

**'Can't nothing heal without pain':
healing in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.**

by
Belinda du Plooy

SUMMARY:

Toni Morrison reinterprets and reconstitutes American history by placing the lives, stories and experiences of African Americans in a position of centrality, while relegating white American history and cultural traditions to the margins of her narratives. She rewrites American history from an alternative – African American woman's – perspective, and subverts the accepted racist and patriarchally inspired 'truths' about life, love and women's experiences through her sympathetic depiction of murderous mother love and complex female relationships in *Beloved*. She writes about oppression, pain and suffering, and of the need for the acknowledgement and alleviation of the various forms of oppression that scar human existence. Morrison's engagement with healing in *Beloved* forms the central focus of this short dissertation. The novel is analysed in relation to Mary Douglas's 'Two Bodies' theory, John Caputo's ideas on progressive Foucaultian hermeneutics and healing gestures, and Julia Martin's thoughts on alternative healing practices based on non-dualism and interconnectedness. Within this interdisciplinary context, *Beloved* is read as a 'small start' to 'creative engagement' with alternative healing practices (Martin, 1996:104).

KEY TERMS:

Healing; American chattel slavery; Historical embodiment; Healing practices; Maternal infanticide; Non-dualism; Foucaultian hermeneutics; Two Bodies; Mary Douglas; John Caputo; Michel Foucault; Toni Morrison; *Beloved*

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by

BELINDA DU PLOOY

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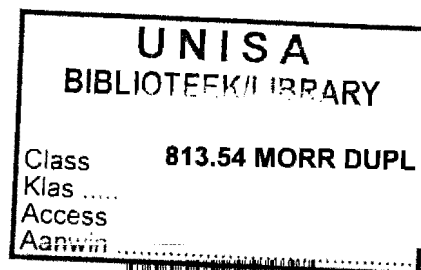
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- Belinda du Plooy

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Introduction

What Toni Morrison has done with her literature is that she has made us look up and see ourselves. She has authenticated us, and she has also said to America, in a sense, 'Do you know what you did? But, in spite of what you did, here we is. We exist. Look at us.'

- Sonia Sanchez
from 'Ghosts in the House',
The New Yorker
by Hilton Als
(2003:70)

Beloved is a political novel. Historically set in America during the height of the slave system and post-abolition reconstruction, it is political with regard to race as well as gender, since it actively interrogates and subverts the oppressive socio-economic and socio-cultural traditions of slavery and patriarchy. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Morrison hypothesises American racial dynamics and their effect on American literature as a repression of the Africanist other by dominant white socio-cultural systems of hegemonic control. In *Beloved*, as in all her other novels, Morrison reinterprets and reconstitutes American history by placing the lives, stories and experiences of African Americans in a position of centrality, while relegating white American history and cultural traditions to the margins of her narrative. Since the system of American chattel slavery was expressly intended to destroy all manner of intimacy and bonding between slaves – Atwood (1987:1) calls it 'one of the most vicious anti-family institutions human beings have ever devised' – Morrison's depiction of intimate personal relations between the characters in *Beloved* reclaims what slavery denied African Americans:

... the African imported to North America was divested as much as possible of his or her culture. The newly minted slave was relegated to a condition that the historian Orlando Patterson has termed 'social death'.
... . . . the system of chattel slavery was designed to prevent Africans and their descendants from building a new identity except in accordance with the dictates of their oppressors. Instead of an individual, slavery devised what Patterson calls 'a social nonperson', a being that by legal definition could have no family, no personal honor, no community, no past, and no future. The intention of slavery was to create in the slave a sense of complete alienation from all human ties except those that bound him or her in absolute dependence to the master's will. (Gates Jr and McKay, 1997:130)

Under the patriarchal system that historically controlled the treatment and representation of women, literary and other depictions *by* women of intimate personal relations *between* women – much less black women – were functionally non-existent.

In spite of this masculinist and racist tradition, *Beloved* is a novel populated nearly exclusively by African American women. It is a story of broken and disconnected female relationships, of reconstituted female relationships, of maternal relationships, and of old and newfound relationships of sisterhood. Morrison's depiction of intimate personal relations between female characters reclaims what had historically been denied African American women. *Beloved* rewrites American history from an alternative – African American woman's – perspective, and subverts the accepted racist and patriarchally inspired 'truths' about life, love and women's experiences through its sympathetic depiction of murderous mother love and complex female relationships. Morrison's oeuvre is a celebration of the unacknowledged history and resilience of African American women:

The [] depth of degradation [], ... to be socially manipulated [and] physically raped [] has had a lasting impact on the real lives and literary images of black American women. That black women survived and flourished under these conditions is surely a testament to the human spirit, but that is precisely the point: Black women, in the midst of both racism and sexism, did survive, and their ability to do so was the glue that bound together black communities both during and after slavery. (Bjork, 1992:18)

Beloved contributes, as do all Morrison's other texts, to the project of postcolonial excavation and reconstruction of marginalized identities and histories. She articulates the revolutionary and counter-ideological spirit of the second half of the twentieth century in her writing, for her writing is against the grain. She writes in opposition to the centre and the tradition of established canonicity; she inhabits the periphery and writes of the lives and experiences of the marginalized. She writes as a woman against the traditionally male canon, and as an African American against the traditionally white canon, thereby reclaiming the long unacknowledged and unrecognized history of Africans and their descendants in America.

In light of her commitment to interrogating and illuminating that which had been suppressed, denied and ignored for centuries, it is not surprising that Toni Morrison's work is often received amid controversy. In 1987 she was shortlisted for America's National Book Award. She did not win, and in response to this, 48 prominent African American writers and critics – among them Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara Christian, Henry Louis Gates Jr, Paule Marshall, Nellie McKay and Alice Walker – published a statement in the *New York Times Book Review* (1988:36) in defence of Morrison, her art and the political and socio-cultural

significance of her work. They chose to lead their statement with the Biblical quotation that Morrison herself uses as an epigraph in *Beloved*:

I will call them my people,
which were not my people;
and her beloved,
which was not beloved.
Romans 9:25
(1988:36)

This they follow up with an introductory paragraph that links the marginality of the slave with the marginality experienced by black artists. They say:

With this passage, Toni Morrison leads her readers into *Beloved*, a universe of complicated, sweetly, desiring, fierce and deeply seductive human beings hitherto subsumed by, hitherto stifled by, that impenetrable nobody-noun: 'the slave'.

That same scripture might well stand as the cradling text or tight-lipped summary of the chaotic, chimeral and frightening task America imposes upon any one of us chosen to be or choosing to become a black artist in this freedom land.

Throughout, [Morrison] has persisted in the task of calling 'her beloved / which was not beloved'. She has insisted on the subjects of her sorrowing concern: 'my people / which were not my people' – black children and women and men variously not themselves, variously not yet free from an inexplicable, mad, impinging hatred that would throttle or derange all village/family/sexual love. And devoutly, she has conjured up alternatives to such a destiny: political and skin-close means to a transcendent self-respect. . . . [She] has never turned away the searching eye, the listening ear attuned to horror or to histories providing for our faith. And freely [she has] given to us every word that [she has] found important to the forward movement of our literature, our life. (1988:36)

Morrison went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 – for *Beloved* – and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. The awarding of the Nobel Prize to Morrison was again steeped in controversy because of accusations of 'political correctness', 'opportunism' and 'populism' (*Guardian Unlimited*, 1993) levelled against the Nobel Prize Committee for awarding, for the third time, this prestigious prize to a writer who writes about racial oppression (the two previous recipients were West Indian Derek Walcott and South African Nadine Gordimer). Morrison does indeed write about oppression – racial, sexual and otherwise – and of the need for the acknowledgement and alleviation of the various forms of oppression that scar human existence. She believes that '[her] novels ought to give nourishment' (Leclair in Gates Jr and Appiah, 1993:370). This 'nourishment' and alleviation of the effects of oppression – calling beloved those that were not beloved and facilitating a 'transcendent self-respect' (Allen; Angelou; Baker et al, 1988:36) – is synonymous with the concept 'healing'.

Julia Martin (1996:117) defines this kind of holistic healing of the human spirit and soul as a process in need of ‘practice[s] [that are] designed to go beyond all othering; beyond fear, hatred and desire ...’.

Morrison dissects and offers to her readers the pain and suffering of the historical and ideological others of western imagination: women, children and Africans. As a ‘neoslave narrative’ (Kella, 2000:115) *Beloved*’s reconstitution and representation of the painful history of African American people speak not of hegemonic master narratives but of smaller, personal stories and individual histories that reflect microscopically the suffering, survival and healing of African American individuals and communities. In politicizing the personal and individual, Morrison sheds light on the deeply human experience of suffering, and the larger, global need for healing. She sees herself as writing for ‘her people’, yet simultaneously also being in contact with ‘all sorts of people’:

I write what I have recently begun to call village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe. Peasant literature for *my* people, which is necessary and legitimate but which also allows me to get in touch with all sorts of people. (Leclair in Gates Jr & Appiah, 1993:370)

Morrison’s novels build on themes that speak of racially and culturally specific experiences, yet it is in its specificity that her work transcends to empathetically touch on the greater human themes of community, history, memory, ‘self-love and self-worth’ (Bjork, 1992:29), love of others and surviving in a divided world. *Beloved* is about healing within and between groups and between individuals, and most importantly, it is about healing the individual human spirit.

The pain and suffering of women form the specific context within which Morrison locates her narratives. *Beloved* is, however, not merely a representation of female pain and suffering, it is also a ‘healing ritual’ (Christian, 1993), a ‘fixing ceremony’ (Morrison, 1988:86) and a ‘creative engagement’ with healing practices (Martin, 1996:104). Thus this novel functions as a vehicle by means of which Morrison engages with and, in the final instance, transcends – through the character of Denver - the pain and suffering of slavery, sexual and gender-based abuse. The extract from the novel that I chose as the title of this mini-dissertation (taken from an exchange between Sethe and Amy Denver) functions as an anchor for the suffering that Morrison portrays in *Beloved* and is symbolic of the potential for reconciliation and healing that transcends the otherwise tragic experiences of these characters. By means of Sethe and Amy’s encounter - and the child, Denver, that is born during this

encounter - Morrison conveys hope for the healing of individual and collective pain that African Americans experienced as a result of slavery.

Amy and Sethe identifies with one another through their recognition of and empathy for each other's suffering. Their recognition that pain is inevitable and universal facilitates their reaching out to one another and the dissolution of the boundaries – of race and class - that divide them. In Chapter Three I read Sethe's encounter with Amy Denver as a means by which Morrison introduces empathy and compassion as 'healing gestures' (Martin, 1996:104) into a novel of suffering, pain and abuse. Thus Sethe and Amy's relationship – and the character Denver, who is the product of their relationship – is employed as a counterbalance for, and redemption of, the suffering and pain experienced by the women who populate the novel.

It is on Morrison's writing of healing in this novel that I focus my attention in the pages that follow. I draw on the work of Mary Douglas (1970), Barbara Christian (1993, 1997), Michel Foucault (1965), John Caputo (1993) and Julia Martin (1996) in my reading and analysis of the text. I follow a methodology of close reading and analysis of the novel, aided by and focused on the theories of the critics and theorists mentioned above. I use three theories from different fields of knowledge – anthropology, hermeneutics and Buddhism – as primary resources because it places my reading of Morrison's novel in an integrated and inter-disciplinary context. Such an inter-disciplinary reading highlights the theoretical and practical significance and necessity of healing – of self, society and environment – as a point of focus in modern traditions of thinking. I hope that this reading will emphasise the similarities and correspondences between disciplines and theories and that it will challenge the artificial boundaries of traditional academic approaches.

There exists a vast body of critical and analytical texts on the work of Toni Morrison. This is especially true of *Beloved*, arguably the novel for which she is best known and which brought her the greatest accolades. Having access to such a body of work as research material is a great advantage when one is engaged in an academic project such as the writing of a dissertation, but it can also prove to be a challenge and even an obstacle. In the case of a dissertation of prescribed length and limited scope, the danger of repetition and duplication is great.

Negotiating the existent mass of publications on the critical discourse surrounding Morrison's work, and *Beloved* specifically, proved to be one of the greatest challenges in my writing of this dissertation. It is, of course, impossible to

engage productively with the vast amount and variety of critical approaches and analyses. Aiming to avoid unnecessary repetition of familiar theories and propositions, I strove to read this novel in the context of an interdisciplinary engagement with theories and fields of knowledge that have not often - if at all - been applied to *Beloved*. I further attempted to scrupulously maintain my focus on my chosen topic, namely Morrison's engagement with healing in *Beloved*, rather than succumb to a disjointed and/or diffusive reading of the novel. I chose Mary Douglas – an anthropologist, John Caputo – whose interest lies in Foucaultian theory and religion, and Julia Martin – who is concerned with Buddhist philosophy and environmentalism, as the theoretical cornerstones of my dissertation because of their individual yet corresponding interests in healing. In the beginning of Chapter Three I expand on these correspondences.

Since Douglas, Caputo and Martin's ideas on healing provide a wealth of applications to Morrison's work in general and *Beloved* in particular, and because the prescribed length of this dissertation inhibits an approach that is more inclusive and diffuse, I have limited my theoretical engagement to only that which, in my opinion, informs and relates directly to an application of their ideas to the novel. Thus I refrain from engagement with, among other things, the autobiographical origins of *Beloved* - which is rooted in the real-life history of a slave woman called Margaret Garner and Morrison's editorial work on *The Black Book* (1974) – and the significance of her appropriation by both pro-slavery and abolitionist forces as, respectively, 'a shameful example of African savagery' and '[a] noble and ... heroic mother' (Bouson, 2000:136). Neither do I engage with the vast potential of this novel for a reading of the crisis of African American masculinity, restricting myself to an interrogation of *Beloved* in relation to the major characters of the novel, who are female.

My necessarily restricted engagement with the subject of healing in *Beloved* is, however, informed by my broader reading and research on the author and her literary concerns. Blake (1984), McKay (1988), Harris (1991), Gates Jr and Appiah (1993), Brooks-Bousson (2000) and Peach (2000), proved a particularly informative foundation in relation to the wide variety of literary, cultural and political criticism in existence on Morrison's oeuvre and individual texts. While Holloway and Dematrakopoulos (1987) and Evans (1987) were instructive on African American spirituality and literary traditions, Bjork (1992), Kella (2000) and Morrison, in her interviews with Stepto (1976) and Davis (1988), proved valuable on the significance

of community in African American experience, while Braidotti (1994) and Lykke and Braidotti (1996) informed my thinking around feminist discourses of embodiment.

In the first chapter I concern myself with Mary Douglas's anthropological theory of dualistic and symbolic embodiment, and its application and relevance to *Beloved*. I use Douglas's theory to investigate historical embodiment in this novel, in which Morrison uses the human body to represent the individual and communal pain and suffering of African Americans. Not only are the bodies of the characters sites of physical cruelty, abuse and torture, but the symbolic African American body becomes a sign of a history of oppression. In this context of historical embodiment, the characters of Beloved and Denver are significant, especially with regard to their relation to America's history of slavery. I read *Beloved* as the embodiment of African American history, while I read Denver as the embodiment of the potential for a new and different future. Morrison uses *Beloved* metaphorically as a historically grounded symbol, in that she stands for the millions of unknown and forgotten enslaved Africans who were 'lost' under the system of slavery. *Beloved* also represents, through her own body, the communal body and body of history from which modern African Americans are disconnected and alienated because of the long-term effects of slavery (Bouson, 2000:132). Conversely, Denver – who is the only character in the novel who is born in freedom (Otten, 1993:659) and who never personally experienced the direct, physical effects of slavery – stands for the millions of current and future African Americans in whose hands are the reclamation and reconstitution of their individual and communal identities. Thus I read Denver as a symbol of 'hope for the next generation' (Bouson, 2000:161) and of the potential for personal and political reconciliation, historical transcendence and holistic healing.

I extend my reading of healing in *Beloved* in Chapter Two through focusing on John Caputo's ideas on 'healing gestures' as 'a direction that, while it was not taken by Foucault, is perhaps suggested by him' (1993:234). I investigate the applicability of Caputo's theory of progressive Foucaultian hermeneutics to *Beloved*, by reading the three major characters as symbolic representations of Caputo's three kinds of hermeneutics, of which the third – represented by Denver – is constitutive of a therapeutics of healing. I sustain my reading of Denver as Morrison's engagement with an African American future, by situating her historical and narrative role in relation to her personal development from a lonely, fearful, suspicious and needy child to an independent, self-assured, wise, wary yet optimistic young woman.

I conclude in Chapter Three with an application to this novel of Julia Martin's ideas on alternative healing practices. Writing from a theoretical basis that is grounded in Buddhist existential philosophy, Martin views the 'illness' or 'disease' (105) of human suffering and the pain of oppression and exploitation as demanding a response. She states that if a move towards 'a non-exploitive, non-dualistic, whole, healthy, compassionate world seems unattainably utopian, we can always start small ... liberating at least some space for creative engagement' (1996:104). Though *Beloved* is not written within a Buddhist framework, this novel is an engagement by Morrison with the need for a response to America's history of suffering and oppression. *Beloved* is a novel about healing, transcendence of suffering and coming to terms with a painful past in order to negotiate a functional, integrated and productive future. In this context I read *Beloved* as a 'small start' to 'creative engagement' with alternative healing practices (Martin, 1996:104).

Chapter One

**Reading historical embodiment in *Beloved*:
a literary application of Mary Douglas's 'Two Bodies' theory.**

Most symbolic behaviour must work through the human body.
- Mary Douglas
Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology
(1970:vii)

Here, ... in this place, we flesh Love it. Love it hard.
- Toni Morrison
Beloved
(1988:88)

In *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (1970), anthropologist Mary Douglas conceptualizes embodiment in relation to what she calls the 'Two Bodies'. Her basic argument is that there are two bodies present in any situation – namely the physical body and the social body – and that there exists a symbolic relationship between these two. Douglas's theory is an anthropological one, but her treatment of the dualistic and symbolic nature of embodiment can usefully be applied in a literary context. Her theory withstands the tests of time and wider application. This indeed was her original intention, as she explains in her preface:

This book is obviously not intended solely for anthropologists. I hope it will be a bridge between anthropology and other disciplines. (xvi)

When read in conjunction with *Beloved*, Douglas's theory allies itself with Morrison's representation of complex symbolic relationships between physical and social bodies. I focus my reading of *Beloved* on four specific aspects of Douglas's theory that are most applicable to the novel and its historical context, namely: the relationship between spirit and matter, the role of intimacy, the criteria of grid and group, and the characteristics of millennialism. I proceed to investigate the significance of the characters Baby Suggs and Denver in the novel, as Morrison's representation of these two and their relationship with one another is indicative of the symbolic relationship between the two bodies.

First, I look at the significance of historical embodiment in the novel. I focus specifically on the title character, Beloved, who is in the first instance the embodiment of an African American socio-cultural crisis of historical alienation and

disconnection. The novel is an attempt by Morrison to represent and engage with this crisis. In the preface to *Natural Symbols*, Douglas says that '[m]ost symbolic behaviour must work through the human body' (vii). She says

... the ideas about the human body, its potential and its weaknesses, which are found in particular social types, correspond uncannily well with ideas current in the same social types about the potential and weaknesses of society. (xiii-xiv)

Read within the context of the African American history of slavery, the weaknesses that Beloved personifies are symbolic of those she detects in African American culture and society. Beloved's lack of knowledge of her origins – what Sethe calls her 'disremembering' (118) – stands for the way in which modern African Americans have become alienated from their origins in Africa and in slavery. This is a theme that Morrison has touched on in other novels, most significantly in *Song of Solomon* (1977), which is about a young man's quest for his African origins and roots. The relationship between African Americans and their history can be said to be *the* theme of Morrison's oeuvre, since the question of personal and historical disconnection plays a significant role in all her novels (*The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998) and *Love* (2003)). Morrison refers to this sense of dislocation and alienation in a 1989 interview (Denard, 1991) and identifies it as her motivation for writing *Beloved*:

There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves; nothing that reminds us of the ones who made the journey and of those who did not make it. There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There's no 300-foot tower. There's no small bench by the road. There is not even a tree scored, an initial that I can visit or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence or, better still, on the banks of the Mississippi. And because such a place doesn't exist (that I know of), the book had to.

Bouson (2000:132) points out that in *Beloved* Morrison remembers 'the horror and humiliation of slavery' and accepts responsibility for the 'unburied, or at least unceremoniously buried' slaves of American history. He sees Morrison's 'telling [of] the story of the forgotten slaves' (2000:132) as a reclamation of authority and power over African American cultural memory. It is in this spirit of historically constitutive remembering that African American literary critic, Barbara Christian (1993), calls *Beloved* 'not just a novel, but a prayer, a healing ritual for our country's holocaust of

slavery'. She describes the socio-cultural and existential function of *Beloved* as follows:

... this is a novel about that unspeakable event, the only event in the brutal history of African Americans about which Morrison has stated there is barely a whisper – that is, the Middle Passage That event is the dividing line between being African and being African American. It is the four hundred year holocaust that wrenched tens of millions of Africans from their Mother, their biological mothers as well as their Motherland, in a disorganized and unimaginably monstrous fashion. Yet for reasons having much to do with the inability on the part of America to acknowledge that it is capable of having generated such a holocaust, as well as with the horror that such a memory calls up for African Americans themselves, the Middle Passage has practically disappeared from American cultural memory. What did, what does that wrenching mean, not only then, but now? That is the question quivering throughout this novel. (1997:364)

Morrison's application of historical embodiment can seem alien to readers who are used to western cosmological and literary traditions. However, Christian (1997) shows that Morrison's depiction of a dead baby's spirit, embodied as an infantile young woman and representative of dead African ancestors, is not only plausible but also 'natural' when the novel is read in the context of African cosmology:

... *Beloved* has much to do with the fact that practices derived from African religions, specifically in relation to ancestor worship, still persist in the culture from which I come. Why these practices are not often known about by those outside the culture, or even used as a basis of analysis by those from within the culture, might have to do with a pervasive belief within American cultural institutions that Africa does not have a philosophical tradition. It might also have to do with Western academics' denigration of African ancestor worship as superstition.

...
I was struck by Morrison's representation of the character Beloved as an embodied spirit, a spirit that presents itself as a body. for African Americans, at least until the recent past, the experience of spirits communicating with the living was a natural one rather than a weird, unnatural event. Hence her representation of the spirit character as a body. Moreover, in my tradition, ancestral spirits must be nurtured and fed, or they will be angry or, at the least, sad. If ancestors are consistently not fed or have not resolved a major conflict, especially the manner of their death, they are tormented and may return to the realm we characterize as that of the living, sometimes in the form of an apparently newborn baby. (366)

There is a symbolic relationship between the physical body of the young woman who calls herself Beloved and the social significance of the baby ghost that haunts Sethe's house. The baby ghost is the spirit of a person who was murdered, not *by* the institution of slavery – as so many others were – but *because* of it. The embodiment of the ghost-become-human is thus a symbolic representation of the past-become-present and of the dead coming back to life. Even at skin-level, there is a

symbolic relationship between the physical body of Beloved and the collective social body of the dead African slaves for whom she stands. This relationship is an ironically reversed one for Beloved's perfect body – 'soft and new' (52), like that of a baby – stands for the abused and mutilated bodies of millions of slaves who died during the Middle Passage and on American soil. Christian (1993) lends a practical immediacy to Morrison's linking of Beloved's physical infantile perfection with the social body of the dead enslaved African ancestors:

... the ancestral spirits in my Caribbean context who come back to visit us eat and drink and are carnal. Yet they differ from the living in that while they do appear as bodies, their eyes and skin, like Beloved's, are those of newborn babes.

The small scars on Beloved's forehead and throat – the only blemishes on an otherwise perfect body – are indicative of her relationship with the dead slaves of African American history. These scars are physical signs of Sethe's killing of her baby girl, an act intended to keep her children safe from slavery (Maxwell, 2000:247 & 257). Through reverse symbolism the scars on Beloved's body – intended to keep her *from* slavery – become symbolic of the deaths of millions of Africans *under* slavery. It is in this context that Morrison's epigraph to *Beloved* gains its significance: 'Sixty Million and more'. Beloved's scars are symbolic of the break in continuity between the generations that call themselves African Americans and their ancestors, their history, their origins and their African roots. Through the identification of Beloved with distant social relations, Morrison succeeds in bringing the distant close, for Beloved is not only Sethe's daughter and Denver's sister, she stands for every daughter and sister – and relation of every kind – that was lost because of slavery. Beloved is symbolic of social relationships that have ceased to exist and of a fractured community in need of healing and reconstruction. She 'historicizes the personal [and] in so doing, [] emphasizes the role of personal and communal agency in building a 'home' for African American community' (Kella, 2000:14). Morrison shows, says Bjork (1992),

that identity and place are found in the community and in the communal experience, and not in the transcendence of society or in the search for a single, private self. Each communal variation, the community, the clan, the ancestor, is an intrinsic part of the self, and exists not merely as an altruistic concern. (ix)

I progress to the four aspects of Douglas's theory that are most applicable to this novel, and I begin with her thoughts on the spirit/matter dualism. She criticizes

Levi-Strauss' theory, which states that nature/culture is 'the last ultimate, all-inclusive pair' (xiii), and says:

For some societies the contrast of spirit with matter is more fundamental. the symbolism of the body, which gets its power from social life, governs the fundamental attitudes to spirit and matter. (xiii)

124 Bluestone Road, the house in which Sethe and her family live, is the first physical and material body that the reader encounters in the novel. The first words of the novel are in reference to the house: '124 was spiteful. Full of baby's venom. ...' (3). The house is significant for the way in which Morrison uses it to represent 'fundamental attitudes to spirit and matter' (xiii). The relationship between the spirit of Sethe's dead baby, the house on Bluestone Road and the character Beloved speaks of a cultural tradition, with its roots in African cosmology, in which the mixing of spirit and matter is possible and acceptable.

As a symbol of socio-cultural meaning, Sethe's house represents her identity and social standing: she is a free woman. She is the body that owns and not the body that is owned. The house signifies location, since it is here that Sethe finds and fixes her identity as a free woman. 124 Bluestone Road is where she goes when she flees slavery and where she is reunited with her children. It is also where she spends her first euphoric 28 days of freedom and where her body heals from the abuse slavery heaped upon it:

I did it. I got us all out. ... Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own. Decided. And it came off right like it was supposed to. We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. ... It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before. It felt good. Good and right. I was big ... and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. (162)

However, the house is also the site of Sethe's tragic act of salvation and sacrifice – the killing of her child(ren) – and through this act the house becomes a sign of dislocation. This dislocation is represented through the disembodied spirit that haunts the house and is signified by the house's number: 124. From this sequence of numbers is absent the number three, which is the number that belongs to Sethe's dead baby. If Sethe's sons, Howard and Bugler, are represented by 1 and 2 and her youngest daughter, Denver, is represented by 4, then the missing number, 3, belongs to the missing child who, as I have shown, also represents a missing people and a history much greater than her own short life.

But Sethe's third child is not really missing, for during the eighteen years between the baby's death and the supposed exorcism by Paul D, the 'venomous' (106) spirit of the baby not only inhabits but also becomes the house on Bluestone Road. In many respects *Beloved* is based on the conventions of the gothic horror genre, specifically in its manifestation as a ghost story about a haunted house. The supernatural element is, however, not presented in a 'watch-me-make-your-flesh-creep mode', but with 'magnificent practicality' (Atwood, 1987:1). The baby is embodied *in* the house because the house and the spirit are one. Throughout the novel the narrator refers to the *house* as being 'spiteful' (3), for the house and the dead baby's spirit are inseparable. Denver, who spent all her life in the company and under the roof of the spiteful and venomous spirit-house, realizes on an instinctual level – long before she identifies Beloved as her dead baby sister – that there is a deep and complex connection between the material body that is the house and the spirit that haunts it:

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. Her steps and her gaze were the cautious ones of a child approaching a nervous, idle relative ... (29)

In trying to undo or correct the separation of spirit and matter that occurred at 124 Bluestone Road as a result of the baby's murder, the spirit moves in response to its desire to manifest through a physical body – first the house and later the human body of Beloved. In the context of Douglas's theory, the separation of spirit and matter through death is significant on a level far greater than Sethe's killing her child. The haunting of Sethe's house, first by the disembodied spirit and later by Beloved, is symbolic of the 'ghost' of African American history and the spirits of the unnamed and forgotten enslaved ancestors that cry out for representation and recognition.

Douglas says 'there is a drive to achieve consonance in all the layers of experience' (vii). In *Beloved*, this drive towards consonance is apparent in Morrison's representation of progressive embodiment. First, there is the spirit's possession of the house. Then, after having been evicted by Paul D, the spirit returns, this time embodied as a young woman. The driving force that aims to reunite spirit and matter and create consonance is represented through Beloved and her need for physical closeness with Sethe, which she unambiguously communicates to Denver when she tells her: 'She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have' (76).

When she proves to be incapable of achieving what is essentially pre-natal unity with Sethe, Beloved tries to achieve it in another way, namely through sexual intercourse with Paul D. When she cannot reunite spirit and matter by reinstating the mother-child union *as the child*, she attempts to do so *as the mother*. The progression of embodiment continues to another level when Beloved seduces – and becomes pregnant by – Paul D in the cold house. She demands his participation in the reconstitution and recognizing of her identity: ‘You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name’ (117). Beloved’s individual psychosis, her narcissistic desire for pre-natal, semiotic (re)union with the mother – which Morrison represents as an insatiable appetite: ‘Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved’s eyes’ (57) – is symbolic of a greater psychosis, namely of the disconnection of African Americans. Her attempts, through progressive embodiment, to come to terms with her identity – to heal/whole herself – are symbolic of an African American drive to achieve consonance through historical reclamation, (re)naming and reconciliation.

The second aspect of Douglas’s theory that I include in my reading of *Beloved* is her understanding of ‘the field of personal relations [as] especially apt for bodily symbolism’ (vii). I include aspects of psychoanalytic theory in my discussion, especially in reference to mother-child and sibling relationships, to aid in my application of Douglas’s theory to Morrison’s text. Douglas says:

The human body is common to us all. Only our social condition varies. The symbols based on the human body are used to express different social experiences. ... [T]he field of intimate personal relations is especially apt for bodily symbolism. Take the simple series that runs from socially distant to familiar. It is expressed by a diminishing of personal distance and by a choice of speech forms and topics which starts from the most general and closes down on the particular, personal and physical. As soon as we focus on the contrast between the expression of formality and the expression of intimacy ... we can see the symbolism of the human body being set to work.
(vii)

In accordance with Douglas’s theory, the social significance of interpersonal and group relations in *Beloved* is represented in the ways in which the characters use their bodies, especially in relation to one another. Baby Suggs’ sermon is the most explicit example of the relationship between the social body and the physical body. When she calls to her informal congregation in the Clearing, she speaks not only of the healing and love of the individual physical body but also of the healing and self-love of a people, a collective, a group, a social unit that she calls ‘we’ (Bjork, 1992:29):

Here ... in this place we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. ... (88)

Intimacy is also represented in the ways in which the characters use their voices and language. It is through informal colloquial speech, and especially Beloved's infantile speech, that intimacy between characters is communicated. Beloved's child-like inarticulation represents the child in the Lacanian semiotic pre-mirror stage before the imposition and internalization of order by the 'Law of the Father'. The sections in the novel presented as stream of consciousness exchanges between Beloved, Sethe and Denver are indicative of the pre-natal and semiotic body-language relationship that exists between mother and child:

Beloved
You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me
... (216)

These sections of the text communicate to the reader that there are no body boundaries between these three characters and that Sethe has regressed to a point of pre-mirror stage narcissistic self-interest – in herself and her child(ren) – because that is where she recovers her pre-murder relationship with her baby girl(s):

Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing ... (200)

Shifting and fluid body boundaries can also be found in the sisterly relationship between Denver and Beloved. Before understanding that Beloved is her lost daughter, Sethe notices this relationship between the two girls without fully understanding its significance. She looks at them walking back from the Clearing and thinks:

... the two were alike as sisters. ... Denver and [Beloved] liked each other's company. ... They spent up or held on to their feelings in harmonious ways. What one had to give the other was pleased to take. ... [Sethe] noticed neither competition between the two nor domination by one. (99)

Denver sees her relationship with Beloved as a salvation from loneliness and alienation. Early in the novel she is angry and frustrated because 'nobody speaks to [her] ... [n]obody comes by ... [b]oys don't like [her] ... [g]irls don't either' (14), but after Beloved's arrival she revels in the fact that she finally has someone with whom she can share her experiences. Even after Beloved tells her that '[Denver] can go but [Sethe] is the one [she] needs' (76), Denver remains infatuated with Beloved, to the extent that she believes that

[n]othing was out there that this sister-girl did not provide in abundance: a racing heart, dreaminess, society, danger, beauty. (76)

The relationship between Denver and Beloved can be read as one of pre-socialization to post-socialization. Beloved represents the pre-social/unsocialized infant moving through the Freudian psychosexual stages of the oral – her constant desire for food and her tendency to put things in her mouth; – the anal – she initially soils her clothing and bedclothes like an infant; – and the genital – her seduction of Paul D. Denver is the successfully socialized individual who has internalized her society's prescriptions regarding social and body boundaries. Different relationships between the physical body and the social body are represented by these two characters: Beloved is narcissistically self-obsessed and simultaneously uninterested in social relationships beyond those that satisfy her immediate physical and emotional needs, while Denver is searching for her place in the community and for meaningful relationships with other people. Beloved is focused inward, Denver outward. Beloved increasingly becomes selfish and demanding, while Denver increasingly becomes selfless and altruistic.

But the categories of the unsocialized/socialized dualism are not distinctly separate from one another, and this interactive and interdependent relationship is communicated to the reader through what Douglas calls a 'mixing' of categories (xiii). The following exchange between Denver and Paul D after the final exorcism of Beloved is significant, as it succinctly encapsulates the fluidity and ambiguity of body and identity boundaries between Denver and Beloved:

... 'Uh, that girl. You know, Beloved?'
 'Yes?'
 'You think she sure 'nough your sister?'
 ... 'At times. At times I think she was – more.' (267)

Denver's words to Paul D are an acknowledgement that she saw many of her own repressed feelings and emotions reflected in Beloved, some of which were decidedly negative – fear, anger, selfishness, obsessiveness, narcissism – especially her 'terrifying feelings about her mother' (102) and her 'monstrous and unmanageable dreams about Sethe' (103).

Morrison's representation of fluid and shifting body boundaries in her novels confirms Douglas's understanding of body control as indicative of social control:

... bodily control is an expression of social control – abandonment of bodily control in ritual responds to the requirement of a social experience which is being expressed. (70)

The body boundaries between Sethe, *Beloved* and Denver are abandoned through their creation of intimate physical and linguistic rituals of expression. These rituals of expression carry great social significance, enabling the recovery of social relationships – bonds of family and friendship – and personal identities – mother, daughter, sister – that were denied African Americans under the system of slavery.

I move my focus to Douglas's 'concern with [] a formula for classifying relations' (viii) and its application to *Beloved*. Douglas's formula consists of

... two independently varying criteria which [she] ha[s] called grid and group. Group is obvious – the experience of a bounded social unit. Grid refers to rules which relate one person to others on an ego-centred basis.
(viii)

She again allows for flexibility and 'mixing' (xiii), as she does not present these criteria – group and grid – as rigid exclusive categories, but as potentially endless variations of more of the one and less of the other, according to the dynamic natures of different cultures and societies.

Douglas's 'group' can be read as the post-bellum African American community in which the novel is set, the 'bounded social unit' (viii) to which the inhabitants of this community belong. Morrison does not equate the concept of a 'bounded social unit' with an inflexible, static and monolithic entity. Her depiction of the dynamic and changeable nature of the Cincinnati community evades this kind of interpretation. The community's flexibility is part of the resolution of the dramatic events of the novel, as it is in their reaching out to Sethe and Denver – giving them food, finding work for Denver and mobilizing against *Beloved* – that the community, through its women, moves from a position in which Sethe and Denver are ostracized and alienated to one where they are welcomed and embraced.

Sethe and Denver's inability to relate to the group can be identified with Douglas's 'grid'. Sethe transgresses the formal and informal laws of the community. Her inability to relate to the group is the cumulative effect of several actions on her part: her attempt to kill her children, her refusal to show any outward sign of remorse and repentance, and her determination to live in the company of her dead baby's ghost (256). Sethe finds herself in a situation that Douglas describes as 'the case of group alone' (viii):

a man recognises very strong allegiance to a social group, and at the same time does not know how he relates to other members or what his expectations should be In such a case, the most fundamental assumptions about the cosmos and man's place in nature are coloured by the socially appropriate image of the human body. For if group is

strong and grid weak, the idea of a cherished bodily form vulnerable to attack from without tends to be transferred from one context to another. (viii)

The fourth aspect of Douglas's theory that I apply to *Beloved* is her identification of characteristics of millennialism and its significance to the symbolic relationship between the two bodies. Baby Suggs' sermon in the Clearing is especially significant in this context, because it functions as a link between the physical body of the individual and the social body of the community. Douglas says that all social systems are dynamic and prone to change, but even in this '... we find that dominant symbolic forms draw on bodily experience' (xii). She says there are many things that 'can go wrong with any social system', such as a 'general catastrophe' (xii). The invasion of Africa by western imperialist and colonialist forces and the subsequent system of African slave trade can be seen as such a catastrophe.

The origins of the slaves that were taken to America were rooted in a variety of different, and often conflicting, social and cultural systems, for Africa was not – and is not – one singular, monolithic 'bounded social unit' (viii). The dynamic nature of African American socio-cultural reality springs from the repeated creation of new communities and new communal and individual identities: first under slavery and again later, after its abolition and the advent of reconstruction. Morrison's text weaves through and between these historical moments, with the main narrative set in 1873 – eight years after the end of the Civil War in 1865 – but reaching back to earlier times under slavery through the use of narrative flashbacks and the characters' retelling/reliving of their memories. There is a correspondence between Morrison's representation of the African American socio-cultural and communal experience at the moment in which the novel is set and the characteristics of millennialism that Douglas identifies as indicative of the way in which societies change and adapt themselves in response to 'a general catastrophe' (xii) and the ways in which 'the dominant symbolic forms draw on bodily experience' (xii). Douglas describes these millennial tendencies as follows:

... society appears as a system which does not work. ... a person feels that his personal relations, so inexplicably unprofitable, are in the sinister grip of a social system. It follows that the body tends to serve as a symbol of evil, as a structured system contrasted with pure spirit which by nature is free and undifferentiated. The millennialist is not interested in identifying enemies and disabling them. ... [H]e believes in a utopian world in which goodness of heart can prevail without institutional devices. He does not seek ... to cherish any particular social forms. He would sweep them all away. ... [T]he millennialist goes in for frenzies;

he welcomes the letting-go experience He seeks bodily ecstasy Philosophically his bias is towards distinguishing spirit from flesh, mind from matter. But for him these terms take on a slightly different allure. The flesh does not suggest temptation to lust and all physical delights. It would more likely represent the corruption of power and organisation. For him spirit is found working freely in nature and in the spirit of the wild – not in society. (xii-xiii)

In first calling forth the different strata of social life and following this by calling on the different parts of the human body, Baby Suggs equates the two bodies with one another:

... 'Let the children come!' 'Let the grown men come,'
Finally she called the women to her. ...

'Here ... in this place, we flesh; Yonder they do not love your flesh. They don't love your eyes; No more do they love the skin on your back. And O my people they do not love your hands. And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. And O my people ... they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. And all your inside parts that they'd as soon slop for hogs The dark, dark liver ... the beat and beating heart, lungs your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts' (87-88)

Her style of preaching and the effects it has on her congregants can be described as 'frenzied', a 'letting-go experience', an instance of 'bodily ecstasy' (Douglas: xiii) and 'effervescence' (a term Douglas borrows from Durkheim (73)):

It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced, men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay around the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. (88)

The unstructured informality of her services is indicative of the millennialist desire to 'sweep away all social forms' (Douglas: xiii) and conforms to Douglas's theory that 'abandonment of bodily control in ritual responds to the requirement of a social experience which is being expressed' (70). Douglas's theory corresponds with Morrison's representation of the instability of a newly formed - and fast developing - society of runaway and freed slaves who find themselves embroiled in the process of social organization. The loss/lack of bodily control in Baby Suggs' sermon in the Clearing functions in conjunction with the 'lack of strong social articulation' in the community:

In all cases, it is the lack of strong social articulation, the slackening of group and grid which leads people to seek, in the slackening bodily control, appropriate forms of expression. This is how the fringes of society express their marginality. (Douglas: 83)

In further correspondence with Douglas's theory, Baby Suggs presents society – specifically dominant white society – as defective, for it does not love that which is different: 'Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it' (88). The hated and despised black 'flesh' (88) of which she speaks is, through the scars and signs of mutilation that it carries, a symbol of the 'corruption of power and organisation' (Douglas: xiii) that stems from oppressive social systems. Peach notes that Baby Suggs here becomes 'the outraged female ancestor, angry at the abuse of her people and feeling keenly every wrong done to them' (2000:114). Rather than lash out in violence and aggression at the abusive and oppressive forces that use the physical bodies that it despises for its own profitable purposes, Baby Suggs focuses her teaching internally and introspectively, on loving and cherishing the despised body:

'Love it. Love it hard. Love your hands! Love them. *You* got to love it, *you!* This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved.' (88)

After Sethe's attempt to kill her children, however, the physical body becomes for Baby Suggs the location of evil. But not just any body, for it is the external sign of the westerner's white skin that translates for her into the internal quality of evil. In having Baby Suggs preach of the goodness of black people and the badness of white people, Morrison subverts the traditional dualism in which white/black stands in a binary relationship to good/bad. The whiteness of the westerner's body signifies for Baby Suggs the entire social system of western slavery and its horrors:

'Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed, ... and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks.' (89)

Baby Suggs is not the only representative of millennialism in this novel. The utopian desire is very strong in Sethe, to such an extent that she attempts to kill her children to save them from slavery (Maxwell, 2000:247 & 257) and to ensure for them a better existence after death:

'I took and put my babies where they'd be safe.' (164)

'It's my job to know what is and to keep them from what I know is terrible. I did that.' (165)

Utopian millennialism combines with the Christian faith to make Sethe act on a value system that is based on the belief in a better world and 'a new home' beyond death, where the promise of a new and perfected physical as well as social body awaits. The prospect of this New Jerusalem is a theme that is found repeatedly in African American cultural traditions. Many Negro spirituals and gospel songs communicate

this Christian belief system and show its utopian influence on African-American culture. 'Oh, Freedom!' is one example that demonstrates clearly the fusion of rebellious and subversive anti-slavery sentiments with Christian and Biblical discursive traditions:

Oh, freedom,
 Oh, freedom,
 Oh, freedom over me!
 An' befo' I'd be a slave,
 I'll be buried in my grave,
 An' go home to my Lord an' be free.
 ...
 (Gates Jr and McKay, 1997:15)

Sethe's attempt to kill her children to save them from slavery – what she thinks of as 'the perfect death of her crawling-already? baby' (99) – lends devastating immediacy to these words, since 'her plan was always that they would all be together on the other side, forever' (241).

Christian religious traditions are not the only ones to influence Morrison's representation of millennialism. Following Christian's call for a reading of *Beloved* informed by the 'African traditional religious belief that Westerners call ancestor worship' (1997:363), it is possible to apply Douglas's observations about possession cults usefully to *Beloved*. Douglas says that

[i]n his Malinowski lecture on Spirit Possession (1966) Ioan Lewis applies the useful distinction between the main morality cult and peripheral cults: he finds that people who are peripheral to the central focus of power and authority tend to be possessed by spirits who are peripheral to the main pantheon and whose morality is dubious. So the allocation of spiritual powers reflects the location of people along dimensions from the centre to the margin. So women subject to their husbands, serfs subject to their masters, indeed anyone in a state of subjection, constitutes this category of the peripheral. (83)

A peripheral class is one which feels less the constraints of grid and group than other classes of people within its social ambit, and expresses this freedom in the predicted way, by shaggier, more bizarre appearances. (84)

Through the system of slavery, Africans in America were forcibly brought into contact with Christian principles and traditions. These religious principles were incorporated and adapted into their own African religious, philosophical and cosmological traditions. In the context of Douglas's statement above, it is not surprising that Baby Suggs – who is 'the novel's voice of healing and ancestral wisdom' (Bouson, 2000:159) – revels in the beauty, and calls for what amounts to the veritable worshipping of the black body – physical and social – and its black flesh. Baby

Suggs' sermon surpasses the normalized Christian religious traditions – with the Trinity as its white 'pantheon' – and reaches back to African traditions in which the gods and the dead were manifested 'naturally in the world ... in the wind, in the trees, in the water, in the rocks' (Christian, 1997:363) as well as through human embodiment 'sometimes in the form of an apparently newborn baby' (Christian, 1997:363).

By incorporating remnants from African religious and cosmological traditions in her sermon, Baby Suggs appropriates the position of priestess of a peripheral cult and provides her community with an opportunity to move beyond the oppressive and debilitating body-centred binary traditions of western religio-political systems. The subversiveness of her appropriation and glorification of the marginal and peripheral black body constitutes an ideological repositioning and a socio-cultural reversal of 'the central focus of power and authority' (Douglas: 83).

To conclude, I look at two characters, Baby Suggs and Denver, and the way in which Morrison's representation of their relationship engages with Douglas's theory. I focus my reading of these two characters on Morrison's representation of temporal continuity and symbolic rebirth. Christian says:

African time is not linear. Rather, the future, in the Western sense, is absent because the present is always an unfolding of the past Thus every 'future' is already contained in what Westerners call the 'past'.
(396)

Morrison communicates the complex (dis)connection of temporal continuity through the four major female characters: Sethe, Beloved, Denver and Baby Suggs. As I have shown, Beloved represents the past, through her own personal death and the millions of unknown and 'disremembered' (118) dead African slaves for whom she stands. In the context of African cosmology, she can be said to symbolize the ancestors, as Baby Suggs also does (Bouson, 2000:159). Yet there is a significant difference, for Beloved represents an ancestral link that is malicious, malignant and malevolent ('spiteful' (3), 'venomous' (106), 'mad' (13)). The ancestral link represented by Baby Suggs is one of beneficence and benevolence. Through these two characters, who are ironically buried next to one another – 'a neighborliness that Stamp [Paid] wasn't entirely sure had Baby Suggs' approval' (171) – Morrison represents two kinds of potential relations with the past: one destructive, the other constructive.

Sethe, and her contemporary Paul D, represent the narrative present, since they are the ones who experienced slavery and are faced with the crisis of coming to terms with personal histories of inhumanity and abuse. Both attempt to do this by denying

the past: Sethe admits to Paul D that she '[does]n't go inside' (46) and sees 'beating back the past' as her daily 'serious work' (73), while Paul D keeps the past shut up 'in [] the tobacco tin lodged in his chest' (113). Denver, who has no personal history of slavery, is significant because she symbolizes the potential resolution of intrapersonal and intracommunal conflicts of disconnection and alienation. As Sethe's only surviving daughter, she is the embodiment of the future (Bouson, 2000:160).

Denver, like Sethe, must choose one of the possible forms of historical engagement. Denard (1991:371-338) explains that the challenge for Sethe and Denver is

a reconciliation with the slave past that blacks in general must face in order to move forward in contemporary society. They must bring slavery, the starting point of their injustice, back to life, must come to terms with that past, must mourn for those lost ancestors, must finally face the horror and the grief on a personal level before they can let go of the ghost of slavery and move forward into the future with hope and wholeness.

Despite the fascination that *Beloved* holds, Denver eventually chooses – in opposition to Sethe – the path of benevolent and beneficent historical engagement that she finds in her relationship with the spirit of her grandmother, Baby Suggs. Denver progresses from a shy, secretive, frightened, idle little girl at the beginning of the novel to a strong, competent, self-assured, 'steady' (266), opinionated young working woman at its end. It is significant that it is not through *Beloved* – spurred on by narcissistically obsessive emotional and sexual desire – that the African American legacy is continued, but through Denver, who acts out of a sense of both self-preservation and self-sacrifice when she reaches out to Lady Jones for help:

Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help. (243)

With the support of her benevolent ancestor, Baby Suggs, Denver transcends the consequences of progressive and invasive embodiment by extracting herself from the grip that the house, the ghost and *Beloved* have on her mother. She moves to a point where she defines herself as an individual and seizes the agency necessary to change her life quality and experiences:

Her father's daughter after all, Denver decided to do the necessary. Decided to stop relying on kindness ... she would hire herself out somewhere It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve'. (252)

Kella (2000:26) views Baby Suggs' message to Denver from beyond the grave as 'an existential one', namely that 'there is no defence against white people, but one must claim freedom through action anyway'.

Ironically, this also was what Sethe initially attempted to do. Through fleeing from slavery 'she had claimed herself ... claim[ed] ownership of [her] freed self ...' (95). At the end of the novel, however, she is a broken woman who, like Baby Suggs before her death, has lost her sense of identity and place in the world. As Sethe – whom we come to know early in the novel as 'the quiet queenly woman' (12) – loses her strength through Beloved's exhaustive demands, Denver becomes stronger and able to overcome her fear of the outside world. She ventures into it to become a full member of, and participant in, its bustling activity, and it is here, in the midst of its bustling activity, that Paul D meets the 'new' Denver at the close of the novel.

With Sethe's deterioration and regression to a state of complete obsession with the past, the second exorcism of Beloved by the women of the Cincinnati community – who act as the voice of the people, as did the chorus (Otten, 1989:93 and 1993:660) of ancient Greek drama, in what Kella (2000:190) calls acts of 'performative community' – is not only necessary but also inevitable. The survival of both Sethe and Denver – the African American present and future – depends on Beloved's return to her rightful place: death and memory. In relocating Beloved where she belongs – with the dead in the spirit world – the women of the community release Sethe and Denver from the oppressive hold of the past. Morrison does not present the past as something that must be forgotten, as Beloved's 'disremembering' (118) and Sethe's attempts 'to remember as close to nothing as was safe' (6) signify. Neither does she present it as something that must be obsessively wallowed in, as Sethe does once she discovers that Beloved is her dead baby returned. Morrison presents the past as something that must be acknowledged, honoured and dealt with, as Denver does when she tells Lady Jones of her mother's plight and asks for assistance. Christian describes the principles of a functional and healthy relationship between the living and the ancestors from within the context of African cosmology as follows:

The Christian African theologian John Mbiti warns us that in traditional West African societies, Africans do not worship their ancestors. Rather, they believe that when people pass ... that is, 'die', in the Western sense, they do not disappear as long as someone remembers them, their names, their characters. Mbiti states: 'So long as the living dead is thus remembered, he is in the state of personal immortality' The acts of feeding the dead and pouring libations are meant as symbols, active symbols of communion, fellowship and renewal. Thus continuity, not

only of genes but also of active remembering, is critical to a West African's sense of her or his own personal being and, beyond that, of the beingness of the group. (369)

The relationship between Denver and her grandmother, Baby Suggs, is an especially significant one in the context of the 'Two Bodies' theory, since Denver can be read as a symbolic reincarnation – an embodiment of sorts – of Baby Suggs' gospel of love, self-love, forgiveness and healing. Schapiro (1991) points out that

[s]elf-recognition is inextricably tied up with self-love, and this is precisely the message of the sermons that Baby Suggs preaches to her people in the Clearing. In a white society that does not recognize or love you, she tells them, you must fight to recognize and love yourself. (206)

When Sethe, Beloved and Denver go to the Clearing 'where Baby Suggs had danced in the sunlight' (86) to perform a 'fixing ceremony' (86) for Sethe's husband, Halle, Morrison presents to her reader the teachings of 'Baby Suggs, holy' (87) through the consciousness and memories of Sethe. Sethe engages with the past through a mystical meditative communion with Baby Suggs' spirit. This communion is both of the social and the physical body – the communion of the social body being Sethe's memories of the communal participation in Baby Suggs' sermon in the Clearing. Moglen (1997:15) describes the significance in the novel of Baby Suggs' sermon as follows:

Mother-midwife, she restores the despised others to themselves by teaching them how to embrace their bodies, hearts, and minds, understanding that 'the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine' []. She recognizes them not only in their otherness but also as a collectivity.

Sethe also remembers and relives an intimate personal encounter: Baby Suggs rubbing her neck while crooning a song of release and surrender. The thematic use of the defence of the 'cherished bodily form vulnerable to attack from without' (Douglas: viii) is apparent in Sethe's need - after hearing from Paul D of Halle's insanity – 'to lay it all down' (86). It is Baby Suggs' voice that Sethe remembers crooning the following words, which are an adaptation from the lyrics of the gospel song 'Down by the Riverside' (Gates and McKay, 1997:18):

Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Down. Both of em down. Down by the riverside. Sword and shield. Don't study war no more. Lay all that mess down. Sword and shield. (86)

In these words of Baby Suggs, the defence of the body and the defence of the community are one and the same. Baby Suggs calls from beyond the grave for the laying down of the sword and shield of hate, revenge, retribution and violence. She could not lay it down herself in the last years of her life, having come to the

conclusion – after Sethe’s killing of her child(ren) – that she had lied (89) and that ‘there was no grace – imaginary or real ...’ (89).

It is, ultimately, Denver who symbolically succeeds in laying down the heavy burden. As Stamp Paid tells Paul D upon his return to Cincinnati, it is Denver who restrains Sethe’s lust for revenge and retribution at the end of the novel, when Sethe attempts to kill Mr Bodwin:

‘... she was the first one wrestle her mother down. Before anybody knew what the devil was going on.’
 ‘She saved his life then, you could say.’
 ‘You could. You could. ... I’m proud of her. She turning out fine. Fine.’ (266)

Denver also takes up her grandmother’s teachings in her own life. The intergenerational connection between Baby Suggs and Denver – the one who bears the message of peace and healing (‘Don’t study war no more’ (86)) and the one who brings fulfilment to it – can be read in the dual contexts of Christianity and African cosmology. In the context of Christianity, it can be read as the fulfilment of Christ’s teaching of tolerance, non-violence and forgiveness, while in the context of African cosmology, it can be read as the mutually beneficial social relationship that exists between the living and the ancestors, the present and the past. As Denver keeps Baby Suggs’ memory alive through living according to her teachings, so too does Baby Suggs protect and care for Denver from beyond the grave, for it is Baby Suggs that encourages and leads Denver on her newfound path of self-actualization and self-possession:

... Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn’t leave it. Her throat itched; her heart kicked - and then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. ‘You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don’t remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother’s feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can’t walk down the steps? My Jesus my.’
 But you said there was no defence.
 ‘There ain’t.’
 Then what do I do?
 ‘Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on.’ (244)

Douglas advocates a replication hypothesis when investigating the relationship between a society and its symbols, because it

... allows for the power of symbols generated in a particular social set-up to control it. The symbols themselves lash back at the people and divert their attempts to change their lot into channels which do more to symbolise than to improve it. (xiv)

Beloved speaks eloquently of this symbolic backlash. Morrison shows the destructive consequences, for an individual and a community, of a dysfunctional historical-temporal relationship. The imminent destruction of Sethe, broken in body and spirit by *Beloved*, at the end of the novel, is symptomatic of the threat that certain kinds of obsessive and regressive engagement – or disengagement – with the past pose, while Denver's self-reliance and self-possession suggest the promise of a balanced and constructive relationship with the past. Denver is thus the embodiment and promise of healing.

Chapter Two

**Reading identity, difference and healing in *Beloved*:
a literary application of John Caputo's theory of progressive Foucaultian
hermeneutics.**

... . [Foucault's] interest is hermeneutic: he wants to hear what one says who has been driven *in extremis*.

... What is the truth of madness, the truth that madness knows but we have silenced? Madness is 'difference' extreme, disturbing difference, inhabiting a 'void'.

- John Caputo
Foucault and the Critique of Institutions
(1993:237)

Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nonno. Nonono.

- Toni Morrison
Beloved
(1988:163)

Hermeneutics can be defined as 'a science of interpretation' (Mallery et al, 1987) or 'message analysis' (Szabo, 1996). Originally applied by ancient Greek scholars to literature and linguistics, it was revived and revised by Protestant theologians of the Reformation and applied to Biblical exegesis. In modern times, the term 'hermeneutics' is more commonly used and applied in a post-Heideggerian context, to uncover and interpret the meaning of human being (*Dasein*) through socio-cultural artefacts and texts. In the latter context, Michel Foucault's insistence on viewing and presenting himself as an archaeologist and historian, rather than a philosopher, (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997:64&85) corresponds with John Caputo's reading of his work in a hermeneutical framework.

In *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions* (1993), Caputo isolates three kinds of Foucaultian hermeneutics. He interprets Foucaultian hermeneutics as a development or progression from one kind of hermeneutics – which he calls a 'tragic hermeneutics' – towards another kind, a 'hermeneutics of refusal' (233). Tragic hermeneutics is constitutive of, and equivalent to, a hermeneutics of identity – interpreting 'who we are', or 'who we are not' (233) – while a hermeneutics of refusal is also a hermeneutics of difference – interpreting how we refuse and resist definition and definitive identification. Finally, Caputo moves beyond Foucaultian theory – 'in

a direction that, while it was not taken by Foucault, is perhaps suggested by him' (234) – by envisioning a hermeneutics of response and redress and a therapeutics of 'healing gestures' (234). Caputo identifies Foucault's hermeneutical project as follows:

... Foucault's thought is best construed as a hermeneutics of who we are. This is a hermeneutics that turns not on uncovering the truth but on living with the untruth or with what Foucault calls very early on the 'night of truth', the truth that there is no capitalized 'Truth', no 'truth of truth'. (233)

Caputo articulates his own academic and philosophical project as the 'pursui[t of] the notion of a hermeneutics more radically conceived' (2003). By 'hermeneutics' he means

the inescapability of interpretation, the necessity we are under to construe the world, to engender meaning, to produce a rendering of things, of the world and one another. (2003)

'A radically conceived hermeneutics' means the following to him:

one that sustains a working relationship with deconstruction, that takes its point of departure in a deconstructive analysis of our beliefs and practices, that stresses the radical revisability, reformability and the contingency of any take we have on things ... a radical affirmation of an unforeseeable ethical and political future and of the possibility of being otherwise. (2003)

Caputo locates the radicalness of Foucault's thought in his insight that exacting, definitive and static formulations of existential truth and identity are impossible, since identity and subjectivity are always relative to a context and thus constantly in motion. Foucault's interpretation of human behaviour and social institutions centres on the understanding that there is no 'capitalized Truth' (Caputo, 1993:233), and that human existence and experience escape definitive interpretation and organization. Caputo sees Foucaultian hermeneutics as 'a hermeneutics that confesses from the start that we do not know who we are, and it is a hermeneutics of who we are not' (1993:233).

The three kinds of hermeneutics that Caputo identifies in Foucaultian theory dovetail with Morrison's representation of the three major characters in *Beloved*, namely Sethe, Beloved and Denver. I read Sethe as representative of a tragic hermeneutics of identity, Beloved as representative of a hermeneutics of refusal and difference, and Denver as representative of a hermeneutics of response and redress. I interrogate Sethe's (attempted) murder of her child(ren) in relation to Foucault's thoughts around madness/unreason as formulated in *Madness and Civilization* (1965).

Although Foucault does not clearly distinguish between madness and unreason, there is a marked difference in his conception of these two terms. ‘Unreason’ refers to everything that is beyond reason. It is the ‘giving way of reason’ (Caputo, 1993:234) and ‘the mode of access to the natural truth of man’ (Foucault in Caputo, 1993:234). According to Foucault, the meaning of unreason – the ‘natural truth’ to which it gives access – has been lost to modernity, since it has been reduced to silence through reason’s powerful practices of confinement, exclusion and moralising discursivity that transform unreason into what modernity knows as madness. ‘Madness’, though originating in unreason, is socially constructed according to hegemonic and ideological forces that operate in different historical periods. As changes occur in societies, so do the meaning, understanding and treatment of madness change. Thus the meaning of madness is wrapped up in the historically and culturally specific discourses of different societies. There is no eternal ‘capitalized Truth’ (1993:233) of madness – it is different things at different times.

Foucault theorizes that it is only through expressions of unreason in art that modernity can engage with that which lies beyond reason, from outside of the limiting and restricting discourses of medicine and psychology, which appropriate and control unreason in its guise of madness. For Foucault ‘[t]he work of art springs not from pure madness [– which gives rise only to silence (1993:244) –] but from the invasion of reason by madness, from the tension or confrontation between reason and unreason’ (Caputo, 1993:242). I read Morrison’s representation of Sethe’s (attempted) murder of her child(ren) as an artistic representation of ‘the voice[] of unreason that [] speak[s] of ‘human truth’ and ‘dark freedom’’ (Caputo, 1993:240). I deviate from Foucault, in that he focuses on unreason in the artistic expressions of socially and/or morally ‘deviant’ or ‘mad’ artist such as Van Gogh, Nietzsche, Artaud and De Sade. Like these artists, Morrison also dwells ‘at that limit point where the world comes undone, where it is unmade’ (Caputo, 1993:241), yet, unlike them, she represents the confrontation between reason and unreason, rather than the artistic silence that flows from ‘pure madness’ (Caputo, 1993:244).

Like Foucault’s artists, Morrison challenges the normalization and institutionalisation of ‘capitalized Truths’ through her representation of ‘the confrontation of reason and unreason in [a] concrete historical context’ (Caputo, 1993:244). Foucault calls for this in *Madness and Civilization*, when he says ‘we

must renounce the convenience of terminal truths' (ix). In *Beloved*, it is through the character of Sethe and her disturbing act of unreason – the (attempted) killing of her child(ren) – that Morrison interrogates and subverts western ideological conceptions of freedom, maternity and humanity. Morrison's text conforms to Foucault's understanding of unreason in art when he says:

[A] work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself. ... [T]he world is made aware of its guilt. ... [T]he world ... becomes culpable ... it is now arraigned by the work of art, obliged to order itself by its language, compelled by it to a task of recognition, of reparation, to the task of restoring reason *from* that unreason and *to* that unreason. (1965:288).

Foucault explains the principal aim of *Madness and Civilization* as the identification of the exact point in history – he calls this the 'zero-point' (ix) – immediately prior to reason and unreason becoming divorced from one another. Morrison's *Beloved* also centres on a zero-point and a split between reason and unreason. Unlike Foucault, Morrison's project is not so much about searching for the zero-point as representing – through her narrative of murderous mother love – what resulted from it. She represents the tragedy that resulted from the splitting of reason and unreason. Where Foucault focuses on the historical, Morrison's focus is on the individual and deeply personal experience of the confrontation between reason and unreason. Schoolteacher's arrival at Baby Suggs' home marks a personal zero-point for Sethe.

Foucault calls his zero-point a 'void instituted between reason and what is not reason' (x). This can be brought into direct relation to Morrison's representation of Sethe's eyes as dark and empty wells, and is an early and sustained indication of Sethe's potential as a locus of the conflict between reason and unreason. Even before the murder, Sethe's eyes are described as unreflective voids:

... her eyes did not pick up a flicker of light. They were like two wells into which [Paul D] had trouble gazing. Even punched out they needed to be covered, lidded, marked with some sign to warn folks of what that emptiness held. [They were] two open wells that did not reflect firelight.'
(5)

With eyes commonly acknowledged as 'windows to the soul', the void of Sethe's eyes represents a loss that speaks of the experience of being driven to the extremes of human sensitivity. Schoolteacher comes into direct contact with this void when he faces Sethe at the murder scene:

But the worst ones were those [eyes] of the nigger woman who looked like she didn't have any. Since the whites in them had disappeared and since they were as black as her skin, she looked blind. (150)

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault shows that blindness has a history of association with unreason as it is

one of the words that comes closest to the essence of classical madness. It refers to the night of quasi-sleep which surrounds the images of madness ... but it refers also to ill-founded beliefs, mistaken judgments, to that whole background of errors inseparable from madness. (106)

According to Foucault, unreason has been represented as an inability to see the truth of reason, and as a 'dazzling' (108) of the senses which suspends the boundaries between reason and unreason and makes the false truths of unreason seem profoundly reasonable. He says:

To say that madness is dazzlement is to say that the madman sees the daylight, the same daylight as the man of reason (both live in the same brightness); but seeing this same daylight, and nothing but this daylight and nothing in it, he sees it as void, as night, as nothing, for him the shadows are the way to perceive daylight. And believing he sees, he admits as realities the hallucinations of his imagination and all the multitudinous population of night. (108)

Schoolteacher's perception of Sethe's eyes as non-existent or blind, speaks of an ideological framework in which unreason is interpreted as moral blindness. Sethe's moral blindness is induced by what Paul D calls her 'too thick' love (164) for her children, and by her not 'know[ing] where the world stopped and she began' (164). Paul D realizes the dangers of love early in his life and formulates a golden rule according to which he lives in order to avoid the experience of existential loss and alienation. He says:

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

Paul D's philosophy is echoed by Ella, the ex-slave who helps to reunite Sethe and Baby Suggs. Ella extends Paul D's resolution to 'love just a little bit' to '[d]on't love anything' (92). Viewed in terms of Paul D and Ella's existential philosophy, the root of Sethe's moral wrongdoing lies in her capacity for love, as Otten (1993) explains:

For Sethe, to love becomes a testament of freedom. For having been owned by others meant that her claim to love was usurped as well. It is this compromised love for her children that even Baby Suggs accepted – despite her magnificent sermon in the Clearing on loving one's self – knowing that her slave master would take her children away. And it is this 'weak love' that Paul D tells Sethe she must accept. (658)

It is for Sethe's excessively 'thick' love and her subsequent desperate and tragic act that Baby Suggs apologizes at the murder scene:

Baby Suggs had got the boys inside and was bathing their heads, rubbing their hands, lifting their lids, whispering 'Beg your pardon, I beg your pardon' the whole time. ... 'I beg your pardon. Lord, I beg your pardon. I sure do.' (152)

Foucault's second aim with *Madness and Civilization* is to break the silence that came to exist between reason and unreason. He wants to reinstate communication in the form of a dialogue, rather than the one-sided psychiatric 'monologue of reason' (xi) that marginalizes and, paradoxically, silences the true exponents of unreason. In *Beloved*, Morrison successfully breaks this silence. By presenting the 'giving way' (Caputo, 1993:233) of Sethe's reason *outside* of the moralizing and confining discursive categories of psychology and psychiatry, Morrison opens a channel of communication that engages the reader with the unfiltered experience and knowledge of unreason, which Caputo, following Foucault, interprets as the 'tragic' and 'terrible' 'truth' (Caputo, 1993:237) of being driven to the extremes of human sensitivity. Caputo says:

[t]he mad speak *de profundis*, from the depths of an experience in which both the reassuring structures of ordinary life and the comforting reassurances of scientific or philosophical knowledge have collapsed. They experience the radical groundlessness of the world, the contingency of its constructs, both social and epistemic, they speak of and from a kind of ineradicable terror. They speak to us from the abyss by which we are all inhabited, they are voices from an abyss. (1993:238)

Maxwell notes that

[Sethe's] act of infanticide can only be apprehended through an understanding of the key emotional experiences in [her] slave past, isolated but critical events that for her coalesce in the knowledge of the heart to reveal the unbearable horrors of bestial servitude awaiting her offspring. (2000:250)

Sethe's (attempted) murder of her child(ren) is a reaction to her experience of 'radical groundlessness' and 'ineradicable terror' (Caputo, 1993:238). Schapiro (1991:195) explains, that 'psychic death', which results from slavery, involves the denial of one's being as human subject'. This experience stands in the context of Sethe's understanding of her own identity, as defined in relation to her world and other individuals around her, most specifically her children. She is confronted with the knowledge that she cannot determine or define her identity, and that her new understanding of herself – and her children – as 'free' is neither guaranteed nor

irreversible. Caputo equates a tragic hermeneutics – based on the split between reason and unreason – with a hermeneutics of identity, which constitutes an attempt at defining ‘who we are’ and ‘who we are not’ (1993:233). I continue my reading of *Sethe* in terms of her conceptualization of personal and communal identity.

Before her flight, *Sethe* knew life only as a slave, and her identity – or, more accurately, her lack thereof – was violently imposed on her from outside. Schoolteacher’s ‘research’ into the animality of slaves (193) reflects the ideological climate under which a slave was defined. *Sethe* knew herself only in the context of oppressive ideologies that held that she was less-than-human, an object, and something to be owned and used by others. The narrator represents this ideological framework to the reader via the consciousness of Schoolteacher:

[*Sethe* had] gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who’d overbeat her and made her cut and run. Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think – just think – what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. ... Suppose you beat the hounds past that point thataway. ... [S]ee what happened when you overbeat creatures God had given you the responsibility of ... (150)

Gates and McKay (1997) call this the enforcement of a state of ‘non-personhood’, which was the foundation of the socio-economic system of American chattel slavery, and which translates via racist and ethnocentric ideologies into a belief in the animality/non-humanity of slaves. They say:

... [T]he system of chattel slavery was designed to prevent Africans and their descendants from building a new identity except in accordance with the dictates of their oppressors. ... The intention of slavery was to create in the slave a sense of complete alienation from all human ties except those that bound him or her in absolute dependence to the master’s will. (130)

Baby Suggs is the oldest of the novel’s characters and the one who spent the longest time – and suffered the greatest loss – under slavery. As the ‘voice of ... ancestral wisdom’ (Bouson, 2000:159) and collective memory in the novel, Morrison uses Baby Suggs to represent the consequences of slavery’s violent imposition of ownership and control:

Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. (23)

Baby Suggs is also Morrison’s mouthpiece for the expression of a slave’s experience of loss/lack of identity when she says ‘I don’t call myself nothing’ (141). Morrison describes her as ‘having never had the map to discover what she was like’ (140).

After hearing Schoolteacher discuss her supposed animal traits with his pupils, Sethe is moved to resistance. Her resistance is not only for herself, since at its root lies a mother's love and concern for her children. It is to ensure the safety and freedom of her children that Sethe flees from Sweet Home (Maxwell, 2000:247 & 257). In a conversation she has with her husband, Halle – after overhearing Schoolteacher and his pupils – Sethe realizes that she will lose her children for they, like her, will lose their identities – and possibly even their lives – to slavery:

[Halle said:] ‘... [Schoolteacher] say it don't pay to have my labor somewhere else while the boys is small.’

...

[Sethe thought:] ... I couldn't get out of my head the thing that woke me up: ‘While the boys is small.’ That's what he said and it snapped me awake. They tagged after me the whole day weeding, milking, getting firewood. For now. For now. (197)

When she flees from Sweet Home, Sethe seizes the agency needed to secure control of her own and her children's lives. She moves from a position in which others define her identity for her, to a new position in which she defines it herself. As she actively attempts to liberate herself from the oppression, abuse and pain that marked her life as a slave, subjection transforms into subjectivity and subjectivity becomes subversion.

This act of self-actualisation Morrison calls Sethe's ‘claiming’ of herself. She says:

Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another. (95)

No longer is ownership vested in the slave system and the slave master. She has ceased to be an object and can think of herself, speak and act as a subject. Morrison represents subjectivity as a reclamation project and *choice* as the inherent characteristic of freedom:

[Sethe discovered] how it felt to wake up at dawn and *decide* what to do with the day. (95)

Sethe's acquaintance with choice is significant, as this empowers her to *choose* to kill her children rather than have them enslaved. Her killing of her child(ren) is the act of a free woman, since it is only as a free woman that she has the choice to either ‘save’ them by the only means available to her, or to let them go into slavery with Schoolteacher. This is the reason why she did not kill her children at Sweet Home, since it is only as a free woman that Sethe's choice to kill them carries the profound meaning of freedom. Under slavery – with no experience and true understanding of what freedom meant – murder or suicide was not a choice that she could have

considered. However, after spending 28 days in freedom, her frame of reference changes, and a new choice arises.

Caputo reads Foucault's thoughts on power in this context of the conflict – or 'agonism' – between choice and force, and between freedom and enslavement:

Foucault clearly distinguishes the power that is exerted over material objects, for example, by means of instruments, from the power that individuals exert over other individuals, which is not power over things but power over freedom. . . . [T]he power in which Foucault is interested is exerted over 'the other', over another person who acts and reacts. Power is a set of actions upon other actions ... [p]ower relations occur in the space between pure force and free consent ... [t]hus power is exerted only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free ... [p]ower is exerted only over beings capable of being recalcitrant and intransigent. Power implies freedom since without freedom power is just constraint or force. Power and freedom belong together agonistically, in an ongoing 'agonism', a struggle, in which there are winning and losing strategies. (254)

Under slavery, Sethe was an object; she was owned by someone who could do with and to her what he pleased. He could even kill her if he chose to do so. Her life was in the hands and at the mercy of her 'master'. As a slave in Kentucky, Sethe was subject to 'pure force', but as a free woman in Ohio, she is exposed to 'power [that] is exerted only over free subjects ... over beings capable of being recalcitrant and intransigent' (Caputo, 1993:254). In the 28 days after her flight, she develops a sense of 'freedom [that] is resistant and persistent enough [to] cause power to tremble' because of its 'irrepressibility', its 'refusal to contract into an identity', its 'twisting loose from historical forms of life' and its 'lack of nature and essence [and] capacity for novelty and innovation' (Caputo, 1993:255).

During her 28 days of freedom on Bluestone Road, Sethe learns the meaning of freedom – and of choice – which Paul D expresses as follows:

... to get to a place where you could love anything you chose – not to need permission for desire – well now, that was freedom. (162)

In this state of newfound freedom, Sethe creates a new identity for herself by redefining herself as 'mother'

I did it. I got us all out. . . . Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. . . . But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before. It felt good. Good and right. I was big ... and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was *that* wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon – there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. ... (162)

It is significant that her freedom is contained in a period of 28 days, which is a symbol of her femaleness and motherhood, as it is the length of a menstrual cycle. However, the blood that flows at the end of this cycle is not menstrual blood from her womb, but the lifeblood of her child. In Chapter One, I discussed the significance of the death of this child – who will later return as *Beloved* – in the context of African American history.

The tragic irony of Sethe's infanticide lies in her duplication of the power dynamics to which she had been subjected all her life. Just as the slave master chooses how to use and dispose of his slaves – the 'creatures God had given you the responsibility of' (150) – so Sethe also does with her children. Though her intentions are good – 'my plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is' (203) – the consequences are similar. Like the slave master, Sethe also assumes and claims for herself the right to control others (Maxwell, 2000:254). She claims ownership of her children, as Jennifer Uglow (in Pearson, 1999:88) explains: 'Sethe could not have killed her child unless she thought she owned her.' Morrison eloquently describes this irony as follows: 'She did the right thing, but she didn't have the right to do it' (Morrison in Denard, 1991:317-338) (also Rothstein, 1987:17 and Otten, 1993:657).

Having been a slave all her life, then believing herself to be free, Sethe is confronted with the reality of a return to slavery and 'non-personhood' (Gates & McKay, 1997:130) with the arrival of Schoolteacher. The moment in which she recognizes Schoolteacher marks the disintegration of her newfound and self-defined identity. The approaching group of white men under the leadership of Schoolteacher is represented as 'a portent of death' (Bouson, 2000:145) in their appearance as the apocalyptic 'four horsemen' (148). Bouson points to the correspondence between Morrison's depiction of malevolent and portentous whites encroaching on the inhabitants of 124 Bluestone Road and bell hooks's description of 'representations of whiteness in the black imagination' as 'terrorizing' (145). The moment of Schoolteacher's approach marks Sethe's 'giving way of reason' (Caputo, 1993: 234), from which her act of unreason flows:

... she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized [S]choolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nonono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. (163)

... she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; [] her face beaked, [] her hands worked like claws, [] she collected them every which way: one on her shoulder, one under her arm, one by the hand, the other shouted forward into the woodshed filled with just sunlight and shavings ... (157)

Sethe's murderous act is an attempt to save her children, not only from slavery, but also from the knowledge and truth of human existence – specifically 'black' existence – namely that they will always be subjected to definitions and identities imposed on them by others. Thus she articulates her maternal responsibility as follows:

'It's my job to know what is and to keep them from what I know is terrible. I did that'. (165)

In Chapter One, I read Sethe's killing of her children – and her concomitant intention of suicide – in the context of millennialist utopianism and the Christian belief in a perfected New Jerusalem beyond death. Sethe believes that these murders will be an act of salvation: 'I took and put my babies where they'd be safe' (164) (Maxwell, 2000:254). This corresponds with Caputo's tragic hermeneutics of identity and the experience of unreason 'at the limits of the constitution of the world, where the world threatens to come undone, to deconstitute itself' (1993:240). The world beyond death carries for Sethe the promise of the salvation, unification and liberty that are unattainable for her and her children in life. At the moment when reason gives way to unreason, an act as utterly unreasonable as the killing of her children becomes the most reasonable of acts for Sethe. It is the final and ultimate act of salvation available to her.

Sethe's 'experience [of] the radical groundlessness of the world, the contingency of its constructs ... [and] ... a kind of ineradicable terror' (Caputo, 1993:238) lies at the heart of Morrison's novel. Sethe experiences the inherent absurdity of human existence. She realizes that she cannot definitively construct her identity. She understands that she is consumed by a 'depth of negativity' (Caputo, 1993:237) that makes all things possible – even a return to slavery *and* the salvation of her children through murder.

Caputo reads Foucault's early works – specifically *Madness and Civilization* (1965) – as speaking of a tragic truth that has been repressed and that needs to be recovered in order for 'reason to constitute itself as an identity' (1993:239). This truth that needs to be recovered is the knowledge that reason and unreason are inseparable, that one is always implicit in the other, and that identity can only be constituted

through the acknowledgement, acceptance and understanding of this complex relationship. This interactive bond between reason and unreason is reflected at the end of the novel. As the community re-integrates Sethe, the symbol of unreason in their midst, she must learn to live with an integrated understanding of herself. As she recovers the tragic truth of her own existence, she must come to understand that she is '[her own] best thing' (273). Read from this perspective, *Beloved* can be viewed as '[a] work where there is healing and the prospect of a new beginning. For all its sadness, it has a hopeful ending' (Denard, 1991:317-338) (also Bouson, 2000:160).

The second kind of hermeneutics that Caputo identifies is a hermeneutics of refusal and difference, of which Morrison's character Beloved is representative. I read *Beloved* in the context of Caputo's understanding of a 'new repression' that emerges in Foucault's later work. Caputo calls this a repression of the 'capacity for being-different' (1993:251), which corresponds with the concept of 'self-fashioning' that Butler-Evans (1989) borrows from Stephen Greenblatt:

'[S]elf-fashioning' [is] a term [Greenblatt] uses to denote 'a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving.' This mode of encountering the world places its emphasis on the construction of a self that is different from, and removed from, a hostile Other. ... [He says:] ... 'It invariably crosses the boundaries between ... being moulded by forces outside one's control [and] the attempt to fashion other selves'. (23)

Though Caputo focuses on 'the negative freedom of the individual to be different' (1993:252), I read *Beloved* as more, namely as the actualisation of this 'capacity for being-different' in the context of African American history. She personifies the quest 'to understand how we have been trapped in our own history' (Foucault in Caputo, 1993:249). I focus on Beloved's need for acknowledgement and recognition through naming, and read this as representative of a quest for self-constitution through a reconstitution of the past.

Caputo differs from Dreyfus and Rabinow (Caputo, 1993:247), who argue that Foucault abandons the hermeneutical project in his later work. According to Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault's later works are based on his belief that 'there is no message from the depths [] [m]adness is simply constituted in different ways at different times and nothing is being left out' (Caputo, 1993:247). Caputo agrees that Foucault's project changed, but he disagrees with Dreyfus and Rabinow's understanding of this change as Foucault's abandonment of hermeneutics. Caputo feels that Foucault's project remained one of hermeneutical interpretation, but that he moved away from one

kind – tragic hermeneutics – to another, namely a hermeneutics of refusal and difference.

Caputo also believes that Foucaultian hermeneutics of refusal still conceptualises something being repressed, but he no longer sees this as an ‘originary undifferentiatedness in which reason mingles with and is disturbed from within by its other [unreason]’ (1993:238). What is repressed in a hermeneutics of refusal is the ‘capacity for being-different’ (1993:251):

It is no longer an identity we need to recover (a secret tragic identity) but a difference. It is no longer a positive ideal that needs to be restored but simply a certain capacity to resist the identities that are imposed upon us just in order to set free our capacity to invent such new identities for ourselves as circumstances allow. (256)

From her first appearance, Beloved’s difference is apparent. Like a baby, emerging from the water of its mother’s womb, Beloved emerges as ‘[a] fully dressed woman walk[ing] out of the water’ (50). Like an infant, she has to ‘negotiate the weight of her eyelids’, while ‘her neck ... ke[eps] bending’ and her skin is ‘new [], lineless and smooth’ (50). Though she is a grown woman, she conducts herself like a child: sleeping frequently; soiling her bedclothes; constantly in need of feeding; displaying a fondness for sweet, sugary food; and speaking in an inarticulate child-like manner. Though Sethe and Denver notice her difference, it is Paul D who openly acknowledges Beloved’s difference when he tells Sethe: ‘[s]omething funny ‘bout that gal’ (56).

Caputo understands a hermeneutics of refusal and difference as a project of ‘interpreting the ‘struggles’ we witness nowadays’ (1993:250). He says:

... [T]hese struggles are not for or against the ‘individual’, but rather they are struggles against the ‘government of individualization’ ... the very business of coming up with normative ideas of what the individual should be, and of developing administrative practices and professional competences to see to it that such individuals are in fact produced, is precisely the problem ... it is precisely what these struggles are against. (250)

The idea is to liberate us not only from the state but from the sort of individualization that the state produces. The idea is ‘to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries’. (253)

For Caputo, this refusal is an insistence upon the ‘right to be different’ (1993:252) and the ‘capacity to resist the identities that are imposed upon us’ (1993:256). A hermeneutics of refusal and difference entails the investigation and interpretation of human behaviour and social institutions by ‘approach[ing] the processes of subjection

by way of consideration of the ‘resistance’ that is offered to them, of the ‘antagonisms’ that they engender’ (Caputo, 1993:250). According to Caputo,

[s]uch struggles ‘assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual’ and they fight against everything that ‘ties [the individual] to his own identity in a constraining way’, which reduces the individual to the identity of ‘madman’, ‘mentally retarded’, ‘alcoholic’, ‘handicapped’, etc. (250)

In Chapter One, I discuss the character Beloved in the context of Morrison’s epigraph to this novel: ‘Sixty Million and more’ (Otten, 1989:83). In representing Beloved as a symbol of African American history, Morrison places her in a violent engagement with the pacifying discourses of racism and western historicity. Through her increasing refusal of docility and conformity, Beloved inhabits a space that corresponds with Caputo’s understanding of a Foucaultian hermeneutics of refusal and difference. Morrison’s representation of Beloved forces an engagement with African American history. As Beloved invades Sethe and Denver’s lives and house, the reader is forced to engage with slavery, not only as a cold historical fact, but also as a tangible and real experience. The increasing invasiveness of Beloved symbolizes the manner in which the knowledge of their origins in slavery pervades the lives and experiences of modern African Americans. The inescapability of history is presented through Beloved, who clings to Sethe ‘like a familiar’:

Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe was in unless required and told to. (57)

Beloved forces Sethe to engage with her personal history of enslavement. Beloved’s strangling of Sethe in the Clearing, marks the moment when, for the first time, Sethe relates Beloved to her dead baby: ‘[she had] the suspicion that the girl’s touch was also exactly like the baby’s ghost’ (99). Similarly, Morrison here forces the reader into an engagement with American history, collective memories and the ‘ghosts’ of the past:

When Denver later accuses Beloved of making Sethe choke, Beloved claims that Sethe was choked by the ‘circle of iron’ [101] – that is, the iron collar used to restrain the slaves. If Sethe’s frightening experience is the repetition of a collective trauma, it also is the repetition of a family trauma. For Sethe’s near-strangulation, as she helplessly claws at invisible hands and thrashes her feet in the air, is a rememory of the murder of the baby who died by having its throat slit. In this rememory, however, the victimized baby/reincarnated ghost turns the tables and exacts revenge by victimizing Sethe. (Bouson, 2000:151)

Morrison uses Baby Suggs to widen the focus from Sethe’s personal ghost to the greater context of African American history:

Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband's spirit was to come back in here? Or yours? (5)

When Ella says to Stamp Paid, 'You know as well as I do that people who die bad don't stay in the ground' (188), it is an acknowledgement of the impropriety of America's slave deaths. Beloved's resurrection of the past is an African American rebellion against America's dismissal of the lives that were lost under slavery. Her return to life is a refusal to be dismissed and forgotten. It is an insistence on America's addressing of unfinished business, which Heinze and Lewis describes as 'a purging of the guilt of the American psyche' (1994:171-187).

Beloved's fear of disintegration speaks of the dangers of historical forgetfulness. Having been a spirit without body, Beloved reconstitutes herself in embodied form in an attempt to undo the separation of spirit and body that resulted from her murder. When her tooth falls out, she fears that it signals the beginning of her disintegration:

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. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. She had two dreams: exploding and being swallowed. When her tooth came out – an odd fragment, last in the row – she thought it was starting. (133)

Read in the context of African American history, disintegration is indicative of an experience of alienation and disconnection from the past. The loss of body parts is symbolic of a disconnection from community. In Chapter One, I used Christian's ideas on African cosmology to show the significance of a sense of communal integratedness, which includes a healthy interaction with the ancestors.

Beloved's need is for the constitution of her identity, and for this she needs a social context within and against which she can construct and define herself. Beloved fears disintegration most when she is alone and momentarily disconnected from Sethe and Denver, who provide her with an immediate context of family relations:

[she feared that] on one of these mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. (133)

Sethe senses this need for (re)constitution in Beloved soon after her arrival:

... [Sethe] was sliding into sleep when she felt Beloved touch her. A touch no heavier than a feather but loaded, nevertheless, with desire. The longing she saw [in Beloved's eyes] was bottomless. Some plea barely in control. (58)

Beloved needs to be acknowledged, remembered, known, and named, and it is Sethe – the woman who is both her creator and destroyer – that can fulfil this need.

When Paul D interrogates Beloved about her identity and origins, she cannot tell him who she is, because without Sethe *she is nobody*. She tells Paul D and Denver

‘I don’t have nobody.’

‘What was you looking for when you came here?’ [Paul D] asked her.

‘This place. I was looking this place I could be in.’ (65)

‘I don’t want that place. This the place I am.’ (123)

The place that Beloved does not want is death, where she will be alone and forgotten like all the other victims of slavery. Beloved wants to belong, and she wants to be acknowledged and celebrated as a member of her family and community. Her insistence on finding a ‘place where [she] could be in’ is simultaneously her refusal to accept the way America has dealt with the memory of its African slaves. Morrison says ‘there is no place you or I can go ... to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves’... . (Denard, 1991:317-338). In order to recollect these absences, Beloved insists on hearing Sethe’s stories of the past. Initially Sethe is amazed at the ‘profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling’ (58), but later she finds that remembering the past becomes also for herself ‘an unexpected pleasure’ (58). In telling Beloved about her past, ‘[Sethe] was remembering something that she had forgotten she knew’ (61). Beloved’s need for (re)constitution also serves Sethe’s own need for the same. Schapiro explains:

The child has a need to see the mother, or his or her most significant other, [] as an independent subject, not simply as the ‘external world’ or an adjunct of his ego []. The intersubjective view ... conceives of self and other as [] distinct but interrelated beings [] who are involved in an intricate dance of assertion and recognition. The essential need is for mutual recognition – [] the necessity of recognizing as well as being recognized by the other []. (1991:196)

The constitution of identity through the acknowledgement and celebration of the past translates into Beloved’s insistence on being named. When seducing Paul D, she insists that he name her:

You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name. Call me my name. Please call it. (117)

Beloved’s memories of the ‘dark’ place of death reflect the historical significance of the absence of her name. In a conversation with Denver she recollects

‘Why you call yourself Beloved?’

Beloved closed her eyes. ‘In the dark my name is Beloved’.

Denver scooted a little closer. ‘What’s it like over there, where you were before? Can you tell me?’

'Dark,' said Beloved. 'I'm small in that place. I'm like this here.' She raised her head off the bed, lay down on her side and curled up. Denver covered her lips with her fingers. 'Were you cold?' Beloved curled tighter and shook her head. 'Hot. Nothing to breathe down there and no room to move in.' 'You see anybody?' 'Heaps. A lot of people is down there. Some is dead.' 'You see Jesus? Baby Suggs?' 'I don't know. I don't know the names.' She sat up. (75)

Beloved's name serves as a symbolic connection to the ancestors. The reader never learns what Beloved's real name is, and this functions as a strong link to the nameless 'Sixty Million and more'. The name by which the reader knows her speaks not only of the loving remembrances due to the dead ancestors, but also of the manner in which western ideologies and systems of power have silenced African conventions, traditions, beliefs and rituals. Beloved's death and grave are marked by Christian liturgy and ritual – 'Dearly Beloved ...' (5) – and not by the memorials and rituals of African traditions.

The third kind of hermeneutics that Caputo identifies in Foucault's work is a hermeneutics of response and redress, along with which he envisions a therapeutics of healing gestures. He says that 'there is nothing in what Foucault says that opposes 'a strategy of cure'; it is simply not his subject' (259). I read Denver in this context as representative of healing, and I focus my reading on her association with salvation and forgiveness. Denver represents a successful constitution of identity, one which acknowledges and celebrates the past without being dependent on it for self-actualization. I also read Denver in relation to Morrison's apparent self-contradictory postscript.

Caputo reminds one that 'madness is also a being-disturbed ... a way of suffering that causes pain' (1993:259) and that 'the mad' need healing: "Their cry of pain is also a cry for help" (1993:259). That all Morrison's characters are in tremendous psychological and emotional pain is clear from the start of the novel. This is proven by Sethe's need to 'lay it all down' (86), Baby Suggs' retreat from the world to 'ponder[] color' (4), Denver's wishing for 'salvation' (29), Paul D's decision to 'love just a little bit' (92) and Beloved's dreams of 'exploding and being swallowed' (131). They are in need of help to constitute and understand themselves in terms of their personal and communal histories. Sethe needs the community to help her exorcise Beloved and the destructive influences of her past. Beloved needs the help of Sethe and Denver to be acknowledged, remembered and honoured. Paul D needs help

to learn to love more than ‘just a little bit’ (29), and Denver needs the help of the community to become emotionally strong, independent and freed from the memories and experiences of other people.

Denver can be read as a continuation – or fulfilment – of the potential that Sethe discovers in herself during the 28 days of freedom before the murder. Like Sethe, Denver also flees from her confinement. While Sethe’s confinement is slavery, Denver is confined by Sethe’s memories and past actions. Like Sethe, Denver also seizes the agency needed to save herself. Sethe flees from Sweet Home, and Denver leaves 124 Bluestone Road to educate herself – first as a young child to attend Lady Jones’ school and later to work in Cincinnati and possibly go to college. Both Sethe and Denver construct their identities around independence and freedom. Denver’s sense of pride and accomplishment after her first visits to Lady Jones’ school is similar to Sethe’s feelings after being reunited with her children and Baby Suggs:

[Denver] was seven and those two hours in the afternoon were precious to her. Especially so because she had done it on her own and was pleased and surprised by the pleasure and surprise it created in her mother and her brothers. (102).

I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle. Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own. Decided. And it came off right, like it was supposed to. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn’t no accident. (162)

As Sethe did after her arrival at Baby Suggs’ house, Denver also creates a new identity for herself when she leaves home to work in Cincinnati. Yet, unlike Sethe, Denver – who does not have to navigate the memories and rememories of a life spent under slavery – has a healthy relationship with the past, in the sense that she neither ‘disremembers’ (118) nor wallows in the pain and losses of the past. Denver transcends her personal history and her roots in slavery, to emerge in control of her present life, cognisant of her past, and enthusiastic about her future.

From early in the novel, Denver is associated with the idea of salvation. Initially the reader sees her waiting to be saved – Paul D tells Sethe that Denver has ‘got a waiting way about her [] ... [s]omething she’s expecting’ (41). She dreams of salvation in the safe house she creates in the boxwood bushes that grow behind Sethe’s house:

First a playroom (where the silence was softer), then a refuge (from her brothers’ fright), soon the place became the point. In that bower, closed off from the hurt of the hurt world, Denver’s imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness

wore her out. *Wore her out.* Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish. (29)

In the course of the novel, Denver grows from the one in need of salvation, to her own and her mother's saviour:

... it was [Denver] who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't they all would. (239)

... Denver decided to do the necessary. Decided to stop relying on kindness
Somebody had to be saved, but unless Denver got to 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. (252)

Initially Denver associates Beloved with the salvation for which she has been waiting. She needs Beloved's attention to be constituted as an individual. When Beloved leaves her alone in the cold house Denver cries 'because she has no self' (123). Beloved lends Denver a context within which she can define herself, since after Beloved's arrival, Denver conceptualises herself as a caretaker, babysitter, friend, protector, educator and, finally, sister, whereas before Beloved, she was lonely, disconnected and alienated. Through Beloved, Denver feels herself constituted and vibrantly alive:

... Beloved rested cheek on knuckles and looked at Denver with attention. It was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other. Having her hair examined as a part of her self, not as material or a style. Having her lips, nose, chin caressed as they might be if she were a moss rose a gardener paused to admire. Denver's skin dissolved under that gaze and became soft and bright She floated near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what there was.

...
And to be looked at by [Beloved], however briefly, kept [Denver] grateful for the rest of the time when she merely was the looker. (118-119)

At the end of the novel, Denver succeeds in breaking away from her destructive need to have her identity constituted from outside. According to Schapiro (1991:206), 'ultimately Denver is able to escape the narcissistic vacuum' and '[e]xcluded from the Beloved-Sethe dyad, [she] is forced into the role of the outsider, and assuming that role is her salvation'. In this salvationist moment of escape, which Morrison calls 'step[ping] off the edge of the world' (239), 'Denver for the first time begins to experience the contours of her own separate self' (Schapiro, 1991:206). Schapiro continues:

Self-recognition is inextricably tied up with self-love, and this is precisely the message of the sermons that Baby Suggs preaches to her people in the Clearing. In a white society that does not recognize or love you, she tells them, you must fight to recognize and love yourself. (206)

Otten (1989) agrees with a reading that interprets Denver as emblematic of the (re)discovery both of self-love and self-determination, as well as communal reconciliation and healing. He says:

Once Denver begins to comprehend the enormity of Sethe's love and experience 'shame' for her mother's suffering, she herself becomes morally alive. She can assume responsibility and reunite others in the struggle to restore wholeness to a fallen community. (92)

Denver's potential to reconstitute herself in connection to, but not in reliance upon, the past is apparent in her lack of interest in stories that do not revolve around her (62). The story of her own birth is what she fixates on, and this later becomes indicative of her rebirth into the new self-sufficient and self-confident Denver, who – like her namesake Amy Denver – travels to the city to reconstruct her identity. Of the novel's trinity of major characters, Denver is the only one who manages effectively to negotiate the trauma of the past, of which she partakes – unlike Sethe and Beloved – second-hand. Sethe and Beloved, on the other hand, are fixated on stories of the painful past, which lead to their inability to function independently outside of their memories. Sethe is caught up in a destructive cyclical dependence on the past, as she believes that the pain of the past returns and is inescapable. She tells Denver:

Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my memory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. ... The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over – over and done with – it's going to always be there waiting for you. ... (36)

Bouson (2000) (also Otten, 1989:81) read this passage as significant in the understanding of the trauma of *Beloved*:

There remains at the center of the trauma survivor, as Dori Lamb has remarked, 'a danger, a nightmare, a fragility, a woundedness ...'. ... Sethe's account of her 'memory' – that is, her uncontrolled remembering and reliving of emotionally painful experiences – recalls descriptions of a visual form of memory that trauma investigators refer to as traumatic memory. (135)

Both Sethe and Beloved are unable to extract themselves from their memories of, and involvement with, the past. Beloved's traumatization – her own murder and the murder of the millions of ancestors – is depicted in her fragmented and dissociated

'song' that forms the 'moment of historical recollection and narrative rememory of the collective experience of the Middle Passage' (Bousoon, 2000:153). Interestingly, Beloved's rememory of this experience corresponds with her earlier rememory, which she tries to explain to Denver, of the 'dark place' (74) beyond death from which she returns to Sethe. Both experiences are remembered for the same traumatic aspects of darkness, heat, cramped bodies, thirst and an inability to breathe.

Throughout the novel, Denver is also associated with forgiveness. She succinctly summarizes the destructive relationship of Beloved and Sethe as revolving around a need for forgiveness:

It was as though Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out. (253)

Moglen (1997:12) notes that

Denver realizes that the desire of each [Beloved and Sethe] to return to a place in which she can merge with and possess the other initiates a life-and-death struggle that neither can survive.

Early in the novel Denver, like Sethe later, is represented as seeking Beloved's forgiveness and acceptance through various pacifying actions and gestures:

Blinking fresh tears Denver approached Beloved – eager for a word, a sign of forgiveness. (105)

Denver's need for forgiveness from Beloved, like Sethe's, is in response to her own feelings of guilt. Sethe feels guilty because she killed her child. Denver feels guilty that she escaped unscathed from their mother's attack, while her sister died. As I have shown in Chapter One, Beloved functions as a connection to the millions of African ancestors who died as slaves. Denver, conversely, stands for those in post-bellum and modern America, who survived slavery to live as free women and men. Reading *Beloved* as a 'purging of the guilt of the American psyche' (Heinze & Lewis, 1994:171-187) implies a recognition, not only of the collective historical guilt of American whites for what was done to enslaved Africans and their ancestors, but also of the guilt of modern African Americans for their disconnection and 'disremembering' (118) of their painful history. Denver's ambivalent feelings about her birth – as a free person – on the banks of the Ohio exemplify her emotional confusion:

This was the part of the story [her birth] that she loved. ... she loved it because it was all about herself; but she hated it too because it made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver, had to pay it. But who she owed or what to pay it eluded her. (77)

In the novel's postscript, Morrison seemingly contradicts herself. Though she says that the story of *Beloved* 'was not a story to pass on' (275), her telling of the story belies this statement (Kella, 2000:228). Morrison uses the past tense to indicate that this *was* not a story to pass on, as African Americans actively attempted to divorce themselves from the painful truth of their past. The implication of her postscript is, however, that something has changed, and that it now *is* something to pass on, as she 'attempts to transform the shame and pain of slavery into artistic pride' (Bouson, 2000:162) through the novel. Denver is the catalyst for this change. *Beloved*'s story becomes worthy of being passed on because of Denver's redemptive role in the novel. Because of Denver's embodiment of hope for the future, the story of *Beloved* and the now reconstituted and remembered slave ancestors *must* be passed on at all cost, to ensure the preservation of the valuable - and increasingly valued - wisdom that is to be derived from African American history. Schapiro (1991) notes that

[t]he poignancy of *Beloved*'s story/self is that it is *not* a story/self. She has been denied the narrative of her being, the subjectivity and continuity of inner experience that should be everyone's birthright. (209)

Denver reclaims this birthright for all African Americans. Through Denver the novel becomes a 'healing ritual' (Christian, 1993) and a 'fixing ceremony' (Morrison: 86).

It is through her that a hopeful future is envisioned at the end of the novel, since it is Denver who sets in motion the chain of events that leads to the exorcism of *Beloved*. In reaching out to her community, Denver is responsible for healing the schism that separated the community from Sethe. The community transcends its fear and suspicion of Sethe, who symbolizes the 'deeper rupture' that the rest of them 'prefer to ignore' (Caputo: 259). Caputo says:

The disturbing thing about the mad is the nagging fear that they are 'at-tuned' to something, to some deep set dis-sonance, from which the rest of 'us' seek to be protected. We are apprehensive that, living at the margins of normal life, *in extremis*, the mad have been exposed to something the rest of us prefer to ignore. 'We' are beset by an apprehensiveness that our sane, healed, whole lives mask a deeper rupture, that the tranquillity of the sane is acquired only by repressing the 'up-set' of the mad. (1993:259)

Morrison's novel can be read as a healing gesture in itself. *Beloved* speaks of a 'common fate' of existential angst and uncertainty. It 'affirms our community and solidarity' and tells us that '[we] are not alone, that our common madness is a matter of degree, that we are all siblings in the same 'night of truth' (Caputo, 1993:260). In reading this novel, the reader is 'put into question by the mad, ... interrogated by

them. . . . We are instructed by them, they have set foot where the sane fear to tread' (Caputo, 1993:260). In the final instance – and through the character of Denver – *Beloved* is an articulation of, and insistence upon, compassion and forgiveness. Denver is the personification of a 'transcendence' and of 'the capacity to move beyond a particular historical constitution' (Caputo, 1993:255).

Chapter Three

**Reading non-dualism as therapeutics of healing in *Beloved*:
a literary application of Julia Martin's ideas on healing alternatives.**

... acknowledging the extraordinary suffering of our world, we
are committed to transforming it.

- Julia Martin
'On Healing Self/Nature'
(1996:104)

... 'Can't nothing heal without pain, ...'.

- Toni Morrison
Beloved
(1988:78)

Julia Martin (Lykke and Braidotti, 1996) views human suffering and pain as an 'illness' or 'disease' that needs to be cured/healed and conceptualizes this disease as an attachment to dualistic ways of thinking:

'[D]evelopment' ha[s] seriously impoverished both people and natural ecosystems. ... First World models of so-called development have fuelled in many people precisely the 'self's' insatiable clinging and grasping that ... binds us into the suffering of dualistic existence. (115)

She investigates 'healing alternatives' to systems of dualism and othering (105) against the background of Buddhist existential philosophy and the concept of non-dualism. She focuses on two feminist images, namely the mother goddess and the cyborg, as alternatives to the oppressive and exclusionary binary categories of western patriarchal discourse. She states that if a move towards 'a non-exploitive, non-dualistic, whole, healthy, compassionate world seems unattainably utopian, we can always start small ... liberating at least some space for creative engagement' (104).

In the context of Martin's concerns, I read *Beloved* as such a 'small start' to 'creative engagement' (104) with alternative healing practices. Morrison has said that she writes 'about love and ... how to survive whole in a world where we are all of us, in some measure, victims of something' (Morrison in Joyner, 2002:243-247). In depicting characters who struggle to become whole/healed, Morrison engages with a deep human need for liberation, not only from physical suffering, but also from the psychological and existential struggle that engages every aspect of human existence. In *Beloved*, Morrison represents the struggle for liberation from suffering in the context of a specific cultural, historical and familial situation, but the very specificity of the narrative also signifies the interconnectedness of all things, since it provides an

articulation of a greater, global, non-dualistic human need for liberation and healing. In this chapter, I base my reading of *Beloved* on Martin's understanding of the concepts 'healing' and 'illness' and her framework of four 'very simple ideas' on suffering, the self, and methods of cure (105). I also investigate Morrison's engagement with the two alternative feminist images mentioned above. Before I apply Martin's ideas to *Beloved*, I begin by situating them in relation to the theories with which I engaged in Chapters One and Two, namely those of Douglas and Caputo. I do this in order to emphasize the similarities of concern - with healing - in their work.

Mary Douglas's 'Two Bodies' theory revolves around the symbolic relationship between the physical and the social body. Martin acknowledges this 'interdependence' (111) and situates it in the framework of Buddhist philosophy, which holds that 'nothing has a stable essence [and] all things arise dependently' (109). She uses the term 'dependent co-arising' to signify the interdependence of the individual and her/his community/society/environment. As Douglas does, Martin theorizes that all seemingly isolated and independent actions and events take shape, and take place, within specific contexts, simultaneously contributing in complex and dynamic ways to the constitution of a variety of interrelated contexts. In Chapter Two, I explain how Sethe's understanding of herself and her place in the world, and her resultant actions, are constituted by the complex contextual network of her history, time and place, and its ideological and material formulations on, and expressions of, power, namely slavery, racism and patriarchy (Ryan, 2000:389 and Otten, 1993:651 & 664).

Whereas Martin is in agreement with Douglas about the interconnectedness of the physical and the social, the individual and the community, her ideas around healing alternatives correspond with Caputo's analysis of progressive Foucaultian hermeneutics. As explained in Chapter Two, Caputo bases a tragic hermeneutics of identity on the idea that a 'truth' has been lost and must be recovered. He recognizes that, for Foucault, this truth is located in the moment before reason and unreason were split apart, thus a moment of non-dualism that transcends the limiting and confining categories of western traditions of thinking. Martin also interrogates 'truth' and says:

The concept of [] Truths ... is a useful beginning as it points simultaneously to the conventional truth of entities and objects and the ultimate truth of emptiness. Perhaps we can learn from this a way of grounding the work of healing and compassion in two ways of seeing,

both of which are 'true': things are at once both 'empty/interconnected' (not two) and 'real' (the myriad things). ... According to this, insight into non-dualism does not conflict with recognizing difference and particularity. (117)

Caputo's second kind of hermeneutics is also based on non-dualism, though it is conceptualized differently. In this hermeneutic paradigm there are no 'either/or' categories, but rather an inclusive statement of 'neither/nor' or 'both/and', thus suspending definitive categorization and interrogating western binary systems of thinking. Caputo calls this a hermeneutics of refusal and difference, which holds that there 'is no capitalized Truth' (1993:233) and corresponds with Martin's 'ultimate truth of emptiness' (117). This emptiness is 'a negation of ... extremes' (Martin: 109) and is equated with dependent co-arising or interrelatedness:

Manifesting only in relationships, all 'things', including the 'self' are devoid of essence, empty of self-existence. (109)

An acknowledgement of this emptiness leads to 'curing the habitual attachment to an illusory world of subjects and objects' (Martin: 108). Martin's 'truth of emptiness' corresponds with Caputo's reading of a hermeneutics of refusal and difference as insistent upon the impossibility of definitive identification. She is in agreement with him when she states that 'the idea that anyone can claim an absolute vantage point for 'truth' is ... an illusion' (104). Caputo views the illusory nature of 'truth' as a depth of negativity (1993:252) that makes all things possible. He sees it as 'living with the untruth ... that there is no capitalized Truth' and knowing 'that we do not know who we are ...' (1993:233).

The negotiation of identity and a concept of self are important aspects of both Caputo's understanding of a hermeneutics of refusal and difference and Martin's ideas on suffering and healing. Martin explains that it is 'the 'self's' insatiable clinging and grasping that ... binds us into the suffering of dualistic existence' (115). She says:

[t]he traditional response to the problem of suffering is to identify its cause in desire and attachment, and to propose a practical path of liberation which seeks to remove this suffering by eradicating or transforming the cause. Like much of postmodernism this perspective sees the imaginary construction of the 'self' as an entity in opposition to a world of others as being at the root of people's social/psychological/spiritual malaise. Motivated by the desire to establish our solidarity as a separate 'I', we are bound as 'subjects' into patterns of clinging to 'objects' or pushing them away. ... Buddhism recognizes selfhood's desire as being insatiable. But instead of seeing the suffering it involves as being without remedy, the whole purpose of the teaching is healing, liberation. 'Health' in this context means waking up from the dream of separateness into an awareness that the nature of mind (including all phenomena) is non-dual. (108)

Caputo envisages his third kind of hermeneutics emerging from the first two and calls it a hermeneutics of response and redress. He sees it as constitutive of a therapeutics of 'healing gestures' (1993:234). At this point Caputo moves beyond theory towards healing practices that are focused on real human experiences of pain and suffering (1993:259). Martin is again in agreement with Caputo in her insistence on the transcendence of theory and the development of practical approaches to transformational (104) and healing alternatives (105). She describes her academic project as a 'transgressive experiment' aimed at reconnecting theory with practical experience (110) in order to facilitate the release from real 'suffering that causes pain' (Caputo, 1993:259). She says that 'acknowledging the extraordinary suffering of our world, we are committed to transforming it' (104). In an attempt to facilitate this transformative healing process she engages an alternative vision – of Buddhist-based non-dualism and emptiness – which is aimed at 'empower[ing] people with real alternatives' (104). She says:

[T]he teaching of emptiness is ... described as being a medicine, or ... [a] device to expunge the disease ... of attachment ... so that human beings are released from their misery. (109)

She advocates a holistic 'systems approach' (104) understanding of health and healing that moves away from 'the dominant medical paradigm[']s ... atomizing focus on disease and illness [which] has no full understanding of *health*' (104). According to Martin

[C]ontemporary interpretations of Buddhist teaching ... all approach the subject of healing and liberation from the assumption that 'personal' distress and global eco-social crisis are interdependent. (111)

When read from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy, health is thus more than just physical well being, it is the transcendence of suffering. Martin says:

If the disease we are concerned with manifests itself as enormous personal/global suffering and exploitation, then our task ... demands that we recognize the possibility of something more. (108)

Both Martin and Caputo locate alternative healing practices in religion and spirituality. Caputo views religious traditions as apt avenues for the development and application of healing gestures, because

the healing gesture handed down to us by the best religious traditions is not analytical objectification, not minute, ruminating subjectification; the great healing gesture that sweeps down over us in Buddhism is called the 'great compassion' and in the New Testament 'forgiveness'. (261)

While Caputo reads healing in the similarities that exist between religious traditions of the West (Christianity) and the East (Buddhism), Martin focuses exclusively on Buddhism and the curative/healing potential encapsulated in its principle of non-dualism. Martin bases her vision of non-dualistic healing alternatives on four 'very simple ideas' (105) that are grounded on a foundation of Buddhist existential philosophy. They are:

- that suffering and exploitation are facts of our existence which demand a response;
- that a mistaken conception of what is called the 'self', and a misunderstanding of its relation to 'nature', are an important aspect of what goes wrong;
- that for this eco-social-spiritual illness to be cured we need not only analysis of the disease but also an experiential understanding of health
- that transformation cannot take place in the realm of theory – we need practical engagement as well. (105)

Her first idea corresponds with Caputo's vision of a hermeneutics of response and redress. She says that 'Buddhist teaching suggests a response to the master narratives of contemporary theory and a way of deconstructing theory/practice dichotomies' (116). Her understanding of suffering and exploitation as demanding of a response also engages with the extract from *Beloved* that functions as the title of this mini-dissertation. This extract comes from the passage in which Denver relates the tale of her own birth to Beloved. She tells the story of her mother's flight from slavery and of the wild young white girl named Amy Denver who helps her during labour. Denver tells Beloved how Amy 'rubbed Ma'am's feet back to life' (77) and how, upon noticing Sethe's pain and discomfort at this act, she tells her:

... 'Anything dead coming back to life hurts.' (35)

'Good for you. More it hurt more better it is. Can't nothing heal without pain, you know.' (78)

In this passage Morrison presents the reader with the complex power relations inherent in a white person speaking to a black person, and a free person speaking to a slave, but she also represents a transcendence of this complex position of dualism and binary articulation as one woman speaks to another of pain and healing. As Amy discovers the seriousness of Sethe's condition and the extent of her injuries – she is six months pregnant and her back has been mutilated by the slave master's whip – she identifies with Sethe's pain through her own experience of abuse at the hands of 'Mr

Buddy' who 'had a right evil hand too [...] [w]hip you for looking at him straight' (79).

The moment of healing between Sethe and Amy, which is a moment of compassionate and empathetic reaching out and dissolution of boundaries, is interpreted by Denver as a 'friendliness' (29) that is also encapsulated in the name that she shares with Amy. Denver – born in freedom (Otten, 1993:659) and without personal memories of the tortures of slavery – draws romanticized and idealistic conclusions from Sethe's telling of the story of her birth. These conclusions, 'that Sethe never intended' (Peach, 2000:111), revolve around Denver's 'presump[tion] that the majority of white people are like Amy rather than the slave owners' (Peach, 2000:111). This presumption is strengthened in Denver's experience of whiteness in the character of Miss Bodwin, whose employment she enters in order to care for Sethe. Yet the reader, along with Paul D, is left with a vague sense of foreboding at the end of the novel, when Denver tells Paul D that Miss Bodwin – whose statue of a black boy at her back door, bearing the words 'At Yo Service' (255) emphasizes the power relations between black and white, even among abolitionist whites – is 'experimenting' (166) on her by teaching her 'book stuff' and dangling the promise of a college education (266). The reader is left to negotiate the complex reality and the dubious meaning of 'freedom' and 'liberty' within a humanist system that contradict itself in such a manner. Morrison uses Paul D to introduce a sense of guarded realism to the seeming boundless hope that Denver personifies at the closing of the novel: 'Watch out. Watch out. Nothing in the world more dangerous than a white [S]choolteacher' (266).

Read in relation to Caputo and Martin's visions – of response and healing alternatives – Denver's perception of a 'friendliness' between Sethe and Amy functions as a means for Morrison to introduce compassion and empathy as a response to/redressing of/healing gesture for the 'extraordinary suffering of our world' (Martin: 104). This is reinforced by Sethe's perception of this moment that she shares with Amy. Unlike Denver, Sethe has a personal history that is steeped in memories of the tortures of slavery heaped upon black bodies by whites. She sees her connection with Amy as a 'recklessness born of desperation' (78) to which she is encouraged by 'Amy's fugitive eyes and tenderhearted mouth' (78). Amy's 'tenderhearted mouth' points to a compassionate nature that corresponds with the physical healing she brings to Sethe. A runaway herself, her 'fugitive eyes' are

indicative of her empathetic sharing of the pain and suffering that the fugitive slave experiences. Peach (2000) (also Atwood, 1987:1) points out that

Amy introduces a subtext of slavery which has often been ignored and which develops Morrison's concern with the capitalist origins of the slave trade. In Amy's own tortured body there is literally and metaphorically a history of the slavery endured by poor, working-class whites, whose treatment at the hands of their masters was not so dissimilar as Sethe discovers from her own. (111)

In this engagement between Sethe and Amy, Morrison presents the reader with a complex representation of response/redress/healing gestures. She not only presents it as a compassionate and empathetic connection between individuals from different binary categories (white/black), but also as collusion towards active rebellion (Kella, 2000:199) against that which causes the 'extraordinary suffering of our world' (Martin: 104). Morrison writes:

There on a summer night surrounded by bluefern they did something together appropriately and well ... a slave and a barefoot whitewoman with unpinned hair ... wrapping a ten-minute-old baby in the rags they wore. (84)

It is significant that these two women reach out to each other at a point when both have actively attempted to liberate themselves from subjection and oppression. By seizing the agency needed for the constitution of their respective subjectivities, both engage – individually and in collusion – in the subversion of hegemonic systems of socio-cultural and economic power such as racism, slavery and patriarchy. Through their subversive actions Amy and Sethe reach out for 'the possibility of something more' (Martin: 108), which holds the promise of their liberation and healing.

In Amy's words to Sethe – 'Can't nothing heal without pain' (78) – Denver recognizes 'a truth for all times' (35). I show in Chapter One and Two that I read Denver as the novel's personification of healing and hope for future generations (Bouson, 2000:160). Denver is born out of the transcendent moment of compassion and empathy between Sethe and Amy. She is emblematic of the potential transcendence of suffering and pain through her transcendence of material and ideological dualisms. She is conceived in slavery, yet she is born in freedom on the banks of the Ohio. She is ostracized and marginalized by her community, yet she brings unity and reconnection to this same community (Otten, 1989:92). She transcends the limits of her historically constituted identity, while simultaneously transcending her physical boundaries in her search for freedom and self-determination. In contradiction to Sethe and *Beloved*, Denver is a figure of self-

empowerment, self-actualization and a healthy reconstruction of individual and communal identity. She signifies a reconstituted past and a promising future, and personifies Caputo's depth of negativity (1993:252) in which everything becomes possible. Thus it is significant that it is through Denver that Morrison communicates the existential 'truth' of this novel, namely that healing comes from pain and suffering.

The second idea on which Martin bases her theory of healing practices is that there is a misconception and/or misunderstanding of the relationship between self and nature. I read the concept 'nature' as indicative of the belief in an inherent quality or essence that makes something or someone that which he/she/it is believed to be. In *Beloved*, Morrison interrogates this self/nature dualism by means of her engagement with stereotypes of motherhood. Convention holds that it is 'natural' for a mother to be a certain way and to do certain things and that it is 'unnatural' to be otherwise and do different things. This supports an existing dualism in which qualities such as selflessness, nurturance, self-sacrifice and protectiveness are associated with motherhood. In this dualistic framework, maternal infanticide is in direct opposition to these traditional and culturally accepted qualities of motherhood. Patricia Pearson (1997) explains that

Our myths about maternal grace – under pressure, pure as nature – are so deeply ingrained that infanticide is the one crime to be all but ignored in discussions of violence. When women ... commit neonaticide [and infanticide], they tend not to be considered women, exactly. In other words, they are not mothers in a culturally understood and celebrated way. Mothers are strong, long-suffering, altruistic, and resourceful. Mothers are never callous, they are not indifferent. (73-74)

In acting in a way that is 'unnatural' – by attempting to kill her children – Sethe transgresses the boundary between that which is socially and morally acceptable and that which is not. She moves from a position in which she conforms with what her society prescribes and encourages – a nurturing maternity – to a position in which she expresses her nurturing maternity in a manner that is proscribed and condemned by her society. Morrison (in Rothstein, 1987:17) describes the precarious boundary of mother love as follows:

One of the nice things that women do ... is nurture and love something other than themselves – they do that rather nicely. Instinctively, perhaps, but they are certainly taught to do it, socialized to do it, or genetically predisposed to it – whatever it is, it's something that I think the majority of women feel strongly about. But mother love is also a killer. Sometimes people say, well, your children become yourself. But it's not that. It's just that they become what [Sethe] says in the book, [and] that's

the best part of me. That's what maternity is. So you do some extraordinary things if that's what you really believe[.] ... You can really control other people's lives. You can tell them when to move and what to do, and part of this is parental obligation and part of it is excessive. And this woman [Sethe] does something during slavery – she was trying to be a parent and a mother and have something to say about her children's lives in a slave system that said to blacks, 'You are not a parent, you are not a mother, you have nothing to do with your children'.

After Sethe tells him of her (attempted) murder of her child(ren), Paul D accuses her of animality. He tells her '[y]ou got two feet Sethe, not four' (165). Paul D's accusation paradoxically conforms to Schoolteacher's racist ideas about the animality of slaves. When – at Sweet Home – Sethe overhears Schoolteacher explaining her 'animal characteristics' to his students, she is motivated to flee slavery for her own sake as well as for her children's. Yet her flight from slavery, its racist ideologies, and its accusations of animality ironically lead her back to a point at which she is again accused of animality. Tragically, the second round of accusations comes from Paul D – her friend, lover and fellow ex-slave – who could be expected to show empathy and compassion for her actions, as he shared and understands the pain and suffering of slavery that drove her to kill her children. Maxwell (2000) (also Kella, 2000:212) note that

Paul D's reaction is 'being filtered through the experiences of a black male slave who, while undergoing his own unique form of torture and degradation, was spared the humiliation of sexual assault and its attendant objectification. Unencumbered by a love for and the needs of dependent children, and 'free' to take care of only himself, Paul D remains somewhat insensitive to the complexity of the situation that had confronted Sethe. (256)

Paul D accuses Sethe of acting in a manner that is alien to human beings, yet both he and Sethe were treated like animals under slavery. This is exemplified by Schoolteacher's association of the treatment of slaves with the treatment of horses and dogs (149). When Sethe's human emotions of love, compassion, empathy and nurturance – which are deemed 'natural' for a mother – drive her to protect her children, she is, ironically, judged to be devoid of these very emotions and of humanity.

The trigger that causes Sethe to attempt the salvational murder of her children is her personal experience of pain and suffering under slavery, combined with her compassion for her children. Ryan (2000:389) says that 'Sethe's actions ... cannot be evaluated outside the context of [] American slavery'. Otten explains (1993):

... Morrison does not just depict an individual's capacity for destructive love, she reenacts historical truth: infanticide was a common occurrence

among slave mothers, at times in rage against malefic white fathers, at times in paradoxical acts of mercy directed toward their children. (657)

Although the practice of infanticide is commonly noted in accounts of slavery, Morrison analyses the psychic anguish that emerges in the perpetrator of the act. Sethe's own mother murdered her children that were fathered by slave owners who demeaned her. (659)

Her (attempted) murder of her child(ren) – meant to ‘prevent [them] from being defined as racially inferior and animalistic’ (Bouson, 2000:137) – can be read as an active response to her own experience of ‘the extraordinary suffering of our world’ (Martin: 104) and as a tragically destructive attempt at a healing gesture in that she attempts to redress the pain and suffering that she knows her children will suffer under slavery. She pre-empts their suffering by bringing to them the only means of protection available to her, namely death – theirs along with her own.

Pearson says that maternal ‘murder-suicides are the direct consequence of a mother who perceives herself to have failed’ (87). When Sethe sees Schoolteacher approaching Baby Suggs’ house, she understands that she has failed as a mother, since she failed to protect her children from the pain, abuse and suffering that slavery will visit upon them. She sees the killing of her children as her last maternal act, a fulfillment of her flight from Sweet Home: ‘I couldn’t let [Beloved] nor any of em live under [S]choolteacher. That was out’ (163), ‘[m]y plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma’am is’ (203). Pearson explains:

[s]cholars sometimes describe infanticide as suicide by proxy and argue that it is altruistically motivated, meaning that the woman is not being possessive and selfish in taking children with her or sending them to death on their own but believes she is tenderly protecting them from hardship. [] It may seem paradoxical [] ... [] but it is not vice that leads to the death of the infant, rather it is morbid and mistaken maternal solicitude []. (87)

Herman and Janoff-Bulman (in Bouson, 2000:135) concur with Pearson’s reading of a sense of failure as the motivation behind many maternal murder-suicides, but adds that ‘shame and self-loathing’ are also aspects of a ‘contaminated identity’ that lead to feelings of being ‘helpless ... [,] sullied and tarnished’. In accordance to this, Sethe expresses her self-concept as one of feeling ‘dirty’: ‘[Whites] dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up’ (251).

Sethe tries to explain her motivation for the killing to Beloved, who is ‘the only person she felt she had to convince, that what she had done was right because it came from true love’ (249). Morrison presents Sethe’s justification as follows

... [Denver] knew Sethe’s greatest fear was ... that Beloved might leave. That before Sethe could make her understand what it meant – what it took to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hands; to hold her face so her head would stay on; to squeeze her so she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through that adored body, plump and sweet with life – Beloved might leave. Leave before Sethe could make her realize that worse than that – far worse – was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing – the part of her that was clean. No undreamable dreams about whether the headless, feetless torso hanging in the tree with a sign on it was her husband or Paul A; whether the bubbling-hot girls in the coloured-school fire set by patriots included her daughter; whether a gang of whites invaded her daughter’s private parts, soiled her daughter’s thighs and threw her out of the wagon. And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter’s characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no. Maybe Baby Suggs could worry about it, live with the likelihood of it; Sethe had refused – and refused still. (251)

Sethe’s justification of the murder corresponds in various ways to modern medical and psychiatric interpretations of ‘postpartum psychosis’, ‘manic-depression’, ‘bi-polar disorder’ and ‘exhaustion psychosis’ (Pearson: 83-84), which Pearson describes as follows:

In a manic psychotic state, a woman might kill her baby optimistically, as in the belief that the child will ascend straight to heaven and become an angel. When bipolar mothers suffer depressive psychotic breaks, feelings of nihilism and despair darken into intensely negative delusions. Women who are depressed, postpartum, ... are conceiving of their children as the bad part of themselves. By killing them, they get the rottenness out. Women who suffer from postpartum depression fall into a different group from those with exhaustion psychosis or manic-depression. They don’t lose touch with reality. They find themselves, instead, overwhelmed by its implications. (83-84)

Had Sethe’s story been set in a time when medical and psychiatric terminology were readily available and commonly used, explanations like the above might well have formed part of her ‘vocabulary of motive’ (Pearson: 86). Though Sethe has much in common with the above descriptions, her situation – historically specific to the period of American chattel slavery – is also different. For example, her fears for her children under slavery are based on reality and not delusions. Under slavery, the threat of

rape, murder, physical abuse and torture is a reality of everyday life. She is not overwhelmed by the reality and implications of *motherhood*, as such, but by the reality and implications of her inability, as a mother, to protect her children from slavery. Sethe further sees her children not as the bad part of herself, but as her ‘best thing’ (251, 273) and thus killing them is, for her, a way to set *them* free of *her* – who had been ‘dirtied’ (251) by slavery – rather than the other way around.

Pearson describes *Beloved* as ‘the closest anyone has come through imaginative power to describing altruistic infanticide ...’ (88). Morrison questions conventional ideas about ‘nature’ and ‘naturalness’ through her depiction of Sethe’s engagement with the concept ‘mother’. Her depiction of Sethe’s (attempted) killing of her child(ren) is tragically ironic, because of the way in which she problematizes the nature/culture and animal/human dualisms. By having Sethe’s maternity and humanity questioned by other (male) characters in the novel – Schoolteacher and Paul D – Morrison succeeds in reinforcing Sethe’s humanity and maternal sentiments, thereby ‘construct[ing] infanticide as a desperate but heroic act of mother love’ (Bouson, 2000:147). Otten (1993) says:

Morrison inverts conventional moral categories. In a world warped and distorted by brutal oppression, innocence can assume a criminal nature, and evil can become a regenerative force. As Morrison herself has observed, sometimes ‘[e]vil is as useful as good’ and ‘[s]ometimes good looks like evil; and sometimes evil looks like good’ []. Throughout her novels, acts of horrific love bear witness to such truth. (664)

She presents the reader with a character that confronts and contradicts racist and patriarchal ideologies that define the other – those that are not white and not male – as less-than-human, thereby suspending and subverting the exclusive binary categories of dualistic systems of thought. She engages with motherhood in order to question the moral and social ‘capitalized Truth(s)’ (Caputo, 1993:233) that defines and confines human identities and interaction. She does this by ‘creat[ing] a counternarrative[] to the slavemaster’s narrative of her animality and wildness’ and presents the reader with ‘a story of inhumanity [that] has been overwritten as a story of higher humanity’ (Bouson, 2000:148).

Martin’s third and fourth ideas are about healing or curing the ‘eco-social-spiritual illness’ (105) of dualism. As explained earlier in this chapter, she views this ‘illness’ as suffering, which is caused by dualistic traditions of thinking, and she advocates an approach grounded in the belief that health will result from a state of non-dualism, ‘interconnectedness’ and ‘emptiness’ (115). Martin understands health

as being about holism, what she calls ‘caring for the whole person’ (116). She sees it as ‘an entity, a goal rather like what one tends to imagine ‘enlightenment’ to be’ (116). Martin proposes specific Buddhist-based practices - namely ‘intellectual analysis of ‘self’, ‘breathing and visualisation’, ‘mindfulness of the minutiae of daily life’, ‘despair work’, ‘bioregionalism’ and ‘the ritual of the Tibetan Great Bliss Queen’ (113) - as ‘examples which are potentially useful for healing self/nature’ (111). Though these practices – of ‘experienced deconstruction of dualism and awareness of ... dependent co-arising’ (111) – and their application to healing as an interrelated and holistic existential concept fall outside of the immediate literary focus of this dissertation, I will conclude this chapter with Martin’s engagement with two alternative counter-ideological feminist images, namely the mother goddess and cyborg. She identifies these as ‘two current forms of critical response to phallogocentric power structures’ (105) and interrogates them for their value as healing alternatives to the oppressive and exclusionary systems of traditional western binary discursivity. I progress with my application of Martin’s ideas to *Beloved* by reading the novel in relation to these images.

I begin by turning my attention to the image of the mother goddess, which Martin views as a ‘response to the simultaneous exploitation/othering/marginalization ... of women and the natural environment’ (106). Though Martin acknowledges that she finds the mother goddess image attractive and ‘productive in some contexts’ (106), she also feels that it is problematic for the following reasons:

Women are said to be closer to nature than are men because of their experiences of the fertility cycle, childbirth, motherhood, and so on. Aside from what it could mean for men, where does this ‘fact of life’ ... leave women who are not mothers? And who are these universal women anyway? Instead of radically challenging the essentialist categories of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ inherited from patriarchal discourse, such approaches tend to retain them. Instead of eradicating the ‘disease’, essentialisms of this kind tend to keep it going, and to let a simple and fundamental and epistemological mistake go unquestioned. [B]y gendering the planet as feminine, as a projection of human ideas about motherhood, as a goddess instead of a sky-god, feminists and environmentalists may well be working against their own ostensible agendas for health and liberation. (107)

Martin sees this image as failing to present an effective non-dualistic healing alternative to the illness of dualism as it inverts rather than subverts dominant ideological traditions and discursive categories. Thus it replaces a denigration of women and femaleness with a different – but potentially equally oppressive and

excluding – system of exaltation of the female through motherhood and its association with nature.

Motherhood is a theme that is of great significance in Morrison's oeuvre and much has been written on this topic (Reyes (1985), Rothstein (1987), Cummings (1990), Schapiro (1991), Badt (1995), Moglen (1997), among others). There are many instances of complex and ambiguous motherhood in her novels. Rhodes (in Bouson, 2000:148) articulates this as Morrison's play on the theme of conflict between 'mother love' and 'mis-love'. Pauline Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*; Eva Peace in *Sula*; Pilate Dead in *Song of Solomon* - who as the earth woman with no navel is Morrison's most transparent depiction of the mother goddess image - Wild and Rose Dear in *Jazz*; Margaret in *Tar Baby*; Mary Magna, Consolata and Mavis in *Paradise* and May in *Love* are all examples of characters that are embroiled in conflicting and conflicted negotiations of motherhood. *Beloved's* Sethe, however, is undoubtedly the epitome of Morrison's engagement with the reality and myth of motherhood. A reading of Morrison's other novels – most notably *Sula*, *Paradise* and *Love* for their 'women who are not mothers' (1993:106) – in relation to Martin's comments regarding the problematics attached to the mother goddess image might prove an interesting future project. Since motherhood is of central importance in *Beloved*, I limit my immediate focus to a reading of motherhood in the novel against the background of the mother goddess as an alternative healing image.

In *Beloved*, Morrison interrogates stereotypes and traditions of the earth mother/mother goddess in her representation of characters that simultaneously conform and deviate from it. In a reading of *Beloved* – based in, but critical of, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory – Helene Moglen (1997) says:

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison lifts the primal mother out of th[e] prelinguistic space and returns her to history, exploring the complexities of her social construction at the same time that she deepens our understanding of the place within the self from which that mythic figure is believed to come. (205)

I have already touched on Morrison's polemical representation of Sethe as mother, who can be read as both a mythical Medea-like destructive and devouring mother figure (Maxwell, 2000:250) (also Otten, 1989:83) as well as the altruistic and nurturing mother of western tradition. The complexity of Morrison's characterization lies in Sethe's altruistic motivations for the murder of her children, which are 'more pure than those of Medea' (Maxwell, 2000:250). Unlike Medea, whose actions are

coloured - along with her desperate concern for her children - with the desire to exact hurtful revenge on her husband, Jason, for deserting her by taking a new wife, Sethe's (attempted) killing of her child(ren) is wholly based in her selfless concern for her children.

Martin cites the following as recognizable characteristics of the mother goddess:

her earth/water power; her mythic connectedness with living systems; her reminder of a forgotten, buried, hoped-for space before patriarchy, of oneness before the fall into division and language She offers ... a powerful counter to the phallus, and ... has been promoted as the image of the Earth as nurturing biosphere. (106)

In correspondence with Martin's list of characteristics, Sethe is associated with water and earth in her capacity as mother. Denver describes her own birth to Beloved, with specific emphasis on the breaking of Sethe's water: 'as soon as Sethe got close to the river her own water broke loose to join it' (83). The joining of Sethe's birth water with the greater source of life – in the form of the Ohio river – represents the circle of life and enfolds Sethe in the maternal image of 'earth/water power' (Martin: 106). In accordance with this symbolism Beloved manifests in embodied form out of water as if she is being reborn to her mother. Morrison describes Sethe's experience of Beloved's rebirth also in terms of water imagery:

[a]nd for some reason she could not immediately account for, the moment she got close enough to see [Beloved's] face, Sethe's bladder filled to capacity. and the water she voided was endless. ... like flooding the boat when Denver was born. But there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now. (51)

Beloved's passage through water does not only signify her rebirth as a human being – spirit become matter – it also symbolizes 'the torturous passage of a slave ship en route to America' (Otten, 1989:84). Beloved's amniotic journey to return to her mother thus also stands for the return of lost and forgotten ancestors to the African American community, where they can be suitably honoured and nurtured.

Sethe's relationship with her children is represented in the flow of maternal body fluids, which alludes to the safety, security and protection of the mother's womb and breast. The oral symbolism of maternal lactation and mother's milk is of central importance in the novel. Sethe's overwhelming preoccupation with providing milk for her babies emphasizes the maternal role of nurturance that transcends biological lactation and becomes emblematic of Sethe's – who herself was denied her own mother's breast – need of motherhood as a means of constituting her own identity

outside of slavery. Moglen notes that '[in] nourishing [her children], she nourishes herself' (Moglen, 1997:209). Maxwell (2000) and Schapiro (1991) note that:

nursing milk is symbolic of the mother-child bond and if Sethe has [] no nursing milk to call her own, she feels without a self to call her own. (Maxwell: 253)

Because the first physical mode of relationship to the mother is oral, the earliest emotional needs in relation to the mother are also figured in oral terms in the child's inner world. Frustration in this first oral stage of relationship leads to what object relations theorists call 'love made hungry', a terrifying greediness in which the baby fears it will devour and destroy mother and, conversely, that mother (due to projection) will devour and destroy the self []. (Schapiro: 198)

When reunited with her children in Baby Suggs' house Sethe's sense of reconstituted family relationships is expressed in terms of lactational nurturance when she breast feeds Beloved for the first time after their reunion (94). After the death of her baby Sethe is again divorced from the feeling of familial unity and maternal contentment, yet she rediscovers it when - euphoric after communing with her lost relatives in a 'fixing ceremony' (86) for Halle in the Clearing, during which she reconnects to the spirit of Baby Suggs - she decides once again to attempt a reconstitution of her family (Atwood, 1987:1) by accepting Paul D and Beloved permanently into her house and heart. In a repetition of her reunion with her children after her flight from slavery, Sethe again defines her identity in terms of her maternal body fluids: 'Just like the day she arrived at 124 - sure enough she had milk enough for all' (100).

Yet, Morrison also depicts the dangers of the 'hungry love' that results from 'the traumatically frustrated first love relationship' (Schapiro, 1991:198): Beloved fears that Sethe will 'chew[] and swallow[] her (213); Beloved is said to have 'swallowed up [Sethe]'s life' (250); and Denver feels that leaving the house and being removed from Beloved is like 'be[ing] swallowed up by the world' (243) and being 'eaten alive by the dark' (123). Schapiro (1991:198) also says that

Beloved's first appearance in her reincarnated form is marked by her excessive drinking, by her downing 'cup after cup of water' (51), while Sethe, suddenly feeling her 'bladder filled to capacity,' lifts her skirts and 'the water she voided was endless' (51). The dynamic suggests a mother being drained by the child's greedy, excessive need.

It is tragically ironic that Sethe ultimately believes that she can only provide security and protection through the killing of her children, as if their deaths will return them to the safety of a maternal uterine-like space where she can fully protect them. The symbolism of the flow of maternal body fluids is also present in Morrison's use of blood in relation to Sethe's maternal role. In Chapter Two I discuss the

significance of Sethe's 28 days – the length of a menstrual cycle – of freedom with her children and the tragic irony of the fact that the blood that flows on the twenty-eighth day is not menstrual blood but the life blood of her child that 'pump[ed] like oil in her hands' (251). Morrison uses an earth-based analogy in describing the way in which Beloved's blood flows through Sethe's hands. Like the earth pumps forth oil, so does Beloved's blood flow through Sethe's hand. As the earth gives up its riches, so does Sethe give up her 'best thing' (251).

In the context of African American history, Sethe is strongly associated with maternal 'earth power' (Martin: 106) through her (lack of) memories of her own slave mother. Moglen (1997) describes the complex maternity of the African American slave woman as follows:

Like animals, [slaves are] granted sexual function but not gender definition. [The slave woman's] worth ... is greater than a male labourer's because she is also, crucially, a breeder: herself property, she reproduces property in her children. [T]he one social function that blacks cannot be denied in the nightmare world of slavery [is] that of mothering. (209)

Her scarcely remembered and unnamed mother is emblematic of a 'forgotten, buried, hoped-for space' (Martin: 106). As one of the 'Sixty Million and more' nameless dead African ancestors Sethe's mother has a haunting influence on this novel and Sethe's psyche. Sethe tries to find her mother through other women who act as surrogates: the slave wet nurse, Nan; the kind-hearted but disabled slave mistress, Mrs Garner; and her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Failing to reclaim her own forgotten, 'hoped-for' (Martin: 106) mother, 'Sethe attempts to fill her absence by providing as mother what she could not be provided as daughter' (Moglen, 1997:209).

The little Sethe knows about her mother comes to her via her first surrogate mother, 'the woman called Nan ... [who] was the one she knew best, who was around all day, nursed babies, cooked And who used different words' (62). Her memories of her mother and Nan's 'different words' connect her with the 'forgotten, buried hoped-for space before ... the fall into division and language' (Martin: 106):

What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language in which she told it? The same language her ma'am spoke, and which would never come back. She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. (62)

Morrison uses Sethe's mother in relation to the image of a utopian nurturing Mother Africa to represent the mythical space and association, which has been lost, replaced and forgotten under the oppression of slavery. Moglen (1997:10) describes Sethe's

memory of her mother as ‘an aching absence’, she is a ‘barely recognizable figure’, and ‘a body [] disfigured in death’. In longing for her mother, Sethe also longs for that ‘other shore’ (Ryan, 2000:389) from which her mother was taken to America.

As mythical Africa, Sethe’s nameless, unidentified and unidentifiable mother is merely a symbol. She wears on her breast the mark of both the ‘oneness before the fall’ (Martin: 106) and the ‘fall into division’ (Martin: 106) itself. Sethe remembers the moment when her mother showed her the mark on her breast, branded on her body by a slave master:

She picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross-burned right in the skin. She said, ‘this is your ma’am. This,’ and she pointed. ‘I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead.’ (61)

She offers her breast to her child in a manner that reminds one of a mother’s feeding of an infant, yet the sustenance that she gives Sethe is ambiguous. From her mother Sethe receives the knowledge of both connection and disconnection. The circle on her mother’s body is a sign of the fullness and promise of the earth and stands for ‘health’ in the sense in which Martin reads it, namely individual wholeness and communal ‘interconnectedness’ (Martin: 116). The cross in the circle is simultaneously a sign of the destruction of this ‘oneness’ (Martin: 106) as a result of the ‘fall into division’ (Martin: 106). As humankind imposed latitudinal and longitudinal divisions on the earth, so did slavery impose division and disconnection on Africans. The two lines that divide the circle into four sections are a sign of division and dualism and relates to Sethe’s own pain and suffering in being divided and removed from her mother, family, history and origins in Africa.

Sethe’s mother carries this knowledge of division on her body and when she tells Sethe ‘you can know me by this mark’ (61), she provides Sethe with a sense of recognition, not only in that Sethe recognizes her origins and associations through her mother’s body, but also in her cognition of the effects and consequences of the slave system. When Sethe asks that she be similarly marked, she expresses the wish to carry a sign of her affiliation on her body. Sethe’s desire to be marked expresses a need for communion, belonging and wholeness, while for her mother the mark is a sign of oppression, suffering, servitude and division.

Only when she has a mark of her own – a whipping scar in the form of a tree on her back – can Sethe understand the complexity of maternal responsibility and

affection. Like her mother's, Sethe's scar is ambiguous. It is a sign of oppression and suffering since it is the result of a brutal whipping, yet it is also a symbol of life, fertility and hope since it looks like a blossoming tree. Through the 'tree on [her] back' (15), Morrison extends Sethe's association with mythical traditions of the earth mother/mother goddess. Both Sethe and her mother wear signs of their 'mythic connectedness with living systems' (Martin: 106) on their bodies, yet both their lives speak of death and destruction. Through her memories of her mother Sethe is connected to the millions of dead African ancestors and through her children she is associated with death and disconnection.

Sethe's mother-in-law and second surrogate mother, the lay preacher Baby Suggs, represents a further 'mythic connectedness with living systems' (Martin: 106) in the novel, yet even here Morrison questions, contradicts and dismantles traditional mothering stereotypes. Baby Suggs is represented in relation to nature through her preaching in the Clearing, 'a wide-open place cut deep in the woods' (87). Her selfless nurturance of, and service to, her community is presented through the direct association of her 'great heart' (87) with the wide-open space of the Clearing. Her sermons on love stand in stark contrast to the 'whitepeople[']s belie[f] that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle' (198). Bousoon (2000:159) (also Kella, 2000:43) observes that Morrison's juxtaposition of the whitepeople's jungle with Suggs' Clearing is a 'countershaming maneuver' that 'locates the source of black shame in white-projected constructions of blackness':

In reprojecting shaming racist stereotypes of the animalistic, savage African Other back onto its white source and thus recording whiteness as violence, the narrative works to actively counteract racist ideology and discourse. (159)

Since the mother goddess stands in opposition to the hierarchic and exclusive dogmatic traditions of western religion, Baby Suggs subverts these same traditions through her 'unchurched', 'uncalled, unrobed, unanointed' (87) injunction to love the - physical and communal - black body:

Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed. 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. Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an unchurched preacher. When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great big heart to the Clearing In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees. (87)

As discussed in Chapter One, Morrison uses Baby Suggs as a vehicle for her message of individual as well as communal healing and love. Her calling of the community resembles Christ's calling of the children in Matthew 19:14:

'Let the children come!' ... 'Let the grown men come,' Finally she called the women to her. (87-88)

Children are traditionally associated with hope for the future, yet Baby Suggs' hope for the reconstitution of her people and their history takes a tragic turn when Sethe attempts to kill her children. Despite Baby Suggs' connection with hope, life and living systems through her sermons in the Clearing, her personal experiences, like those of Sethe, speak only of death, disconnection and alienation. She loses her own eight children through the slave system and after Sethe's (attempted) murder of her grandchild(ren), Baby Suggs retreats into a world of her own, removed from human contact and interaction:

Baby Suggs didn't even raise her head [when Howard and Bugler left]. ...
 . . . Suspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead, she couldn't get interested in leaving life or living it (4)

Morrison employs both Sethe and Baby Suggs as 'powerful counter[s] to the phallus' (Martin: 106) in that both challenge the ideological and material Laws of the Fathers that control the hierarchical power systems of racism, slavery and patriarchy. Sethe does this by means of her violent act, while Baby Suggs does it through her preaching. Yet, in the final instance both Baby Suggs and Sethe tragically fail to conform to the stereotype of the protective, nurturing and healing mother. Both are finally subjected to the power and destruction of dualistic systems of power. While employing the mother goddess in relation to Sethe and Baby Suggs, Morrison also shows that the image is a reinforcement of traditional dualistic categories. Instead of subverting dualistic patterns, the binary categories are inverted and reversed, thereby exalting that which has traditionally been reviled and *vice versa*. Thus 'female' is exalted, sanctified and honoured by means of the mother goddess image, where it was debased and reviled under patriarchal power structures, yet it brings no release from the suffering and oppression of systems of dualism. In fact, it leads to Sethe's reproduction of destructive patterns of ownership in her assumption of control over the lives and bodies of her children in a manner that is similar to the way in which her own life and body was controlled under slavery. Baby Suggs' exaltation of her people's 'black flesh' (88) in her sermon and her subsequent revulsion at 'whitefolks'

(89) is similarly a destructive inversion of racist dualisms rather than a constructive subversion thereof. Morrison's engagement with the mother goddess image in *Beloved* thus shows that - despite the fact that it appears to challenge racist and patriarchal discourses - feminist and anti-racist counter-discourses that invert rather than subvert traditional power hierarchies fail to replace dualism with non-dualism, thus perpetuating the 'illness' and suffering of humankind and amplifying the need for healing.

Finding the mother goddess useful in some respects, yet also flawed as a healing alternative, Martin investigates another, more modern yet equally mythical image, namely the cyborg. Martin explains the origins of the cyborg image as follows:

Since its appearance in Donna Haraway's 'Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism' (1985), the image of the playful, blasphemous cyborg which inhabits the networks of hi-tech culture has provoked some important discussions among feminists. Haraway suggests that the hierarchical dualisms and dichotomies which have persistently characterized the discourse of the West, and sanctioned its systems of othering, are now being significantly challenged by the polymorphous world of information systems. The figure of the cyborg is of one who moves playfully, ironically, non-innocently beyond the old identities of human, animal or machine, deconstructing the phallogocentric definitions of 'selfhood', 'woman' or 'nature' among many others. (107)

Martin finds the cyborg image useful since it 'enables us to shift perspective on received boundaries' (107), but she also sees it as flawed in that 'the deconstructive (liberated?) play of the high-tech cyborg is inextricably networked into global systems of control and exploitation' (108). It is, however, specifically its position within these global networks that imbues the cyborg image with its counterhegemonic potential. I read Martin's criticism of this image in relation to her emphasis on finding *practical* means by which to address and transform the 'extraordinary suffering of our world' (104). She is correct in her understanding of the limited applicability of the cyborg image in the face of the realities of the living condition of the greater part of the world's inhabitants. Martin says:

... [P]eople are living without electricity or adequate sanitation, collecting firewood for the evening meal, living without books, without the written word. In recent decades the lives and environments of such people have been steadily impoverished by the business/money/power relations of Northern-style development which make computers, laser games and biotechnology possible. (107)

She says '[the cyborg image] is an exciting approach' (107) but asks: 'who in fact profits from it? And who, or what, bears the cost?' (107). Martin means that the

image is useful in a theoretical sense - and even in a practical sense for those who live in daily contact with the tools and apparatuses of hi-tech science and technology, such as computers, telephones, fax machines, televisions, satellite dishes, cars, airplanes, cellular phones, high quality medical care and the variety of discourses and practices that they introduce to one's life. It is, however, of little use to groups and individuals who do not even have access to electricity or sanitation, and who are involved in a daily battle for physical survival, rather than a 'border war' (Haraway, 1983) between dominant and subversive forces of ideological discursivity.

Though conceived in a feminist and socialist context, the inability of the cyborg image to unconditionally transcend boundaries of gender, race and class specificity emphasizes the vast distances that need to be covered before theory and practice can be united in the 'healing' and 'liberation' (Martin: 109) of humanity. Haraway is aware of the theoretical and practical incompatibility of the cyborgian image. Partly in response to this dilemma, she calls the cyborg an 'ironic dream', for 'it is not innocent' – it is not aimed at the altruistic enabling of human release from suffering – and 'it does not seek unitary identity and so [it] generates antagonistic dualisms' (1983), thus contributing to the creation of a 'network ideological image, suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the actual personal body and the body politic' (1983).

Despite the differences of opinion regarding the practical and theoretical usefulness of the cyborg as an image, Martin and Haraway are in agreement on the need for alternatives to the historical oppressive dualisms that define and confine human thought, action and interaction. Haraway says:

Certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systematic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all others. Chief among these dualisms are self/other The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the service of the other; the other is the one who holds the future, who knows that by the experience of domination, which gives the lie to the autonomy of the self. To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other, is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many. (1983)

Martin cites the following teachings of Nagarjuna, a second-century Buddhist scholar, and Seng Ts'an, the Third Zen Patriarch:

When this is, that is;
This arising, that arises;
When this is not, that is not;

This ceasing, that ceases.
(109)

and

In this world of Suchness
There is neither self nor other-than-self.
To come directly into harmony with this reality
Just simply say when doubts arise, 'Not two.'
In this 'not two' nothing is separate,
Nothing is excluded.
(111)

There is a clear and significant correspondence between Martin's conceptualization of non-dualism as an emptiness and/or interconnectedness and Haraway's ideas on self/other. Though speaking from different discursive positions – environmentalism and spirituality/religion in the case of Martin and materialist-feminism and Marxism in the case of Haraway – the similarities between their visions for a healthy future are greater than the differences.

Reading *Beloved* for traces of the cyborg image is an anachronistic project. The narrative is set in an era that predates the modern technological and information systems of our own time that paradoxically necessitate and construct the cyborg image. Yet I believe that *Beloved* lends itself to an analysis in terms of the feminist discourse of cyborgism because of Morrison's postmodern concerns with the construction and significance of 'identity' and 'self', her exploration of women's experiences of oppressive systems of material and ideological power, and the constitution and violent enforcement of various forms of boundaries and limitations. Schapiro (1991) notes that the entire narrative is concerned with boundaries:

... as a whole [the novel] is characterized by a fluidity of boundaries, by a continuously altering narrative perspective that slides in and out of characters' minds, by a multiple, by a mutable, nonsequential time structure, and by an absence of the conventional lines between fantasy and reality. (202)

Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1983) focuses on the identity crisis that modern human beings experience as a result of the intrusion of science and technology into human existence. She sees this identity crisis as political in nature, as it revolves around constantly changing relations of domination and power and the questioning of existent boundaries and borders of thought, knowledge, ethics, experience, and human embodiment. She employs the mythical figure of science fiction – the cyborg – as an image for modern human beings: hybrids that emerge from the confusion of boundaries between human and machine, and from the inability to distinguish the biological from the mechanical, scientific, and technological. In interrogating the

'border war' (1983) of human engagement with science and technology, Haraway engages with non-dualism by insisting on 'multiple, non-reducible sources of insight and practice' and the 'contradictory', 'partial', 'strategic' (Haraway, 1983), elusive and non-unitary reality of identity.

Read in relation to Haraway's cyborgian concerns, *Beloved* can be viewed as a representation of a historically-specific political identity crisis that is both personal and public, individual and communal. Sethe's attempts, after her flight from Sweet Home, to reconstitute her identity as a free woman, mother, and functional, productive member of her community signifies the greater post-abolition liberation project of African American social-cultural reconstitution. Embedded in this identity crisis is the challenge of reformulating a self-concept and identity that transcend the slave system's dehumanizing investment of meaning and value exclusively in the materiality of slave bodies for their potential as mechanisms of labour and production.

Though 'science' and 'technology' might seem to be modern constructs – specifically when read in terms of Haraway's thoughts on their modern cutting-edge manifestations, such as genetic engineering, molecular biology and cybernetics – our contemporary understanding of these terms developed against the background of a tradition of historically-specific (re)interpretations of what constituted science and technology during specific historical epochs. Reading Haraway's interest in contemporary manifestations of science and technology as one element of a larger historical continuum opens an avenue for reading *Beloved* in terms of the scientific and technological manifestations of its historical specificity.

Beloved is historically set in nineteenth-century America during the revolutionary movement from agriculturalism to capitalism, industrialism, and mechanization. In the midst of this material and ideological revolution, slavery stands at the pivotal junction of conflicting theories and practices – racist and abolitionist. Morrison uses Schoolteacher and the Bodwins as emblematic of the contrasting 'sciences' of slavery and abolition. Schoolteacher – whom Atwood (1987:1) describes as a 'Goebbels-like paragon' and Otten (1989:86) calls 'a Dr Mengele' – is styled in the tradition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's character Simon Legree (Atwood, 1987:1), who represents 'the ultimate brutalisation that slavery permits' (Kristensen, 1995:iv) through his murder of the slave, Uncle Tom. Standing at the 'intersection of education and institutionalized racism' (Kella, 2000:117),

Schoolteacher presents his ‘science’ of slavery to his pupils in the guise of a practical school-room exercise, in which they list the animal and human characteristics of slaves on opposite sides of a page. In contrast to Schoolteacher stand the Bodwins who, as committed abolitionists in the style of Beecher Stowe herself, assist Baby Suggs and Sethe on several occasions in the novel. However, as I show earlier in this chapter, the Bodwins are complicated representations of the ‘science’ of abolition. While on the one hand advocating and practicing an abolitionism of ‘upliftment’ – Denver is taught ‘book stuff’ (267) and promised a college education by Miss Bodwin – they simultaneously reinforce a system of power relations that allows them to ‘experiment’ (267) with those they help liberate from slavery, while at the same time expecting them to be ‘at yo service’ (255). Atwood (1987:1) points out that ‘showing [the Bodwins] as totally free of their xenophobia and sense of superiority might well have been anachronistic’. Haraway (1983) notes that

[the] crisis in political identity [] include the immense complexity of liberatory political practice ... , coupled with insistent reproductions of domination in the heart of the most radical and hopeful movements.

As Haraway’s modern-day cyborg does, Morrison’s characters must (re)negotiate their self-concepts and identities on the boundaries of, and in the spaces between, a variety of scientific and technological discourses that inform their daily lives and experiences. Haraway, like Morrison, is exclusively concerned with the influence of science and technology on the female body and in female experiences. She argues that the scientific and technological nature of modern existence has resulted in the rendering of identity concepts – such as ‘woman’ – elusive and ironic, and she uses the image of the cyborg as a substitute – and the foundation of a new and alternative feminist politics – to articulate the possibilities for social reformation that are open to women in modern techno-societies. Operating from a materialist-feminist foundation, she focuses extensively on the female body as site of production and reproduction. Reading technology in *Beloved* in a materialist-feminist context, for its association with matters of material production and reproduction, the plight of female slaves as male-controlled mechanisms for the production of labour is significant for its insights into the ‘gendered forms of oppression under slavery’ (Kella, 2000:121). Carby (in Kella, 2000:119) (also Moglen, 1997:209) argues that

[T]he woman slave’s [] reproductive destiny was bound to capital accumulation; black women gave birth to property and, directly, to capital itself in the form of slaves, and all slaves inherited their status from their mothers.

Sethe's production of ink for Schoolteacher's lessons stands in relation to the violence and violation visited upon African Americans (Kella, 2000:136) by the material technologies of the slave system. Early in the novel, Sethe associates the smell of ink with the memory of 'men coming to nurse her' (6). Kella notes that 'Sethe's forcible milking [i]s not only dehumanizing but also a[] desecration [of] motherhood' (2000:31) (also Maxwell, 2000:253). The violation of her female and maternal body by Schoolteacher's nephews – 'I had milk' ... 'And they took my milk' (16, 17) – is fixed in Sethe's mind as an association of two fluids: the one of production, the other of reproduction. The milk that flows from her body as the nephews drain her breasts – the fluid of reproduction – is brought in relation to the ink – that Sethe labours to produce for Schoolteacher – that is used by the nephews to mark and demarcate her body and value. Kella explains that 'upon such 'scientific' denials of the human status of African Americans rests their legal construction as objects and commodities' (2000:118).

Patricia Collins (in Bouson, 2000:238) (also Moglen, 1997:209) expands further on the gendered effects of the convergence of technologies of slavery and racist biology:

The [] externally defined, controlling image of the breeder woman [] created during slavery [] served white economic interests. [] By claiming that Black women were able to produce children as easily as animals, this objectification of the Black woman as Other provided justification for interference in the reproductive rights of enslaved Africans. (Collins: 238)

There is a correspondence between the slave system's assumption of the right to interfere with the reproduction of slaves and Haraway's criticism of the experimentation with 'birth control technologies' on poor Third World women in, for example, Puerto Rico, while IVF techniques are reserved for affluent 'for profit' medical institutions (1983). Haraway's comments on modern medical technologies disconcertingly correspond with the influence of slavery on African American women's bodies and human rights: '[These] practice[s] makes starkly clear class bias, heterosexism, and the commodification of children ...' (1983).

In response to the exploitation and victimization of women under oppressive systems and their scientific and technological involvement in daily life, Haraway employs the cyborg as an iconoclastic and counterhegemonic 'ironic' 'hi-tech myth' – an 'ironic dream' – about identity and boundaries which might be promising for our

political imaginations' (1983). The promise of the cyborg image lies in the 'great riches for feminists in embracing the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine' (1983). Haraway acknowledges her indebtedness to Mary Douglas – whose 'Two Bodies' theory I apply to a reading of *Beloved* in Chapter One – for 'helping us to consciousness about how fundamental body imagery is to world view, and so to political language ... [and] ... explor[ing] the fundamental role of conceptions of bodily boundaries and social order' (1983).

In Chapter One and Two I read Denver as a personification of healing and hope for future generations, in her transcendence of physical and ideological boundaries in the process of personal reconstitution and self-determination. In relation to my reading of science and technology in *Beloved* at the hand of Haraway's cyborg image, I further read Denver as Morrison's embodied engagement with protean aspects of the cyborg image. Though I do not read Denver as if she *were* a cyborg, I do identify, in her engagement with her society and environment at the end of the novel, certain traces – or precursors – of Haraway's cyborg image, specifically in her 'playful', 'blasphemous', 'ironic' and 'non-innocent' engagement with an increasingly 'polymorphous' world, by means of which she 'challenge[s] and subver[ts]' boundaries of existent binary hierarchies (Martin, 1996:2000).

In Chapter One, I discuss Denver as the fruition of Sethe's attempt at liberation. Sethe's attempt is thwarted by her memories of slavery and her conceptualization of maternal responsibility. Denver is free from personal memories of slavery and maternal commitment. She is thus free to continue where Sethe stumbled on the way to a liberated constitution of the self. At the beginning of the novel, Denver initially lives the life of a recluse – more inside than outside of the house on Bluestone Road. While Sethe – who is also reclusive and ostracized by her community – at least comes and goes to and from her place of employment, Denver is repeatedly portrayed as enclosed in the house and in her secret boxwood retreat (30). By the end of the novel, these roles are reversed as Sethe becomes the hermitic recluse, obsessively and neurotically engaged with her own memories and the nursing of her physically manifested past, while Denver finds employment and a world of possibility in the city.

In the city, Denver engages with the systems of material and ideological power of her time. She engages with technologies of labour through her employment at Miss Bodwin's, where she certainly becomes increasingly skilled in using complex

equipment to perform her tasks, thereby interacting with the fast-developing industrial and utilitarian technologies of nineteenth-century America. She engages with the information and education technologies of the time through her learning of ‘book stuff’ (266) from Miss Bodwin and her envisioned study at Oberlin. At the end of the novel, Morrison places Denver in a different discursive and emotional context from the one in which she is situated at the beginning. She is no longer the shy, lonely and fearful child, afraid of leaving her own home, who complained to her mother that ‘[n]obody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don’t like me. Girls don’t either’ (14).

When Paul D encounters her in the city, she is confident and self-assured, with a network of friends and acquaintances:

She was the first to smile. ‘Good morning, Mr D.’ (266)

[Paul D] licked his lips. “Well, if you want my opinion – ‘
‘I don’t’ [Denver] said. ‘I have my own. (267)

She left [Paul D] because a young man was running toward her, saying,
‘Hey, Miss Denver. Wait up.’
She turned to him, her face looking like someone had turned up the gas
jet. (267)

In her movement from 124 Bluestone Road to the city, Denver crosses technological and discursive boundaries in a manner that reminds one of Haraway’s reading of the cyborg’s challenging of accepted boundaries and hierarchical tradition. Denver’s identity is contradictory and elusive, as she is neither exclusively the shy and fearful child living with her mother, nor definitively the confident young city dweller that Paul D meets at the end of the novel. She transcends dualism in being neither and both at the same time. Through her polymorphous self-constitution and engagement with her environment, Denver becomes the depth of negativity (Caputo, 1993:252) in which all things are possible.

Having developed from a child into a young woman, Denver manifests the characteristics that Martin identifies with the cyborg image, namely playfulness, blasphemy, irony, and non-innocence (107). She is playful and non-innocent in her engagement with Paul D, specifically in relation to his sexual involvement with Beloved. When Paul D asks Denver if she thinks that Beloved really was her sister, she responds in a mock-playful tone:

‘But who would know better than you, Paul D [who or what Beloved was]? I mean, you sure ‘nough knew her.’ (267)

She is ironic, in that she recognizes the ambiguous, duplicitous and elusive nature of human life and experiences. This becomes clear when she answers Paul D's question about Beloved:

'Uh, that girl. You know. Beloved?'
 'Yes?'
 'You think she sure enough your sister?'
 ... 'At times. At times I think she was – more'. (266)

She is blasphemous in her insistence on her own opinion, thereby spurning and scorning what her elders have to offer in favour of her own (re)interpretation of events. Denver can be read for early traces of the postmodern cyborg image, since she

represents (if ironically) a kind of affirmation – not of solid, inherent 'identity' ... but of a networking life that is polymorphous, changing and so potentially more liberated. (Martin: 107)

Haraway notes that '[w]e have become excruciatingly conscious what it means to have an historically constituted body' (1983). Morrison's concern with the relationship between the individual and the community, and the present and the past, are universal themes that lend themselves to practical application and theoretical interrogation, such as Martin and Haraway propose. Sethe and Denver's negotiation of life in relation to others – both past and present – is given symbolic significance when Beloved enters their lives. Beloved is the catalyst that drives the narrative momentum of the novel to its inevitable conclusion, in which the past and the (extended) community must be dealt with. Denver, as personification of healing potential and hope for the future, embodies a new 'politics [that] lose the indulgence of guilt with the naiveté of innocence' (Haraway, 1983). Denver emerges from the tragedy and the suffering of an oppressive past to enter a future that will not be without its own kinds of suffering and oppression, but she is empowered by her commitment to self-determination and her understanding of the simultaneous interrelatedness and emptiness of all things. With the character of Denver, Morrison 'weav[es] something other than a shroud for after the apocalypse of fulfilled domination' (Haraway, 1983).

Conclusion

... all the time that I write, I am writing about love or its absence ... [and] I think I shall still write about the same thing, which is how people relate to one another and miss it or hang on to it. ... About love and how to survive – not to make a living – but how to survive whole in a world where we are all of us, in some measure, victims of something.

- Toni Morrison
from 'Toni Morrison'
by Nancy Carol Joyner
(2002)

In her most recent novel, *Love* (2003), Morrison engages with many of the themes that are prevalent in her other works, such as African American history, racial and sexual oppression, female relationships, and the experience of personal disconnection and alienation. The focus of this mini-dissertation is *Beloved*, and the limited scope does not allow for an in-depth reading and analysis of *Love*. However, I feel it appropriate to briefly mention some similarities and differences in Morrison's treatment of a specific narrative theme in three of her novels, including *Beloved*. Reading Morrison's entire oeuvre as a continuum of engagement with healing practices might prove to be a rewarding future project, specifically in the light of her writing on the theme of reconciliation in *Love*.

Morrison's focus on African American women's experiences of physical, emotional, psychological and existential pain runs through all of her novels. In telling Sethe 'can't nothing heal without pain' (78), Amy Denver verbalizes the central theme of *Beloved* and Morrison's entire oeuvre, namely the characters' engagement with – and their struggle to transcend – the pain and suffering brought on by the slave system. In *Beloved*, Sethe and Amy's co-operative birthing of Denver is symbolic of Morrison's concern with renewal and rebirth and its connotation with spiritual healing and transcendence of painful experiences. In *Beloved*, as in all her other novels, Morrison represents healing as functioning on two interdependent levels, namely the individual/personal and the communal/public. Morrison represents personal healing as dependent on communal engagement with painful experiences and communal healing as dependent on personal engagement with painful experiences. Her characters are shown to be entangled in each other's lives and the potential for healing and transcendence of pain is vested in interpersonal relationships and her characters' (re)connection with one another and the community in which they

are situated. In her latest novel, *Love*, healing only begins to take place once personal and individual experiences of pain and alienation are transcended through interpersonal and communal (re)connection and reconciliation.

In *Love*, Morrison juxtaposes two women who are initially connected in intimate bonds of friendship, but later violently opposed. This is a narrative technique that she has used before, most explicitly in *Sula* (1973) and *Beloved*. In all three novels, the sets of women can symbolically be read as moral twins (Moglen, 1997:205), as ‘polar opposites’ (Rushdy in Otten, 1993:659), or as two sides of the same coin – the one good, the other bad. Nel’s goodness and Sula’s badness are juxtaposed in a way that is similar to Denver and Beloved and *Love*’s Heed and Christine. The three ‘bad’ twins – Beloved, Sula and Christine – each represent a disconnection with history and community in a characteristically individualistic way. Beloved is disconnected and alienated from her history and her people through her disremembering, Sula through her defiant and provocative non-conformism and sexual promiscuity, and Christine through her revolutionary political involvement and sexual promiscuity. Conversely, the three ‘good’ twins – Nel, Denver and Heed – are represented as functional members of their respective communities who share in its rich and involved community life.

Morrison sets up a dualism in each of these novels that revolves around, and evolves with, each novel’s major female characters. In *Love*, however, Morrison introduces a structural and narrative component that is absent from the earlier novels. She presents her reader, for the first time, with a representation of actual reconciliation and reconstitution of interpersonal bonds. Whereas the earlier novels speak of the tragic impossibility and improbability – or alludes to the future promise and possibility – of reconnection and reconstitution, Morrison allows her characters in *Love* an actual moment of forgiveness and healing. Though it is not developed as extensively as in *Love*, the theme of reconciliation is anticipated in the relationships between the female inhabitants of the convent in *Paradise*.

The death of Sula and the exorcism of Beloved leave both Nel and Denver feeling that they have lost something irrecoverable: the community of, and communion with, something larger than themselves, and a bond of friendship, support and love that defines their individual identities and social relationships. We find in Denver’s acknowledgement to Paul D – that Beloved was more than a sister to her – an echo of Nel’s cry for Sula:

'Sula?' she whispered, gazing at the tops of trees.
 'Sula?'
 ... And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat.
 'We was girls together,' she said as though explaining something. 'O
 Lord, Sula,' she cried, 'girl, girl, girlgirlgirl.'
 It was a fine cry – loud and long – but it had no bottom and it had no top,
 just circles and circles of sorrow. (174)

Neither *Beloved* and *Denver*, nor *Sula* and *Nel* manage to transcend their disconnection. They never recover what they have lost, and they live with a resigned sense of regret at the reconciliation that could have been.

In *Love*, however, Morrison explicitly represents an alleviation of the loneliness and alienation that results from socio-cultural dualisms and interpersonal disconnection. Though this moment is short and happens as Heed is dying, the reconciliation between Heed and Christine is a realization of that which was denied in *Beloved* and *Sula*. At the end of the novel, Christine and Heed experience a moment of loving reconnection and mutual forgiveness:

[Christine] pulls the quilt up around her shoulders because Heed is shivering. They both had expected a quarrel. Who's to blame?
 Whose fault is it they are abandoned seven miles from humanity with nobody knowing they are there or caring even if they do know? The future is disintegrating along with the past. (184)'

The sense of perpetuative loss and longing with which Morrison concludes *Beloved* and *Sula*, is finally exorcised in *Love* through Christine and Heed's mutual forgiveness. Past pain and suffering are transcended through the two women's spiritual reconnection, which is symbolised by their rediscovery of a shared childhood secret language. This language – called 'Idagay' (188) – 'was their private code [;] [it] was for intimacy' (188). At the centre of this intimate system of communication stands an expression – 'Hey, Celestial' (188) – that they recover at the end of the novel. Morrison uses this expression – which was their secret way 'to say 'Amen'' (188) – as a healing incantation of forgiveness and love. The ritual of intimate expression and the healing gestures of forgiveness and compassion enable the recovery of that which was lost, the resolution of conflict, and the extinction of dualisms. As they hold each other, they recover what was lost:

Hey Celestial.
 I'd just as soon our picnics. 'Member?
 Fireflies. That's what I remember.
 You're crying.
 So are you.
 Am I?
 Uh-huh.
 I can barely hear you.

Hold my ... my hand.
... . The sky, remember? When the sun went down?
Sand. It turned pale blue.
And the stars. Just a few at first.
Then so many they lit the whole fucking world.
Pretty. So so pretty.
Love. I really do.
Ush-hidagay. Ush-hidagay. (193-194)

As the body boundaries between the two women disintegrate through their shared physical closeness and intimate communication, the binary categories of the 'twin' dualism are eliminated. Opposition and conflict are transcended, and a state of non-dualism is achieved in which neither is good nor bad, right nor wrong. In presenting the reader with this moment of transcendent interconnectedness, non-dualism and wholing/healing, Morrison brings to fulfilment her long-term vision of reconstitution and reconciliation. *Love* can be read as a culmination of Morrison's engagement with healing over the course of eight novels. *Love* is Morrison's saying 'Amen' to forgiveness, healing and the promise that the future holds: 'Hey, Celestial'.

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