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Models of Memory and Romance: The Dual Endings of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

MARY PANICCI CARDEN

One of the great moments of ideological negotiation in any work occurs in the choice of a resolution for the various services it provides. Narrative outcome is one place where transindividual assumptions and values are most clearly visible, and where the word "convention" is found resonating between its literary and social meanings. Any artistic resolution . . . can, with greater or lesser success, attempt an ideological solution to the fundamental contradictions that animate the work. Any resolution can have traces of the conflicting materials that have been processed within it. It is where subtexts and repressed discourses can throw up one last flare of meaning; it is where the author may side-step and displace attention from the materials that a work has made available.

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis (3)

There is always something more interesting at stake than a clear resolution in a novel. I'm interested in survival—who survives and who does not, and why—and I would like to chart a course that suggests where the dangers are and where the safety might be. I do not want to bow out with easy answers to complex questions.

—Toni Morrison (qtd. in McKay 402)

Women writers, Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues in *Writing Beyond the Ending*, search out and project possibilities "beyond" restrictive plots centered in romance and directed toward domesticity. She defines "writing be-

yond the ending" as "the transgressive invention of narrative strategies . . . that express critical dissent from dominant narrative" and fashion a text that "denies or reconstructs seductive patterns of feeling that are culturally mandated, internally policed, hegemonically poised" (5). For Toni Morrison, an African American woman addressing a "dominant narrative" in which black women have been secondary or invisible, "writing beyond the ending" means interrogating the historical implications that romance assumes when infused with ideologies of race. In her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*, intersecting narratives of romance and slavery lead to dual endings, which, in their refusal of resolution, represent the double dilemmas of divergent narrative perspectives and goals.

Most of the voluminous commentary produced on *Beloved* since its publication in 1987 approaches the novel as a meditation on the enduring repercussions of slavery as personified in the character Beloved, with a substantial portion of the criticism focused on the text's negotiations of female identity, subjectivity, and embodiment and on its treatment of mother/daughter bonds.¹ Although these readings have shed light on key aspects of Morrison's project in *Beloved*, they often overlook her placement of this thematic side-by-side with the emergence of a romantic heterosexual couple. Morrison devotes significant textual space and energy to the relationship between Sethe and Paul D, but many critics relegate the romance strand of the novel to the status of subplot. While much of the criticism on *Beloved* approaches it primarily as a story of the consequences of slavery and only secondarily as a romance story, I will argue that the novel demands to be read with *both* narrative lines in the foreground, and that this double-sidedness produces contradictions and oppositions that are never more powerfully problematic than in Morrison's choices for narrative outcome. The novel's action concludes with the projection of a happily-ever-after romance scenario for Sethe and Paul D, a scenario loaded with possibilities for both resistance and reinscription of the gender role expectations that have consistently failed them. Morrison then writes "beyond" this tenuously romantic ending by writing another. *Beloved* ends twice: first with the construction of new domestic arrangements at 124 Bluestone Road, then with the deconstruction of Beloved. That these two endings with their contradictory movements—coming together and flying apart—sit so separately together indicates the novel's ambivalent investment in the heterosexual couple as the site where history assumes its shape and meaning.

Romance plot is central to this and many other novels because it functions as a "trope for the sex-gender system as a whole" (DuPlessis 5), for the normalized expectations and rules that mold male and female subjectivities. In the heterosexual couple, DuPlessis suggests, "the organization of family,

kinship, and marriage, of sexuality, and of the division of all sorts of labor by gender" (1) come together, establishing the basic unit of "natural" human inclinations and interactions. Traditional romance plots ground gender roles in the domestic spaces of the home, spaces that serve as both the training ground and the desired destination of the heterosexual couple. When Elspeth Probyn suggests that we understand "locale" as a "place that is the setting for a particular event"—where "place" signifies "both a discursive and nondiscursive arrangement which holds a gendered event"—she offers "the home" as "the most obvious example" (178). Place and event, however, do not always or completely mesh; the material and discursive surrounds of differently configured houses, for instance, may provoke or prevent particular expressions of sexuality, may energize or disguise specific applications of gender roles. These "lived contradictions of place and event" demonstrate that "discourses are negotiated. Individuals live in complex places and differentiate the pull of events" (182). Uneven or unsteady intersections of place and event produce competing structures for interpreting experience. In this context, Morrison asks us to think about the meanings of romance in fractured, endangered, and illusory spaces of domesticity.

Hortense Spillers observes that

domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of cultural fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those persons it "covers" in a particular place. (72)

Within this American economy of gender-production, enslaved Africans' "loss of the indigenous name/land provides a metaphor of displacement for other human and cultural features and relations, including the displacement of the genitalia, the female's and the male's desire that engenders future" (73). Within the slave system, as Angela Davis points out, slaveholders

cast aside their orthodox sexist attitudes except for purposes of repression. If Black women were hardly "women" in the accepted sense, the slave system also discouraged male supremacy in Black men . . . since Black women as workers could not be treated as the "weaker sex" or the "housewife," Black men could not be candidates for the figure of "family head" and certainly not for "family provider." (7-8)

The captive body is rendered genderless; Africans'

New-World, diasporic plight marked a *theft of the body*—a willful and violent . . . severing of the captive body from its motive will, its ac-

tive desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least *gender* difference *in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. (Spillers 67)

Within the parameters of slavery, romantic and generative outcomes of love and desire are thwarted, redirected, stolen; therefore, for many former slaves, to experience freedom means to recouple domestic places and events. Such a goal, Morrison makes clear, serves a number of interests, not all of them desirable.

“THE LAST OF THE SWEET HOME MEN”: ROMANCE AND REMEMORY

Because Paul D acts as spokesperson for and conveyor of the novel's movement toward romance, I will trace out the ways his character is both embedded in and shut out of dominant gender/power arrangements.² Having lived as a wanderer in America, displaced and out of place everywhere he goes, Paul D is acutely aware of slavery's success in severing of men from family. After the Civil War,

odd clusters and strays of Negroes wandered the black roads and cowpaths from Schenectady to Jackson. . . . Some of them were running from family that could not support them, some to family; some were running from dead crops, dead kin, life threats, and took-over land . . . configurations and blends of families of women and children, while elsewhere, solitary, hunted and hunting for, were men, men, men. Forbidden public transportation, chased by debt and filthy “talking sheets,” they followed secondary routes, scanned the horizon for signs and counted heavily on each other. Silent, except for social courtesies, when they met one another they neither described nor asked about the sorrow that drove them from one place to another. (Morrison 52–53)

In American culture, “man” signifies head of household, protector of wife and children, giver of the law, guardian of culture. But black men, as travelers driven to “secondary routes,” had no such foundation on which to base identity. Pursued and punished as a trespasser in culture, Paul D perceives the trajectory of his life not as a progression toward settlement, ownership, and stability but rather as a set of botched escapes, a series of failures to stay “uncaught” (268). A “dark ragged figure” (113) against a blossoming land he cannot “love” or claim as his own (268), he figures the shadowy (non)position of the black man in America.³

Paul D grew up on a farm called “Sweet Home” as “the youngest of

three half-brothers . . . sold to [John] Garner and kept there . . . for twenty years" (219). For "family" he had his brothers Paul A and Paul F, his friends Halle and Sixo, "Baby Suggs in the kitchen, a boss who showed them how to shoot and listened to what they had to say. A mistress who made their soap and never raised her voice" (219). In this "cradle" (219), he lived as the precocious child of benevolent white parents, embedded in hierarchies that modeled those of patriarchal family. Paul D Garner, however, is not a son but rather one in a group of "Pauls" belonging to a man named Garner. Sons inherit manhood with patrilineage; Paul D borrows a provisional second-order manhood from a master who allows his slaves to

correct [him], even defy him. To invent ways of doing things; to see what was needed and attack it without permission. To buy a mother, choose a horse or a wife, handle guns, even learn reading. (125)

Granted the privileges that signify manhood, Paul D performs a carefully mediated script of male behavior.

Although Paul D wants and needs to believe that "in [his] relationship with Garner was true metal" (125), the text makes clear that the benefits of Sweet Home manhood accrue to Garner, who "brag[s]" while "other farmers [shake] their heads in warning":

"Y'all got boys," he told them. . . ." Now at Sweet Home, my niggers is men every one of em. Bought em thataway, raised em thataway. Men every one.

"Beg to differ, Garner. Ain't no nigger men."

"Not if you scared, they ain't." Garner's smile was wide. "But if you a man yourself, you'll want your niggers to be men too."

"I wouldn't have no nigger men round my wife."

It was the reaction Garner loved and waited for. "Neither would I," he said. "Neither would I," and there was always a pause before the neighbor, or stranger, or peddler, or brother-in-law or whoever it was got the meaning. Then a fierce argument, sometimes a fight, and Garner came home bruised and pleased, having demonstrated one more time what a real Kentuckian was: one tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers men. (10-11)

Garner creates his superior manhood through superior ownership. That the "definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined" (190) and that the slaves' manhood is refracted from the authority of white ownership becomes apparent after Garner's death. Paul D discovers the arbitrary nature of white making and calling when "schoolteacher" arrives to "put the place aright" (226). After a horrifically failed escape attempt, chained and tethered to the wagon that will lead him away from the only "Home" he knows,

it is borne in on Paul D that a rooster named Mister is endowed with the individuality, autonomy, and even manhood denied to him:

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

In the work prison at Alfred, Georgia, Paul D lives not in a "Sweet Home" that mimics normative family but in a "grave," a ditch "into which wooden boxes had been fitted" (106), in a condition of living death designed to erase manhood and humanity. There, "everything belonged to the men who had the guns . . . each one of whom he could snap like a twig if he wanted to. Men who knew their manhood lay in their guns" (162). Completely subject to the physically weaker white guards, the prisoners occupy the abjected position of powerless women. Their feminization is graphically illustrated in the abuse they suffer each morning:

Kneeling in the mist they waited for the whim of a guard, or two, or three. Or maybe all of them wanted it. Wanted it from one prisoner in particular or none—or all.

"Breakfast? Want some breakfast, nigger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hungry, nigger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here you go."

Witnessing this ritual for the first time, Paul D vomits, and "an observing guard smashed his shoulder with the rifle and the engaged one decided to skip the new man for the time being" (108). Although the novel does not record events of subsequent mornings, it is clear that Paul D must have endured this violation. And because in America he is always subject to the law of white men—with or without guns—he always occupies this position of powerlessness and coercion.

The lessons he learns from schoolteacher and in Alfred teach him to "love just a little bit" (45), to guard against loss through disengagement. By the time he arrives at Sethe's house, he does not "believe he could live with a woman—any woman—for over two out of three months . . . walking off when he got ready was the only way he could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a sledge hammer in chains" (40). While it is not difficult to understand Paul D's evasion of any kind of "ties," proving his freedom by "walking off" from the houses of black women seems to position *them* as keepers of the "chains" that bind him. To Paul D, women

represent potential for inscription within the gendered positions defined by romance—husband and father, protector and provider—and acted out in the domestic hierarchies of the home. But his tendency to “house fits”—the “glassy anger men sometimes feel when a woman’s house begins to bind them, when they want to yell and break something or at least run off” (115)—reflects the domestic perils that romantic scripts hold for black men. Because women remain stationary—in houses—they represent not only the privileges but also the dangers attendant upon being attached to place, fixed and defined in the bounds of locale. Denied jobs, votes, voice, and justice, it is hard to be the hero of a romance plot. “House fits” are symptomatic of this gap between place and event, of the discomfort of dominant models of romance.

Travel affords Paul D an alternative power over place, exempting him from the gender arrangements embedded in domestic spaces and policed by white culture. Morrison has said that she envisions the traveling black man as “truly masculine,” “a man who’s stretching . . . he’s going all the way within his own mind and within whatever his outline might be” (qtd. in hooks 96). Addressing this model of black manhood, bell hooks remarks that “though the travelling man repudiates being a patriarchal provider, he does not necessarily repudiate male domination” (96). In an attempt, perhaps, to mediate these competing aspects of Paul D’s character—his need for freedom and for “male domination”—Morrison endows him with an almost preternaturally sensitive and understanding disposition. While this character-content makes him an attractive and sympathetic figure, it poses difficulties for readers attempting to reconcile his dehumanizing experiences and feelings of nonidentity with the capacity for empathy that he has developed when he arrives at 124 Bluestone Road.⁴ We know that as a result of his unspeakable past, he has “shut down a generous portion of his head, operating on the part that helped him walk, eat, sleep, sing. If he could do those things—with a little work and a little sex thrown in—he asked for no more” (41). He keeps “the rest” in a “tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut” (72–73).

Even without a “red heart” and

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

Paul D’s blessedness on the one hand facilitates relationships outside the power-inflected barriers raised between men and women, but on the other

hand gives him a certain advantage because the telling is not reciprocal—he keeps his secrets. His blessedness does, however, balance his walking off—walking *into* houses, he gives women relief and outlet. Creating Paul D as “embodied kindness” (Fields 161), a man women are drawn to on an instinctual level, Morrison will not allow the reader to simply dismiss him when that understanding fails. As we will see, this move indicates the depth of the novel’s investment in Paul D, the extent of its need for what he offers.

Paul D’s blessedness also helps to justify his intervention into the dynamics of Sethe’s household. Moments after his arrival, he drives the “baby ghost”—the presence of Sethe’s dead daughter—out of her house. Breaking up with violence and “a loud male voice” (37) the family composed of Sethe, the baby ghost, and Sethe’s living daughter Denver, Paul D assumes the male role of protector before he understands the nature of the haunting or whether Sethe wants or needs protection from it. He forces the baby ghost out and, “standing in the place he had made” (39), lays claim to Sethe and attempts to establish a more normative family structure.

As “the last of the Sweet Home men” (9), Paul D offers Sethe “a life” (46) through a romance that builds on and reshapes their shared past; with him to support her, he promises, she can “go as far inside as you need to, I’ll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out” (46). For Sethe, who takes as her “day’s serious work” the task of “beating back the past” (73), the prospect of remembering directed at the future is new. “Her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day” (70). Sethe’s agonized history takes up all her psychic space: she is “full” of terrible memories, of “two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on [her] breast the other holding [her] down” while schoolteacher “watch[es] and writ[es] it up” (70), of schoolteacher’s voice instructing his nephews to “line up” her “human characteristics” beside her “animal ones” (193) in their daily lessons. All memory, however, circulates around the moment she cut the throat of her infant daughter and attempted to kill her other children when schoolteacher appeared at 124 to reclaim them after their escape from Sweet Home. The unbearable weight of these memories is the measure of

what it took to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hands; to hold her face so her head would stay on; to squeeze her so she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through that adored body. (251)

Although Sethe “work[s] hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe” (6), she lives these profoundly visceral memories with all the immediacy of

the moment; they fill and shape her life. Paul D's offer of supported memory extends the possibility of another kind of shape.

Swayed by the "temptation to trust and remember" (38), Sethe begins to believe that history can be brought under control and made "bearable because it was his as well—to tell, to refine and tell again" (99). She posits this collaborative retelling as an order-inducing narrative act aimed toward control of the past and resolution of historical trauma. But, while each shares with the other haunting details of unspeakably painful pasts, both leave conspicuous gaps in their stories, gaps containing experiences that fall outside the gendered expectations of romance. Sethe does not reveal that she chose infanticide of her "crawling already?" baby over allowing her to be lost in slavery. Paul D does not speak of his "tobacco tin" or of Alfred, Georgia. Sethe recognizes that there are "things neither knew about the other—the things neither had word-shapes for" but believes that these things will "come in time" (99).

Against this hope stands her experience of the past as a locale that continues to structure identity, which "comes back whether we want it to or not" (14), in the form of "rememory." "Rememory" differs from "memory" in its active force independent of the rememberer. Sethe explains:

what I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head . . . even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (36)

Therefore, she dedicates herself to "the job . . . of keeping [Denver] from the past that was still waiting for her" (42). She tells her daughter that

where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies . . . if you go there—you who never was there . . . and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again. . . . Because even though it's all over—all over and done with—it's going to always be there waiting for you. (36)

Although the borders and defining characteristics of the place of dehumanization may have vanished from sight, its affects and effects—its event—remain. Slavery is remembered but is more than a memory; its immediacy and material consequences resist resolution.

The present poses its own impediments to Paul D's desire to put together a nuclear family. Denver "prefer[s] the venomous baby to him any day" (104), resenting his usurpation of the ghost's space, his appropriation of her mother, and his ownership of a past that excludes her. Sethe wrestles

with the conflicting demands of daughter and lover, but insists that her first responsibility is to Denver. Paul D, however, argues that

it's not about choosing somebody over her—it's making space for somebody along with her. You got to say it. And if you say it and mean it, then you also got to know you can't gag me. There's no way I'm going to hurt her or not take care of what she need if I can, but I can't be told to keep my mouth shut if she's acting ugly. (45)

If he is to assume the respect and authority afforded the man of the house, Sethe and Denver must perform their roles accordingly. But, because they have grown accustomed to a family composed of women not subject to the authority of fathers or husbands, Paul D's imposition of romantic space over a space of alternative domesticity remains difficult and uneasy.⁵

BELOVED: REMEMORY AND DISREMEMBERED HISTORY

Just as a new family structure begins to tentatively coalesce, Beloved arrives to do what the ghost could not. Her narrative strand confronts the romance strand with the interference that "rememory" poses to "memory," the crucial problem underlying romantic remembering. Textual evidence supports her existence on three interconnected planes. She is the "true-to-life presence of the baby" (119) that Paul D drove out, returned in the flesh to reclaim her place in the family and possibly to mete out punishment for her death. She is also an African girl, a child who survived the Middle Passage only to be "locked up by some whiteman for his own purposes, and never let out the door" (119). After his death, she finds her way to the house on Bluestone Road where she mistakes Sethe for the mother who either died and was thrown overboard or committed suicide by jumping off the ship during the passage from Africa. Although she appears approximately 18 or 19 years old, the violent interruption of her family by the slave economy has left her stunted, fixed to the moment her mother went into the sea without acknowledging her. Finally, Beloved is the material manifestation of the "sixty million and more" Africans lost on the Middle Passage as well as the uncounted numbers "disremembered and unaccounted for" (274) in American slavery, whose stories and names will never be known.⁶ As the embodiment of these unspeakable losses, she interrupts what Caroline Rody terms Sethe and Paul D's "mutual talking cure" (99), their amelioration of history through romance.

Until Beloved's arrival at 124, the novel had been structured around the reunion of Sethe and Paul D and their negotiations for a new domestic order. Her plot gradually loosens and finally dismantles this narrative frame,

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shifting relations between characters, their views of domestic locales, and their expressions of memory. Beloved's presence exacerbates Paul D's sense of unmanly powerlessness while simultaneously calling on him to act as a father figure to another resistant daughter.

He wanted her out, but Sethe had let her in and he couldn't put her out of a house that wasn't his. It was one thing to beat up a ghost, quite another to throw a helpless coloredgirl out in territory infected by the Klan. (66)

Sethe, perhaps mindful of her own torturous journey to a fragile kind of freedom, insists on defending Beloved from the dangers of being "a coloredwoman roaming the roads with anything God made liable to jump on you" (67–68). She sees Beloved as "nice girl company for Denver" (67) and is "flattered by [her] open, quiet devotion" (57); the "company of this sweet, if peculiar, guest pleased [Sethe] the way a zealot pleases his teacher" (57). While Sethe wants Paul D "in her life" and works to "launch her newer, stronger life with a tender man" (99), she refuses to sacrifice Beloved to his need to be the man of the family. Disregarding his reservations and accepting Beloved into her home, Sethe diverts the priorities of the household away from maintenance of the romantic couple, sure she has "milk enough for all" (100).

Immediately prior to Beloved's appearance, Denver had shown signs of relenting in her animosity for Paul D. But as she cares for Beloved and protects her from Sethe's dangerous love and from the thing that "can come right on in the yard" (205) and prompt her to kill her children, Denver constructs her own alternative domesticity. Accomplishing a measure of authority as Beloved's caretaker, she attempts to disconnect from the new familial hierarchies at 124. Because "nothing was out there that this sister-girl did not provide in abundance: a racing heart, dreaminess, society, danger, beauty" (76), Denver "plot[s]" (121) to arrange the household to provide for the moments that she is "pulled into view" by Beloved's "interested, uncritical eye." Under that gaze, she feels her "skin dissolv[e] . . . and [become] soft and bright. . . . She floated near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what there was" (118). These moments provide escape from the molds of identity that have been forced on her throughout her life: slow and silent daughter of an abjected mother, outsider cut off from the love and approval of others. "To go back to the original hunger [is] impossible" (118), so Denver clings to Beloved and waits for the return of her missing father, the "angel man" who "could look at you and tell where you hurt and . . . fix it too" (208). When Halle finally makes his way home, he will "help [her] watch out for

Ma'am and anything come in the yard" (207). Restoring Halle's paternal authority, Denver imagines a properly ordered family safe from the unpredictable force of rememory, a home protected from violent eruptions of the past.

For her part, Beloved recognizes none of the male-centered domestic ideals that the other characters take, to one degree or another, for granted. Her overwhelming need for her mother's love exceeds the boundaries of nuclear family: "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe was in unless required and told to" (57). Her touch, "no heavier than a feather," is "loaded, nevertheless, with desire," and her gaze contains a "bottomless longing. Some plea barely in control" (58). Ignoring the other family members' attempts to enforce their domestic norms, Beloved pursues a kind of symbiosis with Sethe, a relationship that will ultimately eliminate all other contact. Sethe "is the one I need," she tells Denver, "you can go but she is the one I have to have" (76). 124, she says, is "the place I am" (123). In Beloved's infantile "romance," the figure of her mother reflects her vision of selfhood. Because her desire for Sethe is for an impossible reversal of loss and because her fragile sense of identity depends on the equation of Sethe-mother-self holding, she lives in constant danger of falling out of existence. She has "two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed" and has "difficult[y] keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself" (133). Sethe gradually directs more of her attention to the urgency of Beloved's needs, and the severed bond of the past takes precedence over the romantic bond that provides for the future. As Sethe "feed[s]" (58) Beloved with stories of her past, the context and purpose of remembering shift to accommodate the demands of a voracious history; it becomes apparent that "they were a family somehow and [Paul D] was not the head of it" (132).

This disruption and redirection is reflected in Paul D's steadily increasing sense of restless discomfort. Made uneasy by Beloved's "shining"—in his experience a sure sign of "arous[al]" (64)—he finds the stability of heterosexual romance increasingly compromised by her presence. Even though he knows that she is "moving" him (114) out of the domestic spaces of 124, he remains strangely helpless to stop her as she "force[s]" (116) him into the cold house and unable to resist her when she comes in the night and says:

"You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name." . . . If he trembled like Lot's wife and felt some womanish need to see the nature of the sin behind him; feel a sympathy,

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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.

"Call me my name."

"No."

"Please call it. I'll go if you call it."

"Beloved." He said it, but she did not go. She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, "Red heart. Red heart," over and over again. (117)

Although the nature of the "connection" between Paul D and Beloved, who actively dislike each other, is not specified, it emerges when Beloved's emptiness—caused by the dismemberment of her family in slavery—meets Paul D's emptiness—caused by a similar lacuna in identity. As this connection results from historical trauma, the sexual act seems to signify possibilities for reencountering the past. It pries open his tobacco tin to expose the red heart secreted within, performing a "bodily cure" (Smith 348) for the disease of history.

Later, Paul D remarks that Beloved "reminds [him] of something . . . look like, [he is] supposed to remember" (234), and equates his "coupling" with her with

a brainless urge to stay alive. Each time she came, pulled up her skirts, a life hunger overwhelmed him and he had no more control over it than over his lungs. And afterward, beached and gobbling air, in the midst of repulsion and personal shame, he was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to. (264)

The repeated implications of a perilous but essential encounter with memory suggest that sex with Beloved stages Paul D's necessary engagement with his avoided history and therefore leads to the reanimation of his red heart. As the novel sets the task of confronting history for all its characters, the fact of his sexual relations with "a girl young enough to be his daughter" (126), a girl who in fact occupies the position of his daughter in Sethe's household, tends to become secondary, as a scan of critical responses will demonstrate.

However, because Beloved is more than embodied memory, this scene calls up possibilities for and losses of other encounters, as well. Beloved approaches Paul D out of her "hunger" to be "recognized," her need to be "known," as Barbara Schapiro suggests, "in [her] inner being or essential self" (201). But as she articulates this need in connection with hearing her

name, it is clearly a need that cannot be met—Paul D cannot speak her name because he does not know it. “Beloved” was not the “crawling already?” baby’s name, but the name Sethe had inscribed on her tombstone, the first words of the preacher’s “Dearly Beloved” sermon at her grave. “Beloved” is not the African girl’s name, but one of the names she was called by her white captors, “ghosts without skin,” who “stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light” (241). When she lost her mother, she lost her name, along with her developing sense of self.

The text does not record what impression, if any, sex with Paul D has on “Beloved.” Following the “bodily cure,” there is no noticeable change in her; because no part of her past is closed down or hidden, there can be no opening of repressed memory. Locked in an endless past—“there will never be a time when [she is] not crouching” in the hold of the ship watching others die and waiting for her mother’s smile (210)—Beloved is unable to contextualize her losses. She cannot save herself by confronting history because she lacks the distance that would afford the new perspectives that project possibilities for a new life. And, just as the text provides no sign of Beloved’s response to her initial encounter with Paul D, it gives no reason for her returns to him. She is obviously not motivated by concern for the condition of his red heart, nor, as we have seen, can she use him as a medium through which to confront her history. Continually reliving profoundly agonizing events that cannot be contained as memories, Beloved has no history. For her, “all of it is now, it is always now” (210).

The novel’s central romance plot is aimed at pulling history into a manageable framework through the “mutual talking cure” that reorganizes the past that pulled men and women apart by denying them “the female’s and the male’s desire that engenders future” (Spillers 73). Paul D’s relationship with Sethe promises a joining of memory within functional structures, a route to normality and to the family that “engenders future.” But his “cold house” sex with Beloved projects memory outside the structures of the home, violating the gender role compacts of romance and family, scrambling positions of domestic authority. That *this* sexual act releases his red heart further compromises the viability of romance plot by confounding any expectation that his relationship with Sethe, whom he loves and who endured Sweet Home slavery with him, would open his tobacco tin. His vulnerability to Beloved indicates that the “talking cure” could not reach his red heart, perhaps because locked away there are the demasculinizing experiences that hamper romantic remembering. In other words, Sethe and Paul D’s memories do not draw them into a domesticity intelligible in American culture because these memories are of being refused traditional male and female roles.

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The description of the sex between Beloved and Paul D turns the power dynamics embedded in the heterosexual scene upside down by assigning "womanish" feeling to Paul D and by reversing the gendered gestures of seduction: Beloved forces herself on Paul D, he resists, she prevails. This confusion of male-dominant and female-submissive positions leads him back to the illusory manhood of Sweet Home:

One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke. His strength had lain in knowing that schoolteacher was wrong. Now he wondered. . . . If schoolteacher was right it explained how he had come to be a rag doll—picked up and put back down anywhere any time by a girl young enough to be his daughter. Fucking her when he was convinced he didn't want to. . . . But it was more than appetite that humiliated him and made him wonder if schoolteacher was right. It was being moved, placed where she wanted him, and there was nothing he was able to do about it. (125–26)

These instabilities and contradictions in his identity as a man fuel his desire to secure a place where manhood will be tangibly visible by making Sethe pregnant. Inscribing her body with his ownership, he would "hold on to her, document his manhood and break out of the girl's spell—all in one" (128). Her pregnancy would prove his ownership in a culture that demands that men own women while producing a child subject to his authority, thus creating normative family within intelligible domestic space.

However, the revelation of Sethe's infanticide interrupts the story of family redemption Paul D has been telling himself. To Sethe, her act is "simple" (163)—she prevents schoolteacher from dirtying her child, from killing her by making her less than human. Paul D, however, is sure that there must have been "some other way," and, drawing on schoolteacher's language, points out "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (165). Her continued insistence on infanticide as the only possible course of action in the context of slavery, schoolteacher, and Sweet Home forces Paul D to adjust his perception of her. He had thought that, until he rescued her, she had lived with the ghost

in helpless, apologetic resignation because she had no choice; that minus husband, sons, mother-in-law, she and her slow-witted daughter had to live there all alone making do. The prickly, mean-eyed Sweet Home girl he knew as Halle's girl was obedient (like Halle), shy (like Halle), and work-crazy (like Halle). He was wrong. This here Sethe was new. . . . This here Sethe talked about love like any

other woman; talked about baby clothes like any other woman, but what she meant could cleave the bone. This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began . . . more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed. It scared him. (164)

His view of Sethe as "Halle's girl" displays his assumptions about wives as extensions of their husbands; he presumes that she is obedient, shy, and work-crazy because he saw those characteristics in Halle. But her claim to responsibility for her children without the mediation of fatherly or cultural authority rends scripts of romance and their outcomes in domesticity.⁷ Her "outrageous claims, her self-sufficiency" (171) upend Paul D's notions of romance as effectively as did sex with Beloved. Moving quickly from his own "shame to hers. From his cold-house secret straight to her too-thick love" (165), Paul D leaves Sethe, removing himself from a locale in which traditional definitions of "man" and "woman" cannot be fulfilled.

In Paul D's absence and without the "distrac[tion]" (202) of his domestic demands, Sethe recognizes Beloved as her daughter returned from "the other side" (203), and a new family structure emerges based in a new view of memory. While Sethe's relationship with Paul D brought her "another kind of haunting" (96) in the form of new information about the past, she interprets the return of her daughter as the end of such hauntings, as deliverance from the burden of memory. "Excited to giddiness by the things she no longer had to remember," Sethe believes that she does not "even have to explain. [Beloved] understands it all" (183). Paul D had "convinced [Sethe] there was a world out there and that [she] could live in it" (182), but Beloved's presence persuades her that "whatever is going on outside [her] door ain't for [her]. The world is in" 124 and the mother-daughter romance contained there is "all there is and all there needs to be" (183). As Sethe rejects memory as the means to a new life, she eliminates her limited contact with the community. Entirely devoted to Beloved, she goes "to work later and later" until she is told "not to come back. And instead of looking for another job, [she] played all the harder with Beloved, who never got enough of anything" (239–40).

The household focuses intensely inward as boundaries between individual members dissolve. Beloved yearns to "join" with Sethe in what she terms "a hot thing" (213), a merging state in which she is "not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too" (210). Within this new family, Sethe, Denver, and Beloved engage in an alternate romance:

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You are my face; I am you. Why did you leave me who am you?
I will never leave you again
Don't ever leave me again
You will never leave me again
You went in the water
I drank your blood
I brought your milk
You forgot to smile
I loved you
You hurt me
You came back to me
You left me

I waited for you
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine (216–17)

As their voices mesh, the women put together their histories in an erotics of relational identity outside of heterosexual structures and organizations of desire.

Gradually, however, Beloved's desire for possession grows punishing and consuming. Despite Sethe's assurances that "Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life" (242), that her children are "her best thing" (251), Beloved accuses her "of leaving her behind . . . not smiling at her . . . they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her" (241). Sethe addresses Beloved as her infant daughter, but Beloved answers as the African girl whose mother went into the water, talking her name and her face away. No matter how sincere her assurances of love, Sethe cannot repair the losses Beloved suffered on the Middle Passage; like Paul D, she cannot say her name. As their play turns to violent recriminations and fruitless explanations, 124 becomes "loud" (169) with "a conflagration of hasty voices," women's voices mumbling and jumbled so that the only word decipherable is "*mine*" (172). And, together with "the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (199), are the voices of "the black and angry dead" (198). 124 becomes a place where the past possesses the present, a household without domesticity or familial hierarchies. Now Sethe sits "licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it" (250).

As the past consumes Sethe, Denver breaks free of the paralysis of knowing that there exist "places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again" by drawing on her memory of Baby Suggs, who advises her to simply "know it, and go on out the yard"

(244). Taking on the “job” of “protecting her mother from Beloved” (243), Denver faces her fears, adapts her views, and acts. Reestablishing contact with the community and developing relationships of her own, she comes to the “new” realization that she “[has] a self to look out for and preserve” (252). This new sense of selfhood, however, “might not have occurred to her” without a young man named Nelson Lord, whose childhood enquiries about her time in prison with her mother “blocked up her ears.” When he tells her to “Take care of yourself,” he “open[s] her mind” (252).

This vision emboldens her to venture further into Cincinnati, where, in order to get help, she tells the whole story of 124. A group of African American women then sets out to restore proper order between worlds, to prevent “past errors” from “taking possession of the present” (256). Acting in community, they produce the song, the music they withheld from Sethe after the murder in order to exorcise Beloved. But this communal ceremony is interrupted by Mr. Bodwin, white abolitionist and owner of 124, who turns out to be the primary, if unsuspecting, player in Beloved’s exorcism. As he arrives to take Denver to work, Sethe believes he is schoolteacher and attacks him, prompting Denver and the singing women to restrain her. As they fall on her, they form what Beloved sees as “a hill of black people, falling.” This “rememory” of the pile of bodies thrown off the slave ship recapitulates the sequence of events that led to her loss of her mother. “Standing alone on the porch,” Beloved “feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding” and sees above the falling bodies, “rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her” (262). Having again lost the gaze of the beloved for the gaze that dirties and destroys, Beloved vanishes.

BELOVED’S TWO ENDINGS

The first ending of the novel tracks Paul D’s return progress through the spaces of 124, where “his coming is the reverse route of his going” (263). His encounter with Denver in the streets of Cincinnati serves two purposes for this ending: it establishes Sethe’s need for rescue and redemption while displaying Denver’s new maturity and confidence. After Denver conveys her fear that she has “lost [her] mother” (266), Paul D watches her greet Nelson Lord, “her face looking like someone had turned up the gas jet” (267). This last image of Denver’s “shining” balances Beloved’s transgressive “shining” and begins the novel’s movement to restore order to its heterosexual economy. As the first unenslaved generation, Denver represents possibilities for the future. And as she takes on adult responsibilities in familial, social, and economic spheres, her potential is represented through her in-

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corporation into the normative safety of heterosexual romance. Her felicitous transformation prepares us for the novel's return to the central romance plot, and for Paul D's return to Sethe.

His motives for returning, however, are not clear. It is possible that he comes back because he has reached some kind of peace not only with Sethe's infanticide but also with her "outrageous claims." These claims "scare" him, but after her attack on Mr. Bodwin becomes common knowledge, he jokes with Stamp Paid: "every time a whiteman come to the door she got to kill somebody?" (265). Perhaps, as Mae G. Henderson suggests, Sethe's attempt to kill Bodwin indicates that she has reconsidered her dangerous claims; "Sethe, in effect, re-enacts the original event" but "directs her response to the threatening Other rather than to 'her best thing'" (81). Or perhaps Paul D returns simply because the presence that displaced him is gone. He comes back to a house that "does not look back at him. Unloaded, 124 is just another weathered house needing repair" (264). He feels that

something is missing. . . . Something larger than the people who lived there. Something more than Beloved. . . . He can't put his finger on it, but it seems, for a moment, that just beyond his knowing is the glare of an outside thing that embraces while it accuses.

(270–71)

Unloaded of the living presence of an unassimilable history of loss, pain, anger, and betrayal, 124 appears as "just another" house, ready to house just another family. Finally, Paul D

doesn't care how It went or even why. He cares about how he left and why. When he looks at himself through Garner's eyes, he sees one thing. Through Sixo's, another. One makes him feel righteous. One makes him feel ashamed. (267)

During his time away from 124, he comes to question the meanings of manhood he has accepted as normal and desirable, reconsidering his long-held belief that

schoolteacher broke into children what Garner had raised into men. . . . Now, plagued by the contents of his tobacco tin, he wondered how much difference there really was between before schoolteacher and after. Garner called and announced them men—but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? That was the wonder of Sixo, and even Halle; it was always clear to Paul D that those two were men whether Garner said so or not. It troubled him that, concerning his own manhood, he could not satisfy himself on that point. Oh, he did

manly things, but was that Garner's gift or his own will? What would he have been anyway—before Sweet Home—without Garner? In Sixo's country, or his mother's? Or, God help him, on the boat? (220)

Here, manhood appears as the slippiest of cultural constructions, measured in relation to others, prone to assume different forms and expressions in different locales. When he can posit, however tentatively, alternative forms of manhood in other cultural spaces, he can admit and carry out his desire to put his story of troubled manhood next to Sethe's story of troubled womanhood.

However, the move to reunite the romantic couple without explanation of Paul D's motives or investigation of Sethe's response complicates this movement toward alternatives. Having found her in the bed that Baby Suggs died in, without "plans," volition, or desire, he struggles to identify all the "things to feel about this woman" (272). Remembering Sixo's description of the Thirty-Mile Woman as "a friend of my mind. . . . The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order" (272–73), he recalls his last encounter with Sethe at Sweet Home. Then, as now, he is moved by

her tenderness about his neck jewelry—its three wands . . . curling two feet into the air. How she never mentioned or looked at it, so he did not have to feel the shame of being collared like a beast. Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that.
(273)

His defining image of Sethe rests in her ability to gather and order his identity as a man, even as it was stripped from him by the slave system. Because he is a man in her eyes, she appears to him, as to Beloved, as "the place I am"—the locale where selfhood resides.

This memory of Sethe's preservation of his manhood stands as Paul D's final thought before he expresses his desire to "put his story next to hers" (273):

"Sethe," he says, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow."

He leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. "You your best thing, Sethe. You are." His holding fingers are holding hers.

"Me? Me?" (273)

Even though Sethe is broken spiritually and physically at the conclusion of the novel, many readers assume a happy ending for her through Paul D's return.⁸ But the uncertainty and ambiguity of the "Me? Me?" that ends

Sethe's story undercut confidence in a happily-ever-after scenario for their future; it is not at all clear that Sethe will find a way to claim and value herself as her "best thing." Further, this (non)resolution is composed almost entirely of Paul D's perspective, with the exception of one paragraph in which Sethe's point of view emerges to reaffirm that he is "the kind of man who can walk in a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could" (273). Echoing almost exactly the earlier description of his blessedness, Sethe's view of Paul D reinvokes the problematic assertion of an understanding that overrides complexity and contradiction. It is this blessedness, the narrative suggests, that will allow her to lay her story beside his in the new "talking cure" capable of producing a promising "tomorrow."

While Morrison is sympathetic to Paul D's dilemmas in the novel and has identified him as "a healer" (Darling 250), the first ending leaves open competing interpretations of his character and of the romance plot he conveys. We could congratulate Paul D for finding the courage to love big instead of small, or see in his proposal to "take care" (272) of Sethe an attempt to reestablish control. Their ending scene, with its implication that Sethe will reclaim herself by deploying her "story" as romantic device, parallels the emergence of Denver's "self" through Nelson Lord's recognition and invests Sethe's renewal tenuously in Paul D's naming. In some ways, Paul D's rescue bespeaks a return to patriarchal scripts: we are left with a strong man bending over the bed of a supine, weakened woman, promising redemption in a space safe for domesticity. In other ways, however, we can see in this ending the potential for unconventional romance: Paul D's expression of openness to alternative models of manhood gains credence when Sethe connects his proposal to "take care" of her to Baby Suggs's care for her. His offer to bathe her reminds Sethe of her arrival at 124 Bluestone Road after her escape from Sweet Home, when Baby Suggs bathed her carefully and with love, putting her bruised and bloody pieces back together. Now, Sethe wonders "if he bathes her in sections, will the parts hold" (272)? Her fear that her parts will not remain intact echoes Beloved's fear of flying apart, but leaves space open for the healing touch of "a tender man."

This ambivalent coming together is countered by the novel's second ending, which addresses the disappearance and dissolution of Beloved. Exorcised when her losses of the Middle Passage are replayed in the yard of 124, she is last seen naked, "cutting through the woods" behind the house (267). If we consider Beloved at least in part a bodily, material being—which the novel insists we do—we must consider the fate of a naked black woman alone and confused in the southern Ohio of the 1870s. Her state of advanced pregnancy⁹ recalls Sethe's lone trek to freedom and delivery of Den-

ver on the banks of the Ohio River, but, unlike Sethe, Beloved has no help and no family to meet, no beloved others to recognize and value her. While Denver conveys the promise that history may be transcended, the baby conceived out of Beloved's unmet need to be known and loved promises to perpetuate an unredeemable immersion in an unescapable past. Recapitulating and reversing Paul D's plan to make Sethe pregnant, Beloved's pregnancy signals not new domestic beginnings but rather a continuation of past-ness; the loss of another mother and child represents the excess of recovery in unremitting namelessness and homelessness. History is pregnant, but will deliver a futurity without a sense of hope.

Pushed "quickly and deliberately" (274) out of the other characters' memories and out of recorded history, Beloved dissolves:

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

The admonition that "This is not a story to pass on" (275) bespeaks the absence of a historical framework to account for the living and continuing consequences of a system that dehumanized and ungendered its victims. These consequences are not easily repaired, and cannot be called into order in such a way as to propose redemption, normality, futurity. Because she is and is not simply a ghost, is and is not simply an abused girl seeking her mother, is and is not simply an embodiment of a history of loss, Beloved reaches beyond linear historical narratives with beginning, middle, end. Her diffuse, multilayered, and unresolvable "story" cannot be deployed to demonstrate national progress or to display African American recovery. Instead, she continues to haunt all locales of normalcy.

Occasionally . . . the rustle of a skirt hushes when they wake, and the knuckles brushing a cheek in sleep seem to belong to the sleeper. Sometimes the photograph of a close friend or relative . . . shifts, and something more familiar than the dear face itself moves there. They can touch it if they like, but don't, because they know things will never be the same if they do. (275)

Behind the house on Bluestone Road "her footprints come and go. . . . Should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit. Take them out

and they disappear again as though nobody ever walked there" (275). Beloved's simultaneous presence and absence figures the ache of the concealed wound of the past throbbing at the edge of awareness and articulation, a wound that, if "touched," would overwhelm the present and dismantle possibilities for the future.

Beloved's two endings encapsulate two incompatible models for memory. The history conveyed in the dynamics of romance—coming together, taking a talking cure, establishing a happily-ever-after family—carries the potential for repair and rejuvenation. Addressing history through romance, the Sethe/Paul D plot represents the possibility of making the unspeakable into the male/female bond that produces normative families, communities, cultures. The unknown story of Beloved and her unborn child, however, reinscribes all that is written out of an intelligible romance, all that haunts models of history based in closure and control. No talking can cure Beloved's losses, and, because these losses are shared in varying degrees and intensities by all of the characters, her ending reaches back into the Sethe/Paul D ending, dissecting and undermining the claims of romance and domesticity. Beloved's ending also reaches into all accounts of American history that assume that slavery simply ended in 1863, that when it was called off it was over.¹⁰ It haunts us as "the glare of an outside thing that embraces while it accuses" (271), reminding us that nothing just stops.

Like Sethe, the novel is torn between Paul D and Beloved. Morrison makes no attempt to "sidestep" or to resolve these "fundamental contradictions that animate [her] work" (DuPlessis 3). Leaving the two endings side by side, she forces us to hold competing notions of history together, drawing our attention to the dilemmas of American history and identity caused by the notion of historical transcendence. Like Sweet Home, which "wasn't sweet and . . . wasn't home" (14), Beloved, who "was not beloved" (epigraph), is a rememory that is "out there, in the world." Even if all the characters in the novel and its author and all its many readers "don't think it, even if [we] die, the picture of what [we] did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened" (36). As she supplements discourses of recovery with the wordless desolation of a wordless history, Morrison's *Beloved* challenges America's faith in the past-ness of the past by undercutting assurance in the resolution of historical trauma. Morrison "writes beyond" the "seductive patterns of feeling" associated with romance plot and its not-so-inevitable happy ending by "writing beyond" the "seductive patterns of feeling" informing dominant versions of American history.

NOTES

¹ For explorations of bonds between women and Morrison's critique of American ideologies of race and gender as they meet in the "unspeakable" experience of slave mothers and daughters, see Ferguson, Horvitz, Goldman, Liscio, Rody, and Rushdy.

² bell hooks notes that

transplanted African men, even those who were coming from cultures where sex roles shaped the division of labor, where the status of men was different and most often higher than that of females, had imposed on them the white colonizer's notions of manhood. Black men did not respond to this imposition passively. Yet it is evident in black male slave narratives that black men engaged in racial uplift were often most likely to accept the norms of masculinity set by white culture. Although the gendered politics of slavery denied black men the freedom to act as "men" within the definition set by white norms, this notion of manhood did become a standard used to measure black male progress. (89–90)

These attempts to "assume full patriarchal responsibilities for families and kin" (90) inevitably conflicted with ideologies of gender and race that denied black men and women recourse to the rewards of the "sex-gender system" granted by American culture.

Also, Herbert Gutman has pointed out that slaves found creative ways to make and nurture family bonds, nuclear and otherwise. See his *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* and Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*.

³ All the black men in Morrison's novel share this (non)position but address it in different ways. Paul compares himself to Sixo, an African man who defiantly rejects white definitions, asserts his rationality and individuality, and preserves his ties to African culture. His insistence on himself as a man results in his destruction, but not before he has impregnated the "Thirty Mile Woman" with "seveno." Paul D also compares himself to Halle, Sethe's husband, who attempts to operate within the white man's system. He works extra hours to buy his mother's freedom, and marries Sethe with the consent of his master and mistress. His crisis results from the problem of claiming a black woman as his own; the question of ownership comes graphically before his eyes as he witnesses schoolteacher's nephews taking Sethe's milk—robbing his children of their sustenance and appropriating the body of his wife. Unable to intervene, Halle goes insane. In Cincinnati, Stamp Paid represents a kind of compromise between the positions of Halle and Sixo. Having "paid" for his freedom with his wife's body, he ferries escaped slaves (including Sethe and her children) across the Ohio River and settles them among the black community on the free side. Because he has been instrumental in establishing black community, he views himself as its patriarch and is dismayed when his community fails to act in the ways he deems appropriate. These performances of masculinity as the factor of control and ownership carry over to generations with no real memory of slavery. Sethe and Halle's sons Howard and Buglar are uncomfortable in the improperly configured family at 124 Bluestone Road. They "grew furious at the company of women in the house, and spent in sullen reproach any time they had away from

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their odd work in town" (104). They are finally driven off by the "personal spite" (104) of the house inhabited by Sethe's murdered daughter.

⁴ Few critics address this issue, seeming to take his gentle, compassionate, and giving nature for granted. Margaret Atwood, however, remarks that "considering what he's been through, it's a wonder he isn't a mass murderer. If anything, he's a little too huggable, under the circumstances" (50).

⁵ See Askeland's essay for an exploration of the "power of ordering" (785) represented with/in houses through Victorian housing reform movements and ideologies of "the model home." She argues that "*Beloved* sets itself up as a remodeling of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that examines this ideology and revises it in a way that avoids reification of a patriarchal power structure" (787). Both texts, she suggests, "use and remodel traces of slave history to create narratives that will also remodel the ideologies that dominate the country's power structure. Yet both novels remain haunted by the figures that represent that power" (787–88).

⁶ For readings of *Beloved* as ghost, escaped African woman, and embodiment of the collective history of slavery, see Bowers, Ferguson, Henderson, Hirsch, Horvitz, Levy, Liscio, Mathieson, Rody, and Rushdy.

⁷ Characters' conflicting responses to Sethe's infanticide reflect its complexity. Baby Suggs, in many ways the moral center of the novel, can neither blame nor absolve Sethe. Henderson argues that Morrison "neither condemns nor condones, but rather 'delivers'" (82) Sethe over the course of the novel. Goldman suggests that Sethe's act asserts her right to "desire her own daughter, despite the measure of the slaveholder to deny this authority" by preventing black women "not only from expressing a desire which would reinforce autonomous identity as women but from also freely and fully exercising that desire which is rooted in the subject-subject bond between mother and child" (319).

⁸ See, for example, Bowers, Rody, and Rushdy, along with Fields, House, Rhodes, and Schapiro.

⁹ Some readers may feel that *Beloved* only appears pregnant and that her appearance is meant only to illustrate her ability to diminish Sethe, to eat "up her life, [take] it, [swell] up with it, [grow] taller on it" (250). But given the text's insistence on her repeated sex with Paul D and on the lost links between mothers and children (more on this later), I believe that she is indeed pregnant. Note that *Beloved* eats more than Sethe and Denver, developing a "basket-fat stomach" (243), but even though she is "getting bigger," she "seem[s] nevertheless as exhausted as they were" (242). The singing women who come to exorcise *Beloved* see "a pregnant woman, naked and glistening in the heat of the afternoon sun. Thunderblack and glistening, she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight" (261).

¹⁰ Berger sees *Beloved* as an intervention into discourses around the black family. He argues that the novel

opposes neoconservative and Reganist denials of race as a continuing, traumatic, and structural problem in contemporary America but also questions positions on the left that tend to deny the traumatic effect of violence within African American communities. In emphasizing the African American family as a site of violence—emanating both from a racist

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society and from within the family—*Beloved* takes up debates that emerged and then were stifled in the wake of the Moynihan report of 1965. (408)

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