" is never definitively identified, but at the very end of the novel, Morrison, referring to the African women whose stories are lost, writes, "they never knew . . . whose was the underwater face she needed like that" (p. 275). Perhaps she, "the woman with the face I want," the lost underwater, drowned face, is someone on the ship with Sethe's mother. Most likely, given that she sees her own face reflected in the "underwater face," she is her own mother, Sethe's grandmother. If so, there is another generation in the line of tortured, invisible women, all of them Beloveds, who have been cruelly severed from their mothers and daughters. The loss of "the underwater face" represents not only the death of a woman, but the death of a mother and therefore the rupture of the mother-daughter bond, probably the strongest, most important relationship women can have. In this novel grief is not only for one deceased woman but for the empty space that she leaves inside all her daughters.

The two voices, Sethe's ma'am's and her daughter's, both of them Beloveds, merge. Yet within the fused voice, each describes her own, individual experience of horrific loss:

> I am Beloved and she is mine. [Sethe] was about to smile at me when the men without skin came and took us up into the sunlight with the dead and shoved them into the sea. Sethe went into the sea. . . . They did not push her. . . . She was getting ready to smile at me. . . . All I want to know is why did she go in the water in the place where we crouched? Why did she do that when she was just about to smile at me? I wanted to join her in the sea but I could not move (p. 214).

From the "place where we crouched," the slave ship, Sethe's mother has lost someone who jumped in the water—the woman Morrison says will never be known, but surely it is Sethe's grandmother. The author creates a fluidity of identity among Sethe's mother, Sethe's grandmother, and the murdered two-year-old, so that Beloved is both an individual and a collective being. They are the primary losses to Sethe, more so, even, than her husband, Halle. Beloved is the crucial link that connects Africa and America for the enslaved women. She is Sethe's mother; she is Sethe herself; she

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is her daughter.

Although at different times Sethe, her mother, and her daughter all live with the agonizing feeling that they have been betrayed by their mothers, perhaps most heart-breaking is the image of mother-daughter separation evoked when Beloved insists that a "Sethe," voluntarily and without being pushed, went into the sea. The agony stems from the child's assumption that she is being deliberately abandoned by her ma'am. A little girl stands on an enormous ship not understanding why her mother jumps overboard. Beloved lost her mother when she "went into the sea instead of smiling at [her]" (p. 214). And Sethe's mother wants an unidentified, lost woman on the ship, probably her ma'am, to know how urgently she tries "to help her but the clouds are in the way" (p. 210). This Beloved, Sethe's mother, wants desperately either to save her own mother or die with her, but she loses her again "because of the noisy clouds of smoke" (p. 214). (Beloved also says she lost "Sethe" again "because of the noisy clouds of smoke.") There was a riot on the ship and the noisy clouds of smoke were caused by guards' gunfire, which prevented the daughter from reaching her mother. Perhaps the sick slaves were forced overboard; maybe it was a mass suicide or an attempt to escape through the water. Or the gunfire could have occurred in Africa, before the ships were boarded, when the white traders were hunting down and capturing native Blacks.[8] What is clear is that a woman on the ship went into the sea leaving a girl-child alone, bereft; and each was to the other a Beloved. What is also clear is that the novel is structured by a series of flashbacks, which succeed in bridging the shattered generations by repeating meaningful and multi-layered images. That is, contained in the narrative strategy of the novel itself are both the wrenching, inter-generational separations and the healing process.

The American and African Beloveds join forever in the last two pages of the novel as symbols of the past—exploding, swallowing, and chewing—and fuse with these same images in the present. The sickening fear of her body exploding, dissolving, or being chewed up and spit out links each enslaved Beloved with her sister in captivity. Africa is "the place where long grass opens" (p. 274), the slave ship is the crouching place, and the ghost-child is the girl seen "that day on the porch" (p. 274). The Beloved from each place is another's matrilineal heritage and future; and each Beloved merges with her other "selves" in the shared and horrific fear of losing her body. The gap is bridged between America and Africa, the past and the present, the dead and the living, the flesh and the spirit. But they are joined in a specific shared, secret horror, perhaps the most devastating effect of the violence heaped upon them by "the men without skin." Each lives in terror that her body will disintegrate or, quite literally, explode. Earlier in the text the ghost-child loses a tooth and

> 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,

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> maybe all at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding and being swallowed. When her tooth came out—an odd fragment, last in the row—she thought it was starting (p. 133).

She cannot remember when she first knew "she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces," not simply because she was only two when her mother cut her throat, but because the fear predates her birth; it comes from the Beloveds in Africa and the ship: "In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away" (p. 274). The voice on the ship repeatedly hears "chewing and swallowing and laughter" (p. 212). The point is that enslaved women, not in possession of their own bodies, survived barbaric beatings, rapes, and being "swallowed" without total decompensation by emotionally dissociating themselves from their bodies. The price they paid was, of course, an enormous one; those that survived often did so with no shred of basic integrity or dignity regarding their bodies. The imagery emphasizes, too, those African women who did not survive the Middle Passage—those who were chewed up, spit out, and swallowed by the sea—those whose bodies and stories were never recovered. Morrison, speaking of the women whose stories are lost, says they are "disremembered" (p. 275), meaning not only that they are forgotten, but also that they are dismembered, cut up and off, and not re-membered.

The very end of the novel paradoxically appears to belie the crucial theme of the book, that it is imperative to preserve continuity through story, language, and culture between generations of Black women. The authorial voice says repeatedly "this is not a story to pass on" (p. 275), although it seems in this text that not to repeat is to lose stories crucial to Black heritage and American history and to the personal lives of Black women.

The paradox is the one posed by memory and history themselves when past memories hurt so much they feel as though they must be forgotten. Sethe could not pass on her mother's story for the same reason that, before Beloved came, she could not talk about the murder: "Every mention of her past life hurt. The hurt was always there—like a tender place in the corner of her mouth that the bit left" (p. 58). Remembering horrors of such enormous magnitude can cause a despair so profound that the memories cancel out the possibility of resolution or pleasure in the present and future. For example, the happiness that seemed possible between Sethe and Paul D. at the carnival was obliterated by the past, in the form of Beloved's arrival that very day. However, Morrison implies, even though memory of the past can prevent living in the present, to pursue a future without remembering the past has its own and even deeper despair for it

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denies the reality and sacrifice of those who died. Assuming individual and collective responsibility is a crucial concern of *Beloved,* and it is a responsibility to remember.[9]

Like Sethe, Beloved herself is trapped by painful memories of the past at the end of her narrative. When white Mr. Bodwin comes to pick up Denver, Sethe becomes terrified because she associates Bodwin's hat with Schoolteacher's. She temporarily forgets where she is and who he is, and she tries to kill him. Sethe runs from Beloved into the crowd of women outside her house. The ghost-child, left "Alone Again" (p. 262), watches Sethe run "away from her to the pile of people out there. They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling" (p. 262). What Beloved sees is the "little hill of dead people" from the slave ship; she sees "those able to die . . . in a pile" (p. 211). She sees "rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her" (p. 262). While Sethe sees Bodwin as Schoolteacher, Beloved sees him as a slave-driver from the slave ship looking at her, suggesting again that Beloved, the daughter, is also the woman "from the sea," Sethe's mother. She runs away, naked and pregnant with stories from the past, back to the water from which she emerged, where the narrator says she will be forgotten.

The paradox of how to live in the present without cancelling out an excruciatingly painful past remains unresolved at the end of the novel. At the same time, something healing has happened. Sethe's narrative ends with her considering the possibility that she could be her own "best thing." Denver has left the front porch feeling less afraid and more sure of herself. Now that Beloved is gone there is the feeling that perhaps Sethe can find some happiness with Paul D., who "wants to put his story next to hers" (p. 273). As the embodiment of Sethe's memories, the ghost Beloved enabled her to remember and tell the story of her past, and in so doing shows that between women words used to make and share a story have the power to heal. Although Toni Morrison states that "it was not a story to pass on" (p. 274), she herself has put words to Beloved's tale. Though the ghost-child-mother-sister returns, unnamed, to the water, her story is passed on.

Notes

[1]Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: The New American Library, 1966), p. 11.

[2]Toni Morrison quoted by Judith Thurman, "A House Divided," *The New Yorker* (November 2, 1987), p. 175.

[3]Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), p. 215. Because the novel is so newly published, there is no body of criticism on it. For substantial reviews, however, see Judith Thurman; Thomas R. Edwards, "Ghost Story," *The New York Review of Books* (November 5, 1987), p. 18; Margaret Atwood, "Haunted by Their Nightmares," *The*

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New York Times Book Review (September 13, 1987), p. 1; and Marsha Jean Darling, "In the Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," *The Women's Review of Books* (March, 1988), p. 7. For discussion of Morrison's work in general up to *Beloved,* see Mari Evans, *Black Women Writers (1950–1980)* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 339–70; Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 137–79; Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), pp. 47–63. For an analysis from a Marxist perspective of Morrison's first four books, see Susan Willis, *Specifying* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 83–109. Among the essays available on Morrison's first four novels, a particularly interesting one is on the character of Sula in *Sula*: Naana Banyiwa-Horne, "The Scary Face of the Self: An Analysis of the Character of Sula in Toni Morrison's *Sula,*" *Sage,* 2, No. 1 (1985), 28–31. Elizabeth Ammons offered insightful comments regarding Toni Morrison and *Beloved,* and her scrupulous readings of this paper were enormously helpful to me.

[4]Morrison often marks the bodies of her female characters. In *Song of Solomon,* Pilate has no navel; in *Sula,* Sula has a birthmark over her eye; in *Beloved,* Sethe's mother is branded with the cross in the circle and Sethe is permanently marked from the whipping on her back. Their bodies as well as their minds and souls are indelibly marked as different, "other," strange and witchy. As alienated women, they share being motherless. Each lost her mother to a violent death, and the marked bodies are associated with loss. Sethe's markings symbolize her separation from her mother because, in a sense, they are the "wrong" marks. She begged her mother to brand her with a cross in a circle, so she could be permanently marked as her mother's daughter. And Pilate's lack of a navel questions whether she ever had a matrilineal connection. Also, Morrison reminds us that it is the mind, soul, spirit, *and* body that unforgettably mark the identities of these women.

[5]Sethe tells this story about her mother to Denver and Beloved in response to Beloved's questions. The child asks Sethe if her ma'am ever fixed up her hair, a question reminiscent of the one Hannah asks Eva in *Sula* when she wants to know if, twenty-eight years ago, when they were almost starving to death, Eva played games with her children. See Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: The New American Library, 1973), p. 68.

[6]Toni Morrison quoted by Darling, p. 7.

[7]Although Sethe is the daughter of "Ma'am," born in bondage on a Southern plantation, Morrison also uses the name "Sethe," on at least one occasion, to open the possibility that there are other, perhaps many, "Sethes." The text reveals a Sethe in Africa and also one on the ship: "Sethe . . . picked yellow flowers in [Africa] the place before the crouching" (p. 214), and a Beloved lost a Sethe when she [Sethe] "went into the sea" (p. 214). Perhaps "Sethe," like "Beloved," traveled across continents and through generations.

[8]For information on the Middle Passage, see W. O. Blake, *History of Slavery and Slave Trade* (Columbus: J and H Miller, 1859). This book consists of actual testimony given before the House of Commons by a slave ship captain. The report discusses the horrors on the ship that we also hear from Morrison's voice "from the sea": crowding, crouching, suicide by drowning. Also important for the primary documents it contains is *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America,* Vol. 2, ed. Elizabeth Donnan (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, Division of Historical Research, 1931). For more recent discussion of the Middle Passage, see John B. Boles, *Black Southerners 1619–1869* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1983).

[9]Morrison herself very clearly expresses these ideas about memory in her interview with Darling, p. 5.

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