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“White Ink”: The Body and Écriture Féminine in Toni Morrison’s Beloved

“Sixty million and more”: this is the dedication Toni Morrison writes in Beloved, for it is in this book that Morrison wishes to represent both the unrepresented—the millions of stories lost to the system of slavery—as well as the unrepresentable—the horrors not in the numbers and statistics of slavery, but in the everyday, personal details of anonymous slaves and ex-slaves. Even to begin to imagine the story of Beloved, one must consider writing in an entirely different way than, say, Austen or Hemingway might, because she seeks to write a story not about her own experiences, but about the experiences of people lost in the experience of slavery and its aftermath. In the 2004 foreword to the novel, Morrison tells us how she expects to deal with the obstacles that she finds in trying to tell a story about so many people swallowed by American slavery: “The terrain, slavery, was formidable and pathless. To invite readers (and myself) into the repellant landscape... the order and quietude of daily life would be violently disrupted by the needy dead... the herculean effort to forget would be threatened by memory desperate to stay alive. To render enslavement as a personal experience, *language must get out of the way*” (Morrison xvii, xix [my emphasis]). By this, Morrison means that conventional language and storytelling structures must make way for new ones in order to make so many untold tales of slavery into a tale of the personal. We are now with Morrison on a “pathless terrain” to tell a story that cannot be told. This is the story of the illiterate, the abandoned, the lost, the forsaken, the murdered, the forgotten. And we will soon see how imperative it is that Morrison chooses to tell this story by telling the story of a woman, using her body to explain what words cannot.

At this point it is instructive to look to feminist critic Hélène Cixous, whose own ideas concerning phallogocentrism/phallogocentrism and her theory of *écriture féminine*, help us clarify and magnify Morrison's project in Beloved. Cixous' *écriture féminine* and its tactics—writing about the body and focusing on women's writing as a personal story so as to legitimate it against the conventional field of male-centric writing—are useful to exploring Morrison's work. Cixous describes the term phallogocentrism: “Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogocentrism” (Cixous 1946). Here, Cixous points out the traditional method of writing that reveres reason and linearity and shuns the body and other traditionally “feminine” aspects as irrational. Concerning the term “phallogocentrism,” The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism claims, “the term has come to refer to the patriarchal system as a whole system insofar as that system privileges the phallus as the symbol and source of power. It is closely related to *logocentrism*, a term coined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004); the two are sometimes combined as *phallogocentrism*” (Norton 1943). This definition extends to other terms, including logocentrism and, finally, phallogocentrism. The Norton describes logocentrism as the term Derrida uses to explain Western philosophy's “impossible but irresistible search for a fundamental Truth or Logos... Logocentric structures were organized through a system of binary oppositions... the first term of each being desirable and the other shunned” (Norton 1941). So we begin to understand that the categories of men and women, male and female, are part of this system of false binaries, with men being valorized over women:

men/women. The phallus, then, is privileged over the lack of phallus—for that is the only way that many have described the situation (for example, Freud and his penis envy and fear of castration). The idea of phallogocentrism, then, combines both of these critiques into one. According to the College of Liberal Arts at Purdue's English Theory Terms webpage:

Discourse is 'phallogocentric' because it is centered and organized throughout by implicit recourse to the phallus both as its supposed ground (or 'logos') and as its prime signifier and power source; and not only in its vocabulary and syntax, but also in its rigorous rules of logic, its proclivity for fixed classifications and oppositions, and its criteria for what we take to be valid evidence and objective logic. (CLA at Purdue)

In this way, Cixous wants women (and others whose writing has been marginalized or who have been excluded from writing) to break down the power structure of phallogocentrism by looking at how logocentrism and the patriarchal hierarchy in the West organized writing and rationality. And this phallogocentric code often alienates anyone who wishes to write about experiences outside of what that code is capable of representing. This concerns not just content, but also form. Linear writing and shunning the body and the bodily are also phallogocentric norms. Vocabulary is highly regulated and prescribed, and is normally relegated to the rational and reasonable.

Cixous' prescription for breaking down the phallogocentric structure of writing is through *écriture féminine*, or, writing the body:

... the female body *has* been repressed. Indeed, *any* transgressive, desiring body—and perhaps *the body* itself—has been repressed. But maybe there is no

‘body itself,’ only bodies that have power and bodies that haven’t. Granted, power and authority and law have presupposed the male body—but on the condition that no actual body be represented at all. Thus, both men and women would have everything to say about the body... By writing *as if* the female body could be asserted, Cixous’ *écriture féminine* frees it from invisibility and, at the same time, does *not* make it into a new model for the universal human being. (Norton 1941)

This term that Cixous coined has to do with a rejection of the phallogocentric, linear, hierarchical, rational view of writing that has dominated Western society for almost its entire existence. This has in turn led to a denial of the body and the bodily in writing, and also has denied many marginalized people their stories: especially those who regard oral tradition and other such techniques as their primary way of storytelling. As Cixous points out, it is not only women who have suffered, though she would argue that they have indeed suffered more than men, because the system has denied the body entirely.

Therefore, when a woman practices *écriture féminine*, “She physically materializes what she’s thinking; she signifies it with her body... She draws her story into history” (Cixous 1947). These reflections open a conversation about Morrison’s self-confessed intentions in writing Beloved. Morrison writes of her historical subject and inspiration for the book, “The historical Margaret Garner is fascinating, but, to a novelist, confining. Too little imaginative space there for my purposes... The heroine would represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; assume the consequences of choosing infanticide; claim her own freedom” (Morrison xvii). What Morrison finds limiting is the rational, historical re-telling of the facts of the Garner case; as a writer, she

needs more room to tell a story where Garner is not a historical fact or relic, but rather the inspiration for a book that can peer into the untold stories of people like her.

One way that Beloved can hold a non-historical version of Margaret Garner and explore these issues of shame, terror, and ultimately, freedom, is by returning to the body. While many critics have turned to the mind to transcend the body, both Morrison and Cixous disagree. The mere facts are not enough here; by focusing on an individual's bodily needs and experiences, we can explore the people who were never named by history, or were forgotten or cast aside. Cixous writes:

I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement. (Cixous 1942).

It is because women's representation has been controlled by men for so long that women must “write their bodies”: in order to reclaim that part of themselves, as well as their stories. As long as the patriarchy directs the conversation surrounding women's bodies, as long as phallogocentrism rules writing, women will not be properly represented in our society. It is up to women to represent themselves and to take back their bodies.

Likewise, Beloved's quest is to look at Black bodies—particularly former American slaves' bodies—and tell their suppressed, repressed stories by focusing on those bodies. The novel accomplishes this in many ways: As I discuss below, Scars on their backs elicit stories of the past, and Beloved, the title character, takes on a body and loses it. Paul D's body moves involuntarily. Sethe's water breaks; breast milk and blood

narrate the horrors of slavery. So it is through the medium of the bodily that we read the stories of Morrison's characters. By using (especially Sethe's and Beloved's) bodies, we can explore the story that is otherwise unrepresentable, that was oral, and that is lost to history. We can draw those stories back in.

In telling the stories of former slaves through the representation of their bodies, Beloved, through the voice of Paul D, makes bold statements concerning the power structure:

Whitepeople believed that... under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were right. The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle the blacks brought to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them... The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. (Morrison 243)

The skin, the gums, animals living inside of people—this representation of “blackpeople” and “whitepeople” blurs the line between those two groups and their roles in the system of slavery. We witness a rejection of the binary white/black (read: white *over* black) and instead see how the two are intermingled. And we also see a projection of white bodies onto Black bodies, or the projection of the dominant group onto the “Other.” The body, then, becomes a site of projections.

Though she mainly focuses on women, Cixous, who was raised in Algeria, also points to a larger image that extends to marginalized people in general, and also echoes and perhaps magnifies the aforementioned paragraph in Beloved:

Here they are, returning, arriving over and over again, because the unconscious is impregnable. They've wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they've been given a deadly brainwashing... As soon as they begin to speak, at the same time as they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. Because you can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Most of all, don't go into the forest. And so we have internalized this horror of the dark. (Cixous 1944)

Here, the jungle of Morrison is just like the forest of Cixous: the scary, "Other" place of the dark continent. However, as both women point out, this dark place was not dark until Western, white-dominated phallogocentrism introduced it as such. So while these ways of looking at writing work for women, they also open up spaces for other marginalized people to tell their stories. For phallogocentrism focuses on the binaries, and *écriture féminine* breaks those structures down so that we have the language to tell and hear all of the stories.

Another Cixousian term helps open this discussion further: "white ink," which Cixous describes in terms of women's voices:

In women's speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops resonating...[and] retains the power of moving us—that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman. Why this

privileged relationship with the voice? Because no woman stockpiles as many defenses for countering the drives as does a man. You don't build walls around yourself... a woman is never far from 'mother' (I mean outside her role functions: the mother as nonname and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink. (Cixous 1948)

While Cixous clearly alludes to breast milk and mothering here (a theme which runs throughout Beloved as well), she also intertwines these ideas with the concept of the "voice." Therefore, as women write from this "first" song (another symbol also explored in Beloved), they write stories that connect to something more physical, more bodily, more primal than phallogocentric writing. This is the "voice." Here, Cixous connects writing with speech, which is helpful in our project, since many of the novel's characters are illiterate. Morrison as "writer" must capture the oral stories that her characters tell. The only way to do this is through writing with "white ink": writing language that does not "build walls around" itself. "White ink" uses the body and language that breaks through the confines of traditional phallogocentric writing. We can then explore the novel's non-linear concepts of time and plot and the experimental vocabulary and character naming patterns it uses, in addition to the attention we are paying bodies—after all, this voice that sings is a physical voice, embodied.

Beloved, however, has a few projects of its own, stretching some of these terms to fit its needs. For example, the novel concerns itself with the idea of community—this, another type of "body," for when one of its parts is missing or hurting, the community itself suffers. The family we focus on is a non-nuclear, non-traditional family, arising out of a system of slavery that did everything in its power to break such structures apart. But

in the exploration of this tragedy, we find that perhaps this nuclear structure is not the ideal after all. Perhaps we are ignoring the interconnectedness that is essential to human experience: the community body. Just as Cixous proposes that women write our bodies, Morrison tackles the project of writing the community body. It is only when this body is healed that the work in the novel is complete.

Although Morrison often uses the body in her work, Beloved is a unique novel in Morrison's collection because it is quite a bit more obviously redemptive than her usual fare. Pecola ends up raped and insane in The Bluest Eye, Hagar kills herself in Song of Solomon, and Sula dies and the town falls apart. However, in Beloved, Sethe and Denver learn self-love, Paul D confronts his past and opens his heart to take care of Sethe and share something with her, and though Beloved is banished, the characters move on. I suggest that part of the reason for this redemptive turn in Morrison's work is her exploration of spirituality in the character of Baby Suggs, who "calls" in the clearing (Morrison 208). Her "callings"—sermons, really—impact the community to a point where they can find redemption. And the ideas surrounding *écriture féminine* easily extend into the spiritual realm. The spiritual is not necessarily patriarchal, male, hierarchical, and transcendent. In fact, spirituality can focus on the earthly, the material, the female (as well as the male), and the bodily. I argue that through the characters of Baby Suggs, these ideas about writing can and do extend to the spiritual bodies of the characters, enabling them to acquire redemption in the end.

I will present these arguments in four main categories. First, I will explore what it means to "write the body." I will consider the body in terms of the individual characters' stories in the novel, examining the implications of focusing on the body: what

stories the body allows us to explore that phallogocentrism does not, including the untellable story of slaves' lives. Second, I will focus on *écriture féminine* as it is utilized in Morrison's novel. This includes an analysis of vocabulary, the use of repetition and naming, and Morrison's manipulation of time. Third, I will consider the body as it refers to different kinds of "bodies," those outside of the bounds of the individual. This includes the community body, which, I will argue, ultimately plays one of the largest roles in Beloved. Finally, I will examine Cixous' claims about phallogocentrism in a more spiritual context, as offered to us by Morrison in Baby Suggs' "calling" in the clearing, specifically her cry for the former slaves to love their bodies. I suggest that this more material, more bodily sense of spirituality opposes the traditionally transcendent, patriarchal, hierarchical and phallogocentric approach that characterizes the dominant Western tradition. I show how this spiritual system aligns with Cixous' ideals by virtue of *écriture féminine*. Cixous leaves room for sources that examine these different aspects of the body and of the feminine as they challenge traditionally patriarchal consideration. Ultimately, Beloved is not a story to "pass on," but rather a story that must be told through bodies and non-phallogocentric devices.

"Write Your Body":

The Body as Storyteller

Sethe

Sethe's body is the strongest body in terms of narrative structure, because it is the one that tells the story. We begin the novel with a house, a number (124), and little else

besides an introduction to our main characters: the ghost, Denver, Sethe, and finally, Paul D. The story really begins when Sethe's memory is jerked back to a scene where she is performing a sexual act in exchange for the word "Beloved," part of the ceremonial, funereal words the preacher imparted over Sethe's dead baby daughter so many years ago (Morrison 5). Sethe's body is already telling the story, and taking the actions that move the plot along.

As we learn of these memories, we see Paul D's entrance, which seems sudden. We have barely learned about our mysterious ghost, the mention of Baby Suggs, Denver, or even Sethe, when a new character arrives. This seeming rushed introduction of an intruder upon our characters' lives, however, is necessary. For Paul D's presence allows the story, to be opened up. A tree begins our story. However, it is not a tree in the true sense, but a scar in the shape of a tree on Sethe's back, the trace of a horrible beating by her slave master years ago. After she reveals that she has a "tree on her back," Sethe's next words lead us directly into the main story when she begins with, "I had milk... I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl" (Morrison 19). Paul D, like the reader, does not follow the non-linear story that Sethe's body tells, however. He interjects, "We was talking 'bout a tree, Sethe" (Morrison 19). And finally she does admit that she was beaten. And so the story begins: "After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still" (Morrison 19-20). As critic Carol E. Henderson writes, "Freedom for these individuals rests on tracing the multiple figurations

of the scar... The tree on Sethe's back is endemic of this process as her body functions as a template for viewing the rootedness of mental sufferings" (Henderson 85). Here, we see the explicit connection between body and story: and the stories, as Henderson points out (and Cixous intimates) are a kind of freedom. When dominators can no longer control body or story, people begin to reclaim what it theirs. But the scar is there always, as a reminder: the tree grows there still, just like the story does.

Throughout the novel, we follow the story of Sethe's tree to understand how all of the non-linear pieces in Morrison's tale fit together. The tree on her back takes us through her experiences in slavery and the story of Denver's birth. The milk from her breasts tells us much more: it tells us of the baby ghost who will become Beloved, hungry for her mother and eventually consuming her. It tells us of a love so "thick" that it nearly destroys Sethe and Beloved, as well as those around them. It tells us of Baby Suggs' spirituality and inspiration to the community, which will fall and rise again (Morrison 193). And, lastly, it tells of slavery itself, through the character of Beloved, specter of Sethe's baby, and specter of American slavery.

Beloved

Beloved, the title character, begins as a number, a house: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom" (Morrison 3). Already, the house has bodily features and capabilities. It is "full of venom." Still early in the novel, the narrator tells us, "Shivering, Denver approached the house, regarding it, as she always did, as a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled, and fell into fits" (Morrison 35). The house, or Beloved's ghost, is human, bodily. But Beloved's name is never really made known to

us. Her gravestone, bought by Sethe in exchange for a sex act, “names” her ghost and the novel for us:

Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten ‘Dearly’ too? She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her that it still might have been possible—that for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say, surely) engraved on her baby’s headstone: Dearly Beloved. But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered. (Morrison 5)

When Beloved materializes as an adult and comes to 124, she introduces herself as “Beloved” (62). Sethe does not make a connection between this young woman and her baby girl because her baby girl was not named Beloved. It was simply an adjective, a part of a preacher’s sermon at the funeral. Throughout the novel, when we do see Sethe with the baby girl she will murder, she is called only the “crawling-already? baby” or the “crawling-already? girl” (Morrison 110). Thus, Beloved being both unnamed and named by a sex act, we must feel our way around her story and understand her character through her body.

When we are introduced to Beloved, we are introduced to her body and appearance. She is only able to say her “name.” This makes sense to us as readers, as if she is the 124 baby come back to life, the baby that “wasn’t even two years old when she died. Too little to understand. Too little to talk even” (Morrison 5). Beloved does not have language—at least, not at first, and not in the traditional sense. What we know about her we know from her physical description. First, we see the magical realism of her reentrance into the world: “A fully dressed woman walked out of the water... Nobody

saw her emerge or came accidentally by. If they had, chances are they would have hesitated before approaching her. Not because she was wet, or dozing, or had what sounded like asthma, but because amid all that she was smiling” (Morrison 60). We already know that this is something out of the ordinary; that the woman is not just coming out of the water after a bath. We know something is amiss, abnormal, because of Beloved’s smile. But we also see magical realism at work here—an example of *écriture féminine*. Magical realism asks us to suspend reason and to accept the extraordinary as reality. The entire novel hinges on our ability to stray from phallogocentric reasoning and accept a woman who is part ghost, part something else, and who walks out of a river “fully dressed”—embodied.

Beloved’s power increases as her bodily needs increase. While at first she speaks like a baby and is not able to get out of bed, she then quickly grows through the years her body has missed on earth, beginning with a love of sweets, and moving on into full-fledged womanhood, when she seduces Paul D. Henderson writes, “In her embodied state, Beloved is much more deadly, a material force to be reckoned with... But her battle with her mother comes only after she has driven Paul D from the house through a series of spiritual sexual ‘negotiations’” (Henderson 89). However, at the same time, there is an innocence to her malevolence, a striking juxtaposition that Morrison offers through her bodily needs. When she seduces Paul D, she asks him to “touch me on the inside part” and “call me my name” (Morrison 137). Though she has ulterior motives for sleeping with Paul D (to separate him from Sethe), and also has a sexuality, she also doesn’t have the words for the act of sex, and wants to be named. When Denver describes falling asleep next to Beloved she emphasizes “her breath sugary from fingerfuls of molasses or

sand-cookie crumbs” because of her addiction to sweets (Morrison 143). But her need to consume grows to destructive levels: her need to consume her mother, just as a baby needs to consume from its mother’s breast takes over any of the love the women have for one another, as Sethe so desperately risks everything, including Denver, to get her milk to her baby, to pacify Beloved.

Sethe and Denver are equally afraid that Beloved will leave them again. And Beloved shares this fear. When a tooth comes loose and she pulls it out, “Beloved looked at the tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop, maybe one at a time, maybe all at once” (Morrison 157). This fear that all of the women have, including Beloved herself, emphasizes her materiality and the importance of it. If she disappears, they will lose her again. Henderson notes, “Beloved seems to sense that her ability to stay ‘whole’ rests on the insatiable appetites of others who want to see her remain before them as if to remind them of their own physical existence” (Henderson 91). We see this clearly in Beloved’s assertion that she and Sethe share a face (Morrison 255). Beloved’s embodiment also allows characters and readers alike a window into Sethe’s memories. When Sethe finally confirms that Beloved is her daughter come back to her, it is because of a song that Beloved is humming: “It was then, when Beloved finished humming, that Sethe recalled the click—the settling of pieces into places... The click had clicked... ‘I made that song up,’ said Sethe. ‘I made it up and sang it to my children. Nobody knows that song but me and my children.’ Beloved turned to look at Sethe. ‘I know it,’ she said” (Morrison 207). This scene is beautifully reminiscent of a passage from Cixous in “Laugh of the Medusa:” “My body knows unheard of songs” (Cixous 1943). Morrison invents a song for Sethe and her children so

that only they know this “unheard of song,” ultimately so that we can be sure that some magical realism is, in fact, taking place in the novel. This scene assures the reader (and Sethe) that we are not mistaken, that there is no “reasonable” explanation. We have no choice, then, but to believe in Morrison’s world, to go along with the “ghost story.”

Beloved, however, is more than just a ghost story, or even an embodied ghost. Beloved has many memories; she holds a place for the other characters. When Sethe finds out who Beloved is, she is “excited to giddiness by all the things she no longer had to remember... I don’t have to remember nothing. I don’t even have to explain. She understands it all” (Morrison 216). And this is because Beloved is the memory keeper. William Handley points out that Beloved references “fragments of the Middle Passage” (687). One of Beloved’s stream-of-consciousness sections (she gets two, while Sethe and Denver each get one) contains a glaring example of this: “in the beginning the women are away from the men and the men are away from the women storms rock us and mix the men into the women and the women into the men” (Morrison 250). This imagery has no basis in the novel’s other plotlines, and can only point to the Middle Passage, as Handley mentions. Beloved also speaks of having bodies piled on top of her, and of the “men without skin” (the white men) (Morrison 250). In earlier sections of the novel, we may see this as a remembrance of being buried or dead, but in this chapter, full of fragments, multiple narrators, and deconstructed language, we are left to find other conclusions. Henderson points out, “One may argue that Beloved’s presence within the novel suggests a need to confront personal and communal memory” (91). And we will see that Beloved does become the uniting force for the community at the end of the novel, as community is another “body” we must consider in the novel.

Paul D

Though Cixous might be rallying women to write their stories and their bodies, Paul D is proof that she is more likely rallying women to write a different kind of story—the story of bodies—a non-linear story not entrenched in reason, a contestation of patriarchal storytelling. Paul D’s body is represented in a similar way to Sethe’s in the sense that their bodies remember a time when they were owned by another—Paul D runs away from this just as Sethe does. And his story, like Sethe’s, begins with the tree on her back. Henderson writes, “Paul D’s efforts to understand the complexity of his wound are renewed with his reading of the scar on Sethe’s back... It is the act of reading the scar itself that allows Paul D to reclaim his own body (and Sethe’s too) in ways unimaginable in their former capacity as slaves” (Henderson 103-04). Paul D’s story, then, is also reliant upon the story that a woman’s body tells, for he must remember painful things when Sethe shows him her scar. But Paul D also has a similar effect on Sethe. As soon as Paul D walks in the door, he breaks the women down, and causes Sethe’s memories of Sweet Home to come rushing back to her. Through Paul D’s act of “reading” Sethe’s scar, the story unfolds. In this way, Paul D is a reader in a completely non-phallogocentric way: he is literally reading the body, not a book or a text. And through his reading, we are invited to enter the story, as readers of a story that cannot be “passed on.”

Paul D’s body, however, is also shown to us in more active ways than this. One of the sections opens with, “She moved him” (Morrison 134). Referring to Beloved’s forcing him out of the house because he stands in the way of Beloved’s total consumption

of her mother, Paul D is forced, once again, to confront his manhood. Just as in slavery, he loses control of his own body, his own sexual urges, as Beloved pushes him out, room by room, act by act. Henderson explains, “Morrison is deliberate in her efforts to make Paul D a *man*, not a user of women as some stereotypically depicted black men can be” (Henderson 103). The destruction of black men around him is key in understanding this. Paul D watches Sixo get burned, sees Halle with the butter churn after having witnessed the sexual assault on Sethe, and lives shackled with other black men in Alfred, Georgia: all de-humanizing and emasculating circumstances. But Paul D does not wish to assert his masculinity in the same way as the phallogentric system has asserted it. When he comes to “save” Sethe at the end, it is in a similar capacity that Baby Suggs “mothers” her when she arrives at 124: “‘Look,’ he says. Denver be here in the day. I be here in the night. I’m a take care of you, you hear? Starting now. First off, you don’t smell right. Stay there. Don’t move. Let me heat up some water.’ Is it all right, Sethe, if I heat up some water?’ ‘And count my feet?’ she asks him. ‘Rub your feet’” (Morrison 320-1). He proceeds to wash Sethe’s body and feet, just as Baby Suggs does when Sethe shows up at 124 after running for so many days that her feet and body are bloody and destroyed (Morrison 109). But we are not meant to mistake this Baby Suggs-like caretaking for feminization (and if we do, Cixous would chide us, what is the harm in that? Feminization, after all, is not an erasure of a male half of a binary, but a representation of all that conventional writing has left out of its discourse). The narrator makes this very clear in the sentences that follow: “Her tenderness about his neck jewelry... 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” (Morrison 322).

Sethe “leaves” him his manhood—doesn’t give it to him, make him assert it, or take it away from him, like the slave system does. And his manhood is important, but it is a manhood reimagined, with tenderness, love, and care—not the dominating manhood of phallogocentrism.

Bodily Needs: The Language of Hunger and Consumption

So bodies may be moving the plot along, but bodily needs and symbolism also tell us about the characters’ relationships to one another. Hunger and consumption will become tantamount to Beloved and Sethe’s relationship, and to Denver’s self-discovery of a life for herself outside the bounds of 124.

Morrison emphasizes Beloved’s bodily needs as a way of representing the needy demands of memory and the insatiable nature of her desire. When Beloved comes to the house, she is thirsty: “The woman gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it, and four times the woman drank as though she had crossed a desert” (Morrison 62). However, after Beloved’s thirst is finally quenched, Denver notices another hunger. Denver “knows” this woman is her long-lost sister, the baby ghost come to life. She wants desperately to please her, to bond with her. And one of the things that Denver is pleased to find out is that she can make Beloved happy by satisfying her hunger for sweets: “From that moment and through everything that followed, sugar could always be counted on to please her. It was as though sweet things were what she was born for” (Morrison 66). But this desire for sweets will eventually corrupt and consume the family. As we see in the example of “Sweet Home,” the

plantation which, as Paul D articulates, “Wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home,” sweet things aren’t always what they seem (Morrison 16).

Meanwhile, Morrison employs the metaphor of bodily hunger to figure Denver’s emotions and psyche. Beloved’s hunger is certainly not the only hunger in the novel. Denver, too, is hungry. She is hungry because she is lonely: “Denver’s imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. *Wore her out*” (Morrison 35). Denver is literally starved for attention: for interaction outside of the haunted 124 house, and for love. But she is also hungry for her sister, a feeling which might have been brought on by Sethe accidentally mixing Beloved’s blood with her own breast milk while nursing Denver. While the girls are sleeping, “Denver will turn toward her then, and if Beloved faces her, she will inhale deeply the sweet air from her mouth. If not, she will have to lean up and over her, every once in a while to catch a sniff. For anything is better than the original hunger—the time when, after a year of the wonderful little *i...* there is nothing coming through” (Morrison 143). Denver is referring to the time after another child tells her that Sethe is a murderer, and Denver goes deaf for a time rather than hear the truth. However, she is also intimating another, stronger hunger—hunger for other people, for her sister—who even though she is a destructive ghost, was her only playmate when the community abandons Sethe and Sethe abandons the community.

Just as Denver’s hunger might be related to her mother’s milk, so might Beloved’s. Beloved is hungry—not only for sweets, but for her mother. The narrator, consistently reminding us of Sethe’s journey to get her milk to her little girl, emphasizes the possibility of a Beloved hungry for her mother’s milk and her mother’s love. When

we learn of the relationship between Sethe and Beloved gone sour, the narrator tells us, “124 was quiet. Denver, who thought she knew all about silence, was surprised to learn hunger could do that: quiet you down and wear you out. Neither Sethe nor Beloved knew or cared about it one way or another. They were too busy rationing their strength to fight one another” (Morrison 281). Here, Denver is considering actual hunger—not the hunger she has for her sister. The three women are starving because of Beloved,

who never got enough of anything: lullabies, new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk. If the hen had only two eggs, she got both... the pain was unbearable when they ran low on food, and Denver watched her mother go without—pick-eating around the edges of the table and stove... even Beloved, who was getting bigger, seemed nevertheless as exhausted as they were.

(Morrison 282, 285)

As Beloved becomes bigger and bigger, and looks larger, Sethe looks smaller. Beloved takes on a growing, pregnant body, becoming the mother, leaving Sethe as the daughter. Beloved consumes her mother—her hunger for her mother is simply too much. She cannot be fulfilled. And she starves both Sethe and Denver with this consumption. Here, then, Morrison symbolically represents longing for community through bodily metaphors. Hunger leads to consumption, digestion, and the obliteration of the other person. Beloved’s insatiability is dangerous, and calls for a larger body to save Sethe and Denver: the community body. Denver must finally go and find help from the neighbors and then a job to provide for her family. And all the while, Beloved continues to consume Sethe—until the community steps in.

The community is itself at the center of the issue of hunger and consumption. While it is likely that the community shuns Sethe because of her awful deed, there is evidence that the shunning begins before Sethe takes the saw to Beloved's neck. We are told of the time that Stamp Paid comes to Baby Suggs' with bushels of blackberries, and, wanting to share the wealth, Baby decides to make a picnic for her neighbors:

She decided to do something with the fruit worthy of the man's labor and his love. That's how it began... it grew to a feast of ninety people. 124 shook with their voices far into the night. Ninety people who ate so well, and laughed so much, it made them angry... 124, rocking with laughter, goodwill, and food for ninety made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? Giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone... Who had never been lashed by a ten-year-old whiteboy as God knows they had. Who had not even escaped slavery—had, in fact, been *bought out of it* and driven to the Ohio River in a wagon... It made them furious. They swallowed baking soda, the morning after, to calm the stomach violence caused by the bounty, the reckless generosity on display at 124. (Morrison 160-162).

The consumption, the over-consumption, makes the community angry, just as it reproduces itself in Beloved. They are not starving when they come to 124 for the party, and they eat so much that they cannot stand themselves. Although they blame Baby and her bounty, the text reads almost like a person who doesn't feel he or she deserves

something—the person may not think Baby deserves it, but do not feel that he or she deserves it either. Otherwise, one would be happy to take from the surplus. And this anger, I will demonstrate, will have lasting consequences for the community and the inhabitant of 124.

So, we see the natural truths of the body needing sustenance, and the dangers of overconsumption alive and well in Morrison's tale. The neighbors do not simply see facts and logically put them together, arriving at their anger and jealousy of Baby Suggs. No, they eat her food until they've eaten so much that they're angry. Their bodies tell them, tell the reader, what to feel and who to blame in that moment. And Beloved's hunger is the same. A baby waiting for her mother's milk is now a grown woman with a body capable of eating Denver and Sethe out of house and home and into starvation. It is overconsumption out of anger, and, perhaps like the community, anger because of overconsumption. This bodily (and perhaps motherly) theme of hunger and consumption allows us a window into relationships complicated by slavery. What these people have had to endure, and how they navigate hunger and consumption when free, speaks volumes more than a phallogocentric story could.

The Fluids of Life: Breast Milk, Blood, and Water

Cixous has reminded us that every woman writer has "white ink" to offer. By this, Cixous is clearly pointing to breast milk, and her critics often accuse her of female biological essentialism. But Cixous is not necessarily emphasizing actual motherhood and breast milk in her essay. She is also reinforcing the marginalized with bodily symbolism. She is calling on writers to find new "languages" outside of the

phallogocentric language. Morrison heeds this call to the utmost, using breast milk—and blood, and water—as the “ink” of her story.

Breast milk and breastfeeding are constant throughout the novel. As we have seen, when Sethe narrates her story, she begins with, “I had milk... I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl” (Morrison 19). And throughout the story of how Schoolteacher’s boys sexually assaulted and beat her, she emphasizes this point: “Those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they come in there for. Held me down and took it” (Morrison 19). Sethe does not say, “they beat me,” or, “they sexually assaulted me.” Her focus is not on what is done to violate her, but rather, how the men took something precious from her, something that made her a good mother:

Nobody will ever get to my milk anymore except my own children. I never had to give it to nobody else—and the one time I did it was took from me—they held me down and took it. Milk that belonged to my baby. Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma’am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left. I’ll tell Beloved about that; she’ll understand. She my daughter. The one I managed to have milk for and get it to her even after they stole it... (Morrison 236)

Sethe’s breast milk then symbolizes a type of life that slavery would not allow: the ownership of one’s body, and the disruption of natural relations, especially a connection with one’s mother: knowing one had enough to eat and would be provided for. In her mind, it marks her as a good mother because she had milk enough to feed and provide for

all of her children in a way that many slaves could not, including her own mother. Which is why when Paul D asks her, “They used cowhide on you?” she answers, “And they took my milk;” “They beat you and you was pregnant?” “And they took my milk!” (Morrison 20). The milk Sethe can or cannot give to her children becomes a strong symbol for what stands to be gained by freedom, and what was taken away from so many slaves, including herself.

Sethe worries about her milk souring or going bad before she can get it to her baby. While she is running, “Milk, sticky and sour on her dress, attracted every small flying thing from gnats to grasshoppers” (Morrison 36). This is the milk-gone-bad from slavery, from running. This is the milk of the South. When she gets to 124 and Baby Suggs, Baby washes Sethe down and “The crust from her nipples Baby softened with lard and then washed away. By dawn the silent baby woke and took her mother’s milk... “Pray God it ain’t turned bad” (Morrison 109). And the milk is not bad. It has not soured. She is able to nurse her baby and the “crawling-already?” baby as well. Through her entire ordeal, Sethe does the one thing most important to her—even more than delivering Denver alive—she gets the milk to her little girl.

But while Sethe is so concerned with whether or not her milk is taken by Schoolteacher or soured for her “crawling-already?” baby, it is she who sours her own milk for Denver. After the murder, Baby Suggs’ point of view tells us:

Baby Suggs... traded the living for the dead, which she carried into the keeping room. When she came back, Sethe was aiming a bloody nipple into the baby’s mouth. Baby Suggs slammed her fist on the table and shouted, “Clean up! Clean

yourself up! They fought then. Like rivals over the heart of the loved, they fought. Each struggling for the nursing child. Baby Suggs slipped in a red puddle and fell. So Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister.

(Morrison 179)

When Denver takes the blood of her sister with her mother's milk it is a souring that Sethe had not considered. But it is one that has a lasting effect on Denver, who knows before anyone that the ghost in the house is her sister's ghost, that the woman Beloved is her sister in bodily form, and that her sister, in any form, is her only hope for escaping the loneliness that comes from being shunned by the community, losing her grandmother, and living with a mother she is afraid of because she murdered her other child. Toward the end of the novel, when Sethe, Denver, and Beloved receive their own monologue-like chapters, Denver's begins with, "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk" (Morrison 242). So, Sethe's milk has soured not for her "crawling-already?" baby girl, but for her other daughter, Denver. And this is a vital key to Denver's struggle. This mixing of blood and breast milk is not an innovation of Morrison's, however. Traci C. West writes, "[A] particular form of sexualized torture for slaves was the practice of whipping pregnant women and beating nursing mothers so severely that blood and milk flowed simultaneously from their breasts" (West 278). The difference, however, is that Sethe's mixture of blood and milk comes from her own hand. But it is also part of the violence of the system of slavery. Though the men did not beat the mixture into (or out of) her, she never would have taken these actions if the slave catchers had not appeared to bring her back to a place where that may have happened—at someone else's hand. Besides the mixing of blood and breast milk in the murder story,

we also see blood and breast milk mixed for Denver when Sethe turns up alive at Baby Suggs'—her destination. Baby watches Denver breastfeed after she has cleaned Sethe up when she arrives at Baby's house. When the "baby woke and took her mother's milk," "Baby Suggs caught a glimpse of something dark on the bed sheet... Roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe's shoulders" (Morrison 110). This is when Baby realizes that Sethe has been beaten badly. So, the narrative suggests that Sethe's milk has been tied up with blood throughout her ordeal: while being beaten and having her milk "taken," while running away and giving birth, when she arrives at Baby's, and when Sethe kills Beloved.

Of course, *Beloved's* story contains a lot of blood imagery. On more than one occasion, Sethe describes the blood of the murder scene as "baby's blood that soaked her fingers like oil" (Morrison 6). Oily is an unusual adjective to use concerning blood. However, Morrison describes the blood as "pumping," like oil (Morrison 6). And perhaps the repetition of this description denotes the heaviness and permanence of the blood. Oil, after all, is difficult to wash away. And it most certainly does not mix well with water, the other birthing fluid in the novel. But the blood is not simply described as oily. It is also described in terms of its color, which may seem obvious to most readers, but is important to the novel. When remembering Baby Suggs' old age, filled only with a desire for color, Sethe makes an important exception: "She was well into pink when she died. I don't believe she wanted to get to red and I understand why because me and Beloved outdid ourselves with it" (Morrison 237). Baby's want of color, as I will explain, is a significant aspect of the novel and its commentary on the patriarchy. But the distinction of red as an

unwanted color because of the blood also has its own truths to speak about the violence that slavery produced.

Although most of the novel's bodily fluids are referred to in terms of women—particularly Sethe—we also do glimpse some of Paul D's experiences with it, just as we see his experience through his body. Most notably, Paul D's blood is described, "... the further south they led him the more his blood, frozen like an ice pond for twenty years, began thawing, breaking into pieces that, once melted, had no choice but to swirl and eddy... By the time they unhitched him from the wagon and he saw nothing but dogs and two shacks in the sizzling grass, the roiling blood was shaking him to and fro" (Morrison 126). This boiling blood serves as an alternative explanation for the "angry black man" stereotype. We have seen women and babies bleed. Now we see a man's blood boiling because it is one thing to be on a plantation as a slave, but it is another to be an imprisoned slave sent to work on the chain gangs. Paul D's boiling blood, and his story, leave no room for white, Western phallogocentrism's simple, reductive, racist, and empty explanation of "the angry black man." Here is a man who has endured so much that his heart and his blood are frozen, and then endures volumes more—enough to boil frozen blood. And in the end, Paul D is one of the most redemptive characters in the novel. He has not been reduced by his blood, but rather explained by it.

Finally, though no blood is actually mentioned in the following example, it is most certainly implied. When Sethe tells about her landing at Baby Suggs' house, she describes an almost utopian existence for exactly twenty-eight days—the time between her arrival and the murder of Beloved: "Sethe had had twenty-eight days—the travel of one whole moon—of unslaved life. From the clear stream of spit that the little girl

dribbled into her face to her oily blood was twenty-eight days” (Morrison 111). Though the narrator does not explicitly point it out, twenty-eight days, or one moon cycle, is also the time of a woman’s menstrual cycle. It was, then, as Sethe describes it, a time of life: “Days of healing, ease, and real-talk” (Morrison 111). But when the blood comes again, it is the blood of the baby, not the blood of a woman. An unfair life cycle. A life cycle that is out of balance—the baby bleeds—because of the violence of the phallogocentric American slave system. That Morrison uses this timeframe within the context of babies, birth, and breastfeeding, cannot be a coincidence. And, as I will discuss, it serves as an important connection between women’s bodies and the spiritual sense of the cycles of “the moon,” as Morrison points out, as well as the earth.

Lastly, we have water: particularly the water of birth—of water breaking for birth. The first time we see it is when we meet Beloved in the flesh. Beloved comes out of the water. And she is thirsty for water. But Sethe also experiences water when she meets Beloved. When they come upon her sitting at the stump, Sethe finds herself with an incredible urge to urinate:

And, for some reason she could not immediately account for, the moment she got close enough to see the face, Sethe’s bladder filled to capacity... Right in front of the [the] door she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless. Like a horse, she thought, No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born. So much water that Amy said, ‘Hold on, Lu. You going to sink us you keep that up.’ But there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now. (Morrison 61)

The narrator spells this out pretty clearly: Beloved is reborn out of water, and Sethe's has to break again to re-birth her. As in the African philosophy that Handley writes of, the dead has become the living. Later, Sethe confirms this for us: "I would have known at once when my water broke. The minute I saw you sitting on that stump, it broke... I would have known who you were right away because the cup after cup of water you drank proved and connected to the fact that you dribbled clear spit on my face the day I got to 124" (Morrison 239). Although water is a subtler and less startling fluid than blood or breast milk, it is certainly a significant symbol in the novel. And its excess in association with birth also recalls Beloved's excess hunger, as well as the excesses of Baby Suggs that make the community angry. Excess here is problematic: it is the unleashing of something repressed.

Thus, the story that cannot be passed on unfolds in front of our very eyes with Morrison's use of the body and its fluids as connectors in relationships and plotlines in lost stories. When Morrison uses these language inventions, she shirks the conventional language of phallogocentrism because phallogocentrism cannot do justice to her story. To mention the statistics, to tell a linear tale with reason and logic, to focus on the non-bodily, is to silence the very story that she is telling through the space provided by Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine*.

"White Ink"

Finding a Language

As I have established, Morrison is faced with the task of eking out a new language for a story that, as she points out, "is not a story to pass on," full of lost people, fractured

families and communities, and lost stories (Morrison 324). As Handley explains, Morrison “challenges the Western critical assumption about the nature and function of personification and allegory as narrative modes by demonstrating the ways in which language-as-loss is not only a culturally relative concept but produced by history—specifically, for African American culture, the history of slavery” (Handley 679). She uses several techniques to achieve this. First, the sense of time in the novel is non-linear, non-phallogocentric. It weaves the past in with the present and meanders into, out of, and around characters throughout the course of the narrative. Second, Morrison uses repetition to invoke almost religiously the most important parts of the narrative, and to offer up a kind of song, with constant choruses and refrains. Third, Morrison calls our attention to traditional Western systems of naming, and ways in which characters subvert and reject these systems. Also, Morrison invents words. She creates a new vocabulary where there is not one sufficient to tell this untellable story. All of these devices are created in the space that Cixous termed *écriture féminine*, and they serve not only to disavow traditional phallogocentric language, but to allow Morrison to write stories of the forgotten, the “sixty million and more.” Handley asserts, “Morrison’s response... is a critique of slavery’s erasure of memory, but at the same time, a critique of a Western ideology of writing and reading that itself constructs an allegory of reading that serves that erasure” (Handley 679). Morrison critiques this “Western ideology of writing” through these *écriture féminine* dynamics.

Time

One way that Morrison eschews a phallogocentric, linear tale is by complicating time. The past and present become confused at times. We do not have a linear tale in which Sethe begins with her mother and Nan, moves onto Sweet Home, marries Halle, runs away, stays with Baby, murders her daughter, raises Denver, witnesses Baby Suggs' death, and is visited by Paul D and then Beloved. In fact, we begin with Baby's death, which happened years ago, and then we are introduced to Paul D, and we go back to learn about Sweet Home. But the web Morrison weaves is more intricate than that. Moments and experiences in the novel repeat, turn up multiple times in one or more characters' memories and stories. Holes are filled in little by little, by revisiting the plot more deeply each time it is offered to us. Characters are introduced at different points of the action, then explained later. For example, Stamp Paid appears at an important moment in the story when we as readers witness the murder. But then we don't really know who he is until almost the end of the novel. Morrison, of course, is certainly not the first writer to experiment with this—in fact, we may see this as evidence of Morrison's scholarly work with Faulkner's writing. And Faulkner predates Cixous. But this tactic would certainly be one that Cixous would promote as anti-phallogocentric, and therefore opening spaces to tell fractured stories in fractions, in turn making up a whole.

The Language of Repetition

Repetition is not a new device in language. In fact, it is as old as songs and epic poetry. Many writers use it to emphasize and to dig deeper at meanings in their texts. However, repetition also predates a written language. It echoes the choruses and refrains of ballads, which were necessary for remembering songs and stories in the oral tradition.

This is significant for Beloved because most of the characters are relying on memory and oral tradition to tell stories—most are illiterate, or only semi-literate. And Morrison’s musical use of repetition connects us to a different way of storytelling.

As I will demonstrate, the community dubs Baby Suggs “Baby Suggs, holy” (Morrison 102). While this is part of Morrison’s naming structure, it is also part of her repetition. Baby Suggs, holy. It is a name, but also a refrain, reminding us of Baby’s place in the community, even after we learn that she dies thinking of color and abandons her callings in the Clearing. What Baby has said to the community sticks, and is still relevant and true to them, despite her own struggles.

Another chorus sings of Baby Suggs: “nobody knocked her down” (Morrison 164). This is important to Baby’s character, especially considering that she does seem “knocked down” in the end. She slips and falls in a puddle of Beloved’s blood after the murders. She retires from calling and resigns herself to considering color (Morrison 237). But nobody knocked her down. This refrain comes to us in the context of slavery, and we see Baby’s shock at Sethe’s wounds when she makes it to Baby and 124, but it is pertinent to our understanding of Baby. Nobody knocked her down. She remains a pillar in the community, and her wisdom is still with each of its members.

We also encounter a short repetition of “Nobody saw them falling” (Morrison 205). This refrain centers on Sethe, Denver, and Beloved, during the short utopian time they spend together before Sethe figures out for sure that Beloved is her daughter. They are skating, slipping, laughing, and “nobody saw them falling.” They are isolated, alone at 124, and neither the women nor the community see what will eventually be the

downfall of the relationship. It is a foreshadowing, a warning to show us that the happiness will not last, that they are sliding down a slippery slope.

Though there are countless repetitions in the novel, one of the most important ones comes with the stream-of-consciousness sections in Sethe's, Denver's, and Beloved's voices. Each one begins with who Beloved is to them, and the phrase "and she is mine," even Beloved's sections (Morrison 236-256). Each section describes each woman's relationships to Beloved and to one another. But Beloved is everyone's: she is Sethe's, Denver's, and hers. She is even the memory of the slaveship, and the embodiment of the former slaves' memories. This is why she is so dangerous for Denver, and so uninterested in her. Denver has no memories of slavery, so Beloved can do nothing for her. Denver is the only one who can save her family because Beloved is not really "hers," as she imagines. In all, the various repetitions in Beloved play out like choruses in a song, memorized to tell a story. This echoes the oral traditions in the characters' lives, as well as former slaves' lives; it tells the story of people who sang songs with pertinent refrains to help one another through slavery and also to escape to freedom. These songs and refrains represent voice, as Cixous points out. As Morrison recalls refrains, she recreates voices lost to history.

The Language of Naming

Naming plays a large role in many characters' stories in Beloved. Characters are named by their affiliations under the system of slavery. Most characters who name themselves do so to assert their own identities and their own relationships. So this method of naming and re-naming, of pointing out slave names is yet another act of écriture

f eminine: it points to the power structure, and asserts itself outside of that structure. West says, “As a result of being defined as property, the enslaved person suffers a kind of social death” (West 265). Perhaps a way to re-enter social life is by renaming oneself. But re-naming reaches further than this. Handley believes it may point to an African philosophy called “nommo.” Handley explains “nommo,” as “the magic power of the word to call things into being, to give life to things through the unity of word, water, seed, and blood” (Handley 677). Here we not only have a philosophy outside of the Western world, we have a system that mixes language with the body to create being. And as Handley elaborates, naming is central to this philosophy: “The sacred act of naming is integral to becoming *muntu*... a category of existence... that includes both living and dead... such that babies who die before they have been given a name are not even mourned, because they are *kintu*, that category of things that only the power of *nommo* can restore and animate, make actual and real” (Handley 677). Naming, then, is *nommo*: it combines language with body to bring a person, a body—living or dead—into existence.

We can begin with naming under the system of slavery, with Paul D’s naming story. When he meets Denver, she greets him, “Good morning, Mr. D.,” to which Paul D responds, “Garner, baby. Paul D Garner” (Morrison 13). Of course, we have just learned that the name of Paul D and Sethe’s former slave owner was Garner, and that the “D” is in Paul D’s name because there were also a Paul F and a Paul A at Sweet Home (forcing the reader to wonder what happened to Pauls B, C, and E), denoting the rituals of naming under slavery. Slaves were named after their slave owners because they belonged to them, were their property, much how women and children are named after the father in

the patriarchal nuclear family. It is a phallogentric, hierarchical practice—one that many of our characters will reject.

Baby Suggs has perhaps the most significant naming story in the novel, as she is such a central character, and even takes on a new name that the community (Janey, Ella, Stamp Paid, and Sethe all use it) gives to her: Baby Suggs, holy. We learn that Mr. and Mrs. Garner have called Baby “Jenny” throughout her time with them. On her way to freedom, when she asks Mr. Garner why, he is surprised to learn that “Jenny” is not her name:

“Mr. Garner, why you call me Jenny?”

“ ‘Cause that’s what’s on your sales ticket, gal. Ain’t that your name? What you call yourself?”

“Nothing,” she said. “I don’t call myself nothing... Suggs is my name sir, from my husband. He didn’t call me Jenny.”

“What he call you?”

“Baby.”

“Well,” said Mr. Garner, going pink again, “If I were you, I’d stick with Jenny Whitlow. Mrs. Baby Suggs ain’t no name for a freed Negro” (Morrison 167).

But Baby is worried that her family will not be able to find her if she “was calling herself some bill-of-sale name” (Morrison 168). Here is a great example of the power of the system of slavery. Baby doesn’t even know her own name. She calls herself “Nothing.” The people in power in the situation have a name for her based on how much money she is worth: her bill-of-sale name, as she refers to it. And she is confounded by why they call her this name. Even though Mr. Garner is correct that in the North, in the phallogentric

system, “Baby Suggs” is an odd name, it still describes her to herself better than “Jenny.” However, rather than simply explaining that she does not wish to keep a name she was given in slavery, the narrator points out that Baby wants her family to be able to find her. This fracturing of the family is a part of the story that the simple name “Baby Suggs” tells us. And when Baby meets the Bodwins, who will help her set up her new life, she introduces herself as “Baby Suggs,” officially naming herself, and rejecting the fracturing system of ownership that saddled her with the slave name “Jenny.”

We see Stamp Paid with a similar story. But while Baby names herself in terms of her family, Stamp names himself in terms of the role he plays:

Born Joshua, he renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master’s son. Handed her over in the sense that he did not kill anybody, thereby himself, because his wife demanded she stay alive... With that gift, he decided that he didn’t owe anybody anything. Whatever his obligations were, that act paid them off... So he extended this debtlessness to other people by helping them pay out and off whatever they owed in misery. Beaten runaways? He ferried them and rendered them paid for; gave them their own bill of sale, so to speak. ‘You paid it. Now life owes you.’ (Morrison 218)

Stamp, having carried out these exact functions for people like Sethe, only asks for an open door to his neighbor’s houses in return. His name, while changed for different reasons than Baby Suggs’, also becomes an issue of identity. Just as Baby comes with free papers, Stamp comes with non-phallogocentric freedom: a freedom for which he has traded something precious, his wife. Again, we see the fracturing of slave communities and families through the white dominant cultural naming and re-naming process.

Denver's naming story tells of a baby named in freedom. We witness how she loves to hear the story of it. Denver, born in a boat in the river, is born close to freedom. She represents the moving on, the expansion of the new generation, who will deal with problems different from those of freed slaves. Just as Amy, the whitegirl, helps Sethe deliver Denver and becomes her namesake, Denver eventually has to learn a new way of dealing with "whitepeople" when working for the Bodwins. She reaps benefits: they pay her enough to support Sethe, they teach her how to read. But she also encounters the racism central to Reconstruction, which is of a different tone than that of slavery: a knick-knack in the image of a little "blackboy" whose mouth hangs open to hold coins, and who is "on his knees...Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words 'At Yo Service'" (Morrison 300). This knick-knack belongs to the Bodwins, to the "good whitefolks," who helped establish Baby Suggs and gave her 124 to live in. But Denver learns of the system that is still out there. However, just as the area in Ohio right above the Mason-Dixon line will become more and more mixed with "blackpeople" and "whitepeople," Denver is mixed up with this complexity from the beginning. Amy tells Sethe, "' She's never gonna know who I am. You gonna tell her? Who brought her into this here world?' ... 'You'd better tell her. You hear? Miss Amy Denver. Of Boston' ... Sethe felt herself falling into a sleep she knew would be deep. On the lip of it, just before going under, she thought, 'That's pretty. Denver. Real pretty'" (Beloved 100). And of course, Denver does know of the "whitegirl" that delivered her, and loves to hear the tale. In fact, she cannot stand to hear any other stories that concern Sweet Home before her birth. Denver is born somewhat divorced from slavery. And, of course, Denver is not merely a "whitegirl's" last name (perhaps this does point to an odd continuation of the

slave system, in which slaves are named after their masters—though Amy helps deliver Denver), it is also the name of a city out West, one that that Sethe would never dream of seeing, the name of a place that symbolizes expansion and a country that is more complex than a simply divided North and South. This is Denver's future. Once she chooses to leave the house, Denver learns something that Sethe has not yet, "Somebody had to be saved, but unless Denver got work, there would be no one to save, no one to come home to, and no Denver either. It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve" (Morrison 197). This is something that Sethe has always sacrificed: her self, perhaps because she does not know how to have a sense of self after having been owned and abused. But it is a lesson that Denver, in this new post-slavery world, must learn in order to survive, and also a lesson that Sethe will begin to see in the end.

Conversely, as I have stated, *Beloved* really never has a name, and the one she does have is conferred to her after her death on her gravestone by means of a sex act Sethe must perform in order to pay for it. So, *Beloved*'s naming story may be the most tragic and unclear naming story of the novel. However, if we consider that *Beloved*, embodied, stands as a symbol of slavery, we may see that Morrison has named her "Sixty million and more," which she describes with her epigraph from Romans 9:25: "I will call them my people, / which were not my people; / and her beloved, / which was not beloved." Handley writes, "The name both marks and preserves against loss; it inaugurates this present narrative and serves as a stop against total absence, as an enabling limit for an African American cultural memory" (Handley 680). Here, Handley refers to the fact that "*Beloved*" serves as both the title of the book—technically the first word—and as the last word, ending the novel. "*Beloved*," then, is not the name of the

baby, or just of the woman who comes to Sethe and Denver, but the memory of slavery—just as *Beloved*'s body is both as well. Naming in the novel, then, is a rebellious and activist notion. It exemplifies *écriture féminine*, in that it challenges the naming system of the dominant phallogocentric culture.

Inventing Language: "Rememory"

One way to escape phallogocentric language and write one's own story is to invent and re-invent words. And this is exactly what Morrison does in *Beloved*. She simply does not have the words to describe the individual former slaves' stories, and she does not wish to do so by using the language of the slave system, so she invents words to help her find their stories and tell them. She invents words such as "whitepeople" and "blackpeople," perhaps to bridge the gap between identity and personhood by actually eliminating the space between the two words. While these inventions are all significant and one could find many examples in the novel, one word that Morrison manipulates more than any other is "memory." Instead of referring to things as her "memory" or "memories," Sethe refers to her memory as her "rememory" and "rememories." She even uses it as a verb: "seem like I do rememory that," and "You rememory me?" (Morrison 238, 254). Though the characters, for the most part, are illiterate, and they possess a pointed Southern accent and style of speaking, these are not people who speak backwardly or in an ignorant manner. Morrison is not demonstrating their lack of education here. "Rememory" is a word that Morrison invents for a purpose. Henderson points out, "Morrison's novel posits the concept of *re-memory* as a plausible avenue for the materialization of... that freed self once the physical body has been emancipated"

(Henderson 91). And while I wholeheartedly agree with Henderson, I must point out her error in hyphenating the word “rememory,” as it does a disservice to the fact that Morrison has invented a word outside of the phallogocentric discourse, and hyphenating it brings it back into the fold by restructuring it in an acceptable phallogocentric way, and not the new word it is meant to be. Primarily, Sethe is the character who uses this word. And it is Sethe’s story, primarily, that we are reading. Sethe is not remembering; she is materializing the past for herself, inasmuch as Paul D appears in her life, and Beloved reappears in her life. With these reappearances also come the reappearances of memories, or “rememories.” Sethe discusses rememory with Denver:

Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world... Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else. (Morrison 43)

This is the past becoming body, whether in a physical sense, as with Beloved’s corporeality, or in the sense that these memories are forever ingrained in these new, free bodies that once suffered and belonged to someone else, as in Sethe’s tree on her back. And as Amy tells Sethe as she massages her feet, “Anything dead coming back to life hurts” (Morrison 42). “Rememories” are both personal and collective. To “rememory” something is to materialize it, to painfully bring it back to life—something memories just

cannot accomplish. Like naming, inventing language as Morrison does with her term “rememory” is an act of *écriture féminine*. She must invent (or reinvent words) because there is no suitable conventional language for what she tries to portray: the danger of memory.

The Community Body

Just as *Beloved*'s body is a symbol of a larger issue, we can view another kind of “body” in a similar way. The community is, in fact, a body. It is a body of people that becomes dysfunctional when it becomes jealous of one of its own (Baby Suggs) and rejects another (Sethe). But when it comes together, the unity the community shows in saving Sethe from *Beloved* is quite a different story than the one of the nuclear family. In fact, Paul D as the potential “head” of a nuclear family, fails to oust the ghost, while the community succeeds. One way to understand how important the community body is in *Beloved* is to consider the community in terms of the Western ideal of the patriarchal, hierarchal nuclear family.

bell hooks notes, “Much of the talk about ‘family values’ in our society highlights the nuclear family, one that is made up of mother, father, and preferably one or two children. In the United States this unit is presented as the primary and preferable organization for the parenting of children, one that will ensure everyone’s optimal being” (hooks 130). This ideal is also quite phallogocentric, and as such, incapable of representing any kind of ideal for entire generations of people who are unable to track their families, let alone create a nuclear unit. hooks stresses the phallogocentrism in all of this:

Capitalism and patriarchy together, as structures of dominion, have worked overtime to undermine and destroy [a] larger unit of extended kin...By encouraging the segregation of nuclear families from the extended family, women were forced to become more dependent on an individual man, and children more dependent on an individual woman. It is this dependency that became, and is, the breeding ground for abuses of power. (hooks 130).

Indeed, if Western (slave-owning) society believed in this nuclear kind of patriarchal hierarchy, then abuse of power ultimately lending itself to the ownership of others is not a stretch. And if those same people in power sever ties from the ones they own (their slaves), then those bodies that are “owned” are theoretically less powerful. But Morrison offers another possibility. Even if the families she writes about are fractured from their nuclear families (and this, admittedly, creates pain and loss, as one’s nuclear family is, indeed, a part of one’s community), they are forced to look to a larger source for their structure: the community body, as opposed to the family unit. Morrison shows this other possibility in both the destructive relationships she explores, especially Denver’s (at first) stunted growth as an individual as a result of being, as hooks put it, “more dependent on an individual woman,” and in the redemption the community offers in the end.

Also, in keeping with the evidence that *Beloved* offers a body for exploring the memories of ex-slaves, she, much like slavery itself, breaks up the nuclear family by pushing Paul D out of the house. Denver, who has always wanted her father to come back, who is obsessed with her “sister,” and who has been solely reliant on her mother since Baby’s death, supports this effort. Whatever family Paul D and Sethe begin to imagine they could start together, then, falls apart. As the narrator tells us, “They were a

family somehow and he was not the head of it” (Morrison 155). This will never be a “typical” nuclear family, with a patriarchal “head” (a word also related to the body, and only a piece of it). The community ultimately must step in.

However, the importance of community is not always clear to the novel’s characters. Baby Suggs’ downfall echoes the community’s (particularly the community of women’s) judgment and jealousy of Sethe, who holds her head “a little too high”: “Sethe had the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that “somebody” son who had fathered all of her children. A blessing she was reckless enough to take for granted, lean on” (Morrison 28). The same jealousy can be seen regarding Baby and her relationship with Halle. When the community becomes angry over Baby’s abundance, the narrator tells us that Baby Suggs has been “*bought out*” of slavery “by a doting son” (Morrison 162). The community does not realize its worth; it only sees its losses, and measures itself against the supposedly “preferable organization” that hooks describes as the nuclear family unit. It cannot see that it, too, is Baby’s family, profiting from her love and her party.

And while we can see the damage done when a child is too dependent on one individual woman as mother, as in Denver and Sethe’s relationship, we can also see the community’s expectations that they will never see their children again. Right before the slave catchers come for Sethe and the children, Baby considers the children she has lost:

The last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn’t worth the trouble to try to learn features that you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own—fingers she never saw become the male

or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads when they walked. Did Patty lose her lisp? What color did Famous' skin finally take? Was that a cleft in Johnny's chin or just a dimple that would disappear soon's his jawbone changed? Four girls, and the last time she saw them there was no hair under their arms. Does Ardelia still love the burned bottom of bread? All seven were gone or dead. (Morrison 164)

The fact that this passage comes in the section before Baby's discovery of Sethe's crime is quite telling. The violence inflicted in the novel is always explained in conjunction with violence done to the ex-slave characters. When these relationships are lost and broken, the characters must form a family unit together. Immediately after Baby Suggs experiences this remembrance, we are exposed to the failure of community brought about by jealousy, which makes the reality particularly destructive, considering that community must come together to fill what has been lost.

Sethe also remembers her own mother and the relationship she barely had with her. She recalls her "Nan," the wet-nurse who took care of her while her mother worked in the field, and one of the only times she ever met her mother, who showed her a mark to identify her in case Sethe couldn't remember her face, "'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'" (Morrison 72). And Sethe does remember the mark—it is the only way she identifies her mother when she is hanged. This tearing down of the nuclear family in Beloved is historically accurate, and a clear effect of the ownership of people by other people. But it also may testify to

the strength of a community that surfaces in place of the Western ideal of the nuclear family. However, the nuclear family is a part of the community, and the sadness is palpable in the novel when Sethe discusses not knowing her mother.

Similarly, Sethe is not so surprised to find that Beloved (before she is known to be Sethe's daughter) cannot remember her mother. Sethe asks Beloved, "You disremember everything? I never knew my mother neither, but I saw her a couple of times. Did you never see yours? What kind of whites was they? You don't remember none?" (Morrison 140). It is unusual, but not unimaginable, that a girl in the system of slavery would "disremember" (or purposefully not remember) her family and the people who "owned" her.

In spite of the novel's deconstruction of marriage and nuclear family, it ends on a redemptive note, especially in the case of Sethe and Paul D's relationship. While rocky throughout the novel, the two finally realize how much they need (and want) one another in the end. However, it is significant to note that this is only possible after the community heals by casting away Beloved. When Sethe is finally accepted back into the community, Paul D and Sethe can find one another. But the novel will not endorse the nuclear family unit as the answer to the characters' problems until the community is whole again.

This occurs not only because of Sethe's crime, but even before that, through the jealousy of Baby Suggs and her party. The day after the party, while the community "swallow[s] baking soda, the morning after, to calm the stomach violence caused by the bounty," and whisper[s] to each other in the yards about fat rats, doom, and uncalled for pride, while the slave catchers make their way to 124, the community's "scent of disapproval lay heavy in the air" (Morrison 162). Baby's body comes into play because

she can “smell” trouble coming. She “smelled it again... Nothing seemed amiss—yet the smell of disapproval was sharp” (Morrison 162). It is vital to note here that the community’s smell is somehow stronger than the smell of the slave catchers. It overwhelms Baby Suggs so that her senses are too skewed to foretell the danger she might have otherwise seen coming:

She was accustomed to the knowledge that nobody prayed for her—but this free-floating repulsion was new. It wasn’t whitefolks—that much she could tell—so it must be colored ones. And then she knew. Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess... Perhaps they were right. Suddenly, behind the disapproving odor, way way back behind it, she smelled another thing. Something dark and coming. Something she couldn’t get at because the other odor hid it. (Morrison 163)

And then, before Baby knows what it happening, she finds Sethe with Beloved’s throat cut in the barn, and saves the other three children that Sethe has tried to kill. The community does not call the slave catchers or directly play a role in what happens. But their jealousy, their inability to share in abundance, not only causes a trauma, is in itself a trauma. Many things may have broken Baby down to the point that all she wants to do is think of colors in the years before she dies: Sethe’s act, her own doubt about her beliefs, the baby ghost. But this communal disapproval of her generosity and love is too much for her to bear. All Baby Suggs has left to give is her heart, but when the community disapproves of her, wondering why Baby is always “Giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone,” the community has

done exactly the opposite of what Baby has “called” them to do: they have cut out their own heart, which is what she is (Morrison 161). They have hated a part of themselves, a part of their community body. And, in doing so, they have fractured the community and destroyed a part of it. They have broken off into hooks’ nuclear families, falling for the phallogocentric, patriarchal, hierarchal system that encourages jealousy and competition, not sharing, giving, loving. And this is perhaps the most poisonous aspect in the entire novel.

However, thankfully, the community is redeemed. Beloved can be seen as one of the more optimistic novels in Morrison’s oeuvre: Paul D and Sethe’s story ends on a good note, and a divided community comes together to save one of its own and conquer evil:

Some brought what they could and what they believed would work. Stuffed in apron pockets, strung around their necks, lying in the space between their breasts. Others brought Christian faith—as shield and sword. Most brought a little of both. They had no idea what they would do once they got there. They just started out, walked down Bluestone Road and came together at the agreed upon time... thirty women made up that company and walked slowly, slowly toward 124... When they caught up with each other, all thirty, the first thing they saw was not Denver sitting on the steps, but themselves... there they were, young and happy, playing in Baby Suggs’ yard, not feeling the envy that surfaced the next day. (Morrison 303-04)

It is important to note that the women “saw themselves”—not only as youngsters playing in Baby Suggs’ yard, but also begin to see what they had wanted to forget about

themselves so many years ago that allowed them to condemn Sethe: that, faced with the everyday evils of slavery and its systems, they had done similar things that they did not want to “remember.” Beloved, the embodiment of these memories, surfaces them when the women come to fight her. Ella, who has condemned Sethe all these years, begins to think:

Was it true the dead daughter had come back? Or a pretend? Was it whipping Sethe? Ella had been beat every way but down. She remembered the bottom teeth she had lost to a brake and the scars from the belt were thick as rope around her waist. She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by the ‘lowest yet.’ It lived five days never making a sound. The idea of that pup coming back to whip her too set her jaw working, and then Ella hollered. (Morrison 305)

We see that all of the women have done things that they would rather “disremember,” and much of the violence that they do, like Sethe’s and Ella’s, is connected to violence done to them. We see that time has shaped the women, perhaps allowed them to admit their own truths and pasts, and ultimately the community is able to do what they should have done in the first place: march up Bluestone Road to 124 and stop Sethe from having to kill someone. It is in this moment, when they stop Sethe from killing Edward Bodwin, come to pick up Denver for work, that Beloved disappears. They have righted their wrongs together, and have saved Sethe from a terrible fate. When they cause Beloved to disappear, they destroy the slave memories that Beloved represents: “Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn’t like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present” (Morrison 302).

We see this new community at the very end of the novel, after Paul D and Sethe come together and Sethe is allowed a new beginning. The language, always focused on Sethe or Paul D or Denver or Beloved throughout the novel, becomes a collective “they.” And the “they” comes to include the individuals who have, up until this point, told the story:

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

Remembering seemed unwise. (Morrison 323-4)

The collective “they” is, in itself, a healing. The forgetting is “wise” perhaps, but the language Morrison chooses here of a plural reality points to community overcoming struggle. And now, the family of 124 is a part of that plural reality, allowed to forget: not to repress or hypocritically judge others, and not to be haunted by the past either.

“Baby Suggs, holy”:

The Spiritual Body

Perhaps more entrenched in Beloved than even the community body is the idea of the body as spirit. This seems contradictory, but, in fact, it is one of the oldest spiritual traditions we have. But much like “white ink,” nonmasculine language, and the communal decentralization of the nuclear family, this kind of spirituality has largely been

ignored in the major monotheistic patriarchal religions, including Christianity, in which slaves were indoctrinated during slavery. Morrison, however, does not present this kind of transcendent spirituality. Again, she offers us a corporeal alternative.

The primary character who represents this spiritual ideal is Baby Suggs, described repetitively as “Baby Suggs, holy.” Baby Suggs becomes holy because her body is worn out. She “decided that, because slave life had ‘busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue,’ she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart—which she put to work at once,” becoming an “unchurched preacher” (Morrison 102). This word “unchurched”—another word that Morrison creates as part of her language—is significant not only because it denotes that Baby is not ordained or conventional, but also because she is not a part of the patriarchal, hierarchical Church. She rejects these constructions. When Baby first lands in Ohio as a free woman, she inquires about churches, as she has not been to one in over a decade. When Sister Bodwin suggests she go see Reverend Pike, who will “reacquaint” Baby with the Lord, Baby replies, “I won’t need him for that. I can make my own acquaintance” (Morrison 173). A rejection of the patriarchal representative of the Church becomes an assertion of herself as “unchurched,” outside of the system.

Earlier in the novel, in Chapter 9, Baby gives a hugely corporeal “calling” to the people of the town. Stamp Paid explains this term “call”: “she didn’t deliver sermons or preach—insisting she was too ignorant for that—she *called* and the hearing heard” (Morrison 208). In her speech, she repeats the word “flesh,” imploring her congregation to “Love it. Love it hard” (Morrison 103). Like a relaxing meditation, Baby begs her audience body part by body part to love themselves:

No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it. This is the flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms, I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them... More than your life-giving womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize. (Morrison 104)

This speech, placed in a less action-oriented, less emotional section of the novel, is perhaps the heart of Beloved itself. We must consider at Baby Suggs' rejection of the patriarchal, hierarchical Church. In her memoir, The Dance of the Dissident Daughter, author and essayist Sue Monk Kidd explains the body as spiritual vessel. She asserts:

The feminine carries an old and deeply entwined connection with nature, body, and earth. Women's experience has been largely invested in these things as we go through menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing. We've also traditionally been the ones involved in earthly matters of caring for children, cleaning up bodily excrements, and nursing the sick and dying... A Divine Feminine symbol renders obsolete the old idea that these things are outside the realm of divinity. It begins to shift thousands of years of dualistic thinking, setting up a new mandate for the divinity of the earth and the holiness of the body. (Kidd 160)

So Kidd, much like Cixous, is theorizing that the patriarchal way of doing things needs an alternative. Although she does use the phrase "Feminine Divine," she stresses a need to rid ourselves of dualistic thinking. This is a bit confusing at first, but when we see

Baby's bodily imagery used in tandem with Kidd's "Feminine Divine," we see that she is able to cross gender lines, invoking the womb and "life-giving private parts" (the penis) so that everyone is included. Thus, the Feminine Divine is simply an alternative to the patriarchy.

But why does the patriarchy need an alternative? Why can we not honor bodies through the patriarchy as well? One might be reminded of passages in the Bible where women are said to be unclean during menstruation, or of the stories of the Lives of the Saints, where bodily needs, even for food, are fought off like demons. Again, Kidd provides some clarity here:

Patriarchy has majored in divine transcendence, which means separateness from the material universe—being above, beyond, or apart from it. Divine immanence, on the other hand, is divinity here and now, inherent in the material stuff of life... Patriarchy's emphasis on transcendence grew out of a flight from death. It sought to transcend death by transcending the body and nature, which inevitably die and decay. (Kidd 160)

This new phrase, "divine immanence," is maybe more helpful and less dualistic (feminine versus masculine) than the "Feminine Divine."

Perhaps Sue Monk Kidd, as a memoirist, is a less scholarly source than one might normally point to, but if we are following Cixous' call to write our stories, what better source than a memoir? And, also we see these thoughts echoed in scholarly texts (though not nearly so eloquently). Feminist theologian Carol P. Christ writes that the Feminine Divine is: "reinforced by a deep and unquestioned assumption that divinity represents rationality, order, and transcendence, as opposed to the alleged irrationality and chaos of

the finite, changeable world of nature and body. The contrast between rationality and irrationality, order and chaos, transcendence and immanence, is genderized as a contrast between male and female” (Christ 78-9). Here, again, we see a parallel to Cixous’ countering so-called “male” orderly, rational phallogocentrism. But if we take this one step further, we can apply it to spirituality. Then we can make space. We can ask questions, such as, why does the spiritual have to exclude the body and the material? Why must we deny the body and look to an abstract heaven for our spiritual answers? Why is god thought to be male? Why is there only one? What kind of patriarchy/hierarchy does this build in our society? *Who is left out?* Just like Cixous carves a place out for all marginalizations—including the male body—Carol Christ also denounces this false binary of male/female. And while we visit the issue of the Feminine Divine, just as Cixous visits the issue of women writing, we make space for other possibilities—whether “feminine,” “female,” or some other “Other.”

We notice this word “immanence” in both Kidd’s and Christ’s writing. Feminist writer Penelope Ingram further explains what feminist spiritualists vocalize:

The belief that as the Judeo-Christian God is figured as male only men experience themselves as divine; the understanding that a female divine would counter a religion and culture based on sacrifice and be representative of a woman's supposed relation to the earth and cycles of natural fertility; the belief that relations between women are effaced, hence the use of models from ancient and/or mythological history to provide examples of mother-daughter relations; the spiritualization of the sexual and not merely maternal body; and the refiguring of God as immanent. (Ingram 48).

Immanence, then, is the answer to transcendence, and it defines this type of bodily awareness and self-love that Baby Suggs describes. So, if our objective is to follow the patriarchal, hierarchical structure of monotheistic religion in order to deny our bodies (through sex shaming, chastity, and the sacrifice of Jesus' body on the cross) so that we may transcend this life to go on to an afterlife—"Heaven"—then, we deny the body, and, according to Baby Suggs, we deny ourselves. However, loving our "flesh," even our sexual organs, is holy. Here, loving Jesus or God is not the answer. Loving your flesh is the answer. Heaven is not the prize. "This is the prize."

Beloved's lesson, then, could be Sethe's tragic flaw: she does not love herself. She does not love her body. She does not own her body; someone else always has. When Paul D comes in to her house in the beginning of the novel and takes her breasts in her hands, the narrator describes Sethe's reaction: "What she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands" (Beloved 21). She has never truly owned, truly loved her own breasts, as Baby Suggs begged her congregation to do. Sethe's breasts have been her "responsibility": when she speaks of being raped, she focuses on one thing: "After I left you, those boys came in and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it" (Morrison 19). Her concern, however, is not for her the assault done to her own body, but rather for the assault done to her baby, indirectly: "All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl" (Morrison 19). So, through the story of the stolen milk and the relief brought by Paul D's act of holding her breasts, we can see that Sethe does not love herself, her body, the way that Baby Suggs' defining sermon would teach her to. And because she loved her baby more than herself, because she could not love her own body, she kills her baby out of what Paul D calls a

love that is “too thick” (Morrison 193.) So thick, in fact, that she creates a hatred as big as her love. “For a baby, she throws a powerful spell,” Denver notes. “No more powerful than the way I loved her,” Sethe responds, and then we are taken away again to more memories of abuse against Sethe’s body as she remembers the sex act she performs in order “buy” those seven letters on Beloved’s gravestone (Morrison 5). And she reacts in much the same way to this as she does to the beating; she regrets not asking for more time so she could get more letters. More self-hatred. When Sethe finishes telling Paul D of her beating, she says, “Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still” (Morrison 20). The tree grows there still, the baby continues to torture the house, then comes in bodily form to torture the family, Denver continues to be imprisoned, and Paul D cannot join the family. I assert that this is all because Sethe has not learned to love her body, to love herself. She has not learned that “this is the prize,” which is why at the end of the book, when Sethe tells Paul D, “She was my best thing”—about her daughter leaving her—Paul D replies, “You your best thing, Sethe. You are,” which Sethe finally seems to hear, because she replies, “Me? Me?” and then Beloved is allowed to fade from her at the end (Morrison 321-22). But what, we might need to ask, would have happened if Sethe did not have this dysfunction? What if she had not killed her baby, and had allowed herself and her children to be taken back into slavery? Morrison’s narrator offers an unexpected answer: this was not solely Sethe’s responsibility. It was also the community’s responsibility. And they too failed, because they too began to lose their way and began to hate and fear a part of itself.

In all, when we read Beloved, we cannot help but be stricken by the corporeality of the novel. And if we pursue this more, we must explore the body as theory in

literature. When we explore the body in this way, we are forced to look at why it is used, and when we ask this question, it is likely we might run into Hélène Cixous' work concerning *écriture féminine*. The work of writing the body is included in this idea, but *écriture féminine* is not exclusively about the body. In fact, it leads us to see other ways in which the traditional phallogocentric writing convention can be challenged: through writing the body, but also through the creation of new forms of writing that challenge conventional methods in terms of linearity, vocabulary, plot structure, repetition, and time. When these come together, we begin to walk an entirely new path that can open up access to stories of otherwise marginalized people—women and people of other ethnicities and cultures.

But the stories do not end with Cixous' ideas. Over the years, writers, including and especially Morrison, have extended these theories into other areas, such as community as an alternative to the hierarchical, patriarchal family structure, and even a challenge to transcendent, male-centric, body-denying religions and spiritualities. Morrison succeeds in all of these areas in *Beloved*. The character Beloved is a conflation of many of these storytelling techniques. She is magical realism, so we must suspend reason in order to follow the novel. Her story is nonlinear—we learn of her as both a past and a present character at the same time throughout the novel. She is a ghost of something more than Sethe's daughter; she is a ghost of the memories of slavery, haunting a community that is trying to move beyond its "rememories." With her body, she symbolizes consumption to the point of destruction—not just of food, but of her mother and the family. But she is ultimately quieted by the community.

The community in the novel plays a central role in both Sethe's major crime and her redemption. And this is purposeful: Morrison wants us to see another way for people to engage in the idea of family, eschewing conventional structures. Connected to this idea is the character of Baby Suggs, whose "unchurched" "callings" seek to unite the community through self-love. And so, we come back around to the body, where we began. Baby Suggs implores us to love our bodies—our physical bodies, as well as our community bodies. And this is spiritual. It is not transcendental; it does not speak of the soul or heaven. It is not concerned with anything but the here and now, the material, the physical. And love. And the combination of love and the body (whether individual or communal) is the redemption the novel offers, all while bucking the conventionalities of phallogocentric storytelling.

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