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[In the following essay, Schapiro discusses the psychological and emotional dimensions of slavery in *Beloved*, which she praises for its historical depth and insight.]

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* penetrates, perhaps more deeply than any historical or psychological study could, the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery. The novel reveals how the condition of enslavement in the external world, particularly the denial of one's status as a human subject, has deep repercussions in the individual's internal world. These internal resonances are so profound that even if one is eventually freed from external bondage, the self will still be trapped in an inner world that prevents a genuine experience of freedom. As Sethe succinctly puts it, "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another." The novel wrestles with this central problem of recognizing and claiming one's own subjectivity, and it shows how this cannot be achieved independently of the social environment.

A free, autonomous self, as Jessica Benjamin argues in *The Bonds of Love*, is still an essentially relational self and is dependent on the recognizing response of an other. *Beloved* powerfully dramatizes the fact that, in Benjamin's words, "In order to exist for oneself, one has to exist for an other"; in so doing, it enacts the complex interrelationship of social and intrapsychic reality. For Morrison's characters, African-Americans in a racist, slave society, there is no reliable other to recognize and affirm their existence. The mother, the child's first vital other, is made unreliable or unavailable by a slave system which either separates her from her child or so enervates and depletes her that she has no self with which to confer recognition. The consequences on the inner life of the child—the emotional hunger, the obsessive and terrifying narcissistic fantasies—constitute the underlying psychological drama of the novel.

"124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom." The opening lines of the novel establish its psychic source: infantile rage. A wounded, enraged baby is the central figure of the

book, both literally, in the character of Beloved, and symbolically, as it struggles beneath the surface of the other major characters. Even the elderly grandmother is significantly named "Baby," and the ferocity of a baby's frustrated needs colors the novel's overt mother-child relationships as well as the love relationship between Sethe and Paul D and that between Beloved and her sister Denver. "A baby's frustrated needs" refers here not to physical needs but to psychic and emotional ones. The worst atrocity of slavery, the real horror the novel exposes, is not physical death but psychic death. The pivotal event, or crisis, of the novel is Sethe's murder of her baby daughter Beloved. The reader is allowed to feel, however, the paradoxical nature of the murder. Sethe, having run away from the sadistic slave-master Schoolteacher, is on the verge of being recaptured. Her humanity has been so violated by this man, and by her entire experience as a slave woman, that she kills her daughter to save her from a similar fate; she kills her to save her from psychic death: "if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her."

Psychic death, as the novel makes clear, involves the denial of one's being as a human subject. The infant self has an essential, primary need to be recognized and affirmed as a whole being, as an active agent of its own legitimate desires and impulses, and the fulfillment of this need is dependent on the human environment, on other selves. The premise of the object relations school of psychoanalysis, as Jessica Benjamin notes [in *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, 1988], is that "we are fundamentally social beings." According to this theory, human beings are not innately sexual or aggressive; they are innately responsive and relational. As Harry Guntrip explains, the "need of a love-relationship is the fundamental thing" in life, and "the love-hunger and anger set up by frustration of this basic need must constitute the two primary problems of personality on the emotional level" [*Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations, and the Self*, 1969]. The experience of one's cohesiveness and reality as a self is dependent on this primary relationship, on the loving response and recognition from an other. This issue is repeatedly illustrated and explored in Morrison's novels. Sula, for instance, speaks of the two most formative experiences of her life: the first concerns her overhearing her mother state matter-of-factly that she simply doesn't "like" her (Sula), and the second involves her having thrown a child, seemingly by accident, into the river to drown. "The first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow" (*Sula*). These experiences are intimately related: the lack of an affirming, reliable other leads to an unconscious, murderous rage and the lack of a coherent, reliable self.

In *The Bonds of Love*, a feminist psychoanalytic study of the problem of domination in Western culture, Benjamin modifies object relations theory to form what she calls "intersubjective theory." She maintains the primacy of relationship in self-development but argues that the self grows through relationship with another *subject* rather than through relations with its object. 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, which Benjamin sees as complementary to intrapsychic theory, 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." Benjamin also emphasizes the concept of attunement, a "combination of resonance and difference" in which self and other are empathically in tune while maintaining their distinct boundaries and separateness. When the boundaries break down and the necessary tension between self and other dissolves, domination takes root. The search for recognition then becomes a struggle for power and control, and assertion turns into aggression.

Beloved does not delve into the roots of white domination, but there is a suggestion of fear and inadequate selfhood underlying the problem. The white farmer Mr. Garner, while still sharing in the cultural objectification of blacks, nevertheless boasts that his "niggers is men every one of 'em." When another farmer argues that there "Ain't no nigger men," Garner replies, "Not if you scared, they ain't. . . . But if you a man yourself, you'll want your niggers to be man too." A self wants the recognition of another self; this form of mutuality is more desirable, Garner implies, than mastery of an object. Garner, however, dies—his perspective cannot prevail in a world in which domination and the denial of recognition are built into the social system.

Beloved explores the interpersonal and intrapsychic effects of growing up as a black person in such a system, one in which intersubjectivity is impossible. How can a child see self or mother as subjects when the society denies them that status? The mother is made incapable of recognizing the child, and the child cannot recognize the mother. As a young girl, Sethe had to have her mother "pointed out" to her by another child. When she becomes a mother herself, she is so deprived and depleted that she cannot satisfy the hunger for recognition, the longing for "look," that both her daughters crave. The major characters in the novel are all working out of a deep loss to the self, a profound narcissistic wound that results from a breakdown and distortion of the earliest relations between self and other. In the case of Beloved, the intense desire for recognition evolves into enraged narcissistic omnipotence and a terrifying, tyrannical domination.

The infantile rage in the novel is a form of frustrated, murderous love. The baby ghost of Beloved wreaks havoc in Sethe's home, prompting Denver to comment, "For a baby she throws a powerful spell," to which Sethe replies, "No more powerful than the way I loved her." The power of Beloved's rage is directly linked to the power of Sethe's love. The intimacy of destructive rage and love is asserted in various ways throughout the book—Sethe's love for Beloved is indeed a murderous love. The violation or murder of children by their parents is a theme that runs throughout much of Morrison's work, from Cholly raping his daughter in *The Bluest Eye* to Eva setting fire to her son in *Sula*, and in these cases too the acts are incited by feel-

ings of love. If the infant is traumatically frustrated in its first love relationship, if it fails to receive the affirmation and recognition it craves, the intense neediness of the infant's own love becomes dangerous and threatening. The fear, as Guntrip and others have discussed, is that one's love will destroy. The baby's enraged, destructive love is also projected outward onto the parent, which suggests one perspective on the strain of destructive parental love in Morrison's novels.

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 thus destroy mother and, conversely, that mother (due to projection) will devour and destroy the self. A preponderance of oral imagery characterizes Morrison's novel. Beloved, in her fantasies, repeatedly states that Sethe "chews and swallows me," while the metaphor of Beloved chewing and swallowing Sethe is almost literal: "Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it." Denver's problems of identity and self-cohesion, too, are often imaged in oral terms: leaving the house means being prepared to "be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch." When Denver temporarily loses sight of Beloved in the shed, she experiences a dissolution of self—"she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee"—and feels she is being "eaten alive by the dark." Beloved, in the second part of the novel, is said to have two dreams: "exploding, and being swallowed." Everywhere in the novel, the fantasy of annihilation is figured orally; the love hunger, the boundless greed, that so determines the life of the characters also threatens to destroy them.

Sethe repeatedly asserts that the worst aspect of her rape was that the white boys "took my milk!" She feels robbed of her essence, of her most precious substance, which is her maternal milk. We learn that as a child, Sethe was deprived of her own mother's milk: "The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own." Sethe was not physically starved as a baby—she did receive milk from another nursing slave woman—but she was emotionally starved of a significant nurturing relationship, of which the nursing milk is symbolic. That relationship is associated with one's core being or essence; if she has no nursing milk to call her own, she feels without a self to call her own. Thus even before she was raped by the white farm boys, Sethe was ravaged as an infant, robbed of her milk/essence by the white social structure.

Beloved's first appearance in her incarnated form is marked by her excessive drinking, by her downing "cup after cup of water," while Sethe, suddenly feeling her "bladder filled to capacity," lifts her skirts and "the water she voided was endless." The dynamic suggests a mother being drained by the child's greedy, excessive need. Sethe's voiding is also associated with her own child-self in relation to her mother: "Not since she was a baby girl, being cared for by the eight-year-old girl who pointed out her

mother to her, had she had an emergency that unmanageable." One might rather expect Sethe to experience thirst upon seeing her mother, but perhaps that thirst is so extreme, so potentially violent and destructive, that the more urgent need is to void, to empty oneself completely of this unmanageable hunger and rage. Sethe must drain herself in order to avoid draining, and therefore destroying, her mother. This is the fearful fantasy so central to the book; it is precisely what Beloved almost succeeds in doing to Sethe. The nursing dynamic also characterizes Denver and Beloved's relationship: "so intent was her (Denver's) nursing" of Beloved, "she forgot to eat," and she hides Beloved's incontinence. Paul D, as I will discuss more fully later, also plays a maternal, nurturing role in relation to Sethe. When he arrives, Sethe feels "that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands."

The primal nursing relationship is so fraught with ambivalence that frequently in the novel satiation leads to disaster. The most obvious example is the grand feast Baby Suggs prepares for ninety people—"Ninety people who ate so well, and laughed so much, it made them angry." The feast is the prelude to the abandonment of the community, the return of Schoolteacher, and Sethe's consequent murder of her baby. Melanie Klein has discussed the baby's extreme "envy" of the withholding breast, and this projected envy may underlie the anger of the neighbors at the maternal bounty of Baby Suggs—she has "given too much, offended them by excess." Similarly, the prelude to Beloved's appearance in the flesh and the ensuing disruption of Sethe's relationship with Paul D is the festive plentitude of the carnival at which Paul D plies both Sethe and Denver with candy and sweets. Paul D's abandonment of Sethe, too, is preceded by a special dinner that Sethe, feeling confident that "she had milk enough for all," prepares for him.

The rage and ambivalence surrounding the love hunger in the novel is illustrated again in the scene in which Sethe, while sitting in the Clearing associated with Baby Suggs and her sermons on love, experiences fingers touching her throat. The fingers are first soothing and comforting but then begin to choke and strangle her, and the hands are associated with those of both Baby Suggs and Beloved, of both mother and child. When Denver accuses Beloved of choking Sethe, Beloved insists that she "fixed" Sethe's neck—"I kissed her neck. I didn't choke it." The incident, of course, parallels Sethe's murder of Beloved by sawing through her neck, the oral associations once more enforced by mention of the "teeth" of the saw having chewed through the skin. After denying that she choked Sethe's neck, Beloved adds, "The circle of iron choked it," and the image recalls the collars locked around the necks of the black slaves. Her statement is thus true in that the slave system has choked off the vital circulation between mother and child so crucial to the development of the self. Some of the most vivid, disturbing passages in the novel describe the experience of having a horse's bit forced into one's mouth; the sense of deep, searing injury to one's humanity that these descriptions evoke is perhaps compounded by unconscious resonances of violation at the earliest oral roots of our human identity.

The oral imagery in the novel is also closely associated with ocular imagery, with images of eyes and seeing. Sethe is described as being "licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes"; when Sethe lies hidden in the field, anticipating the approach of one of the white boys, she "was eager for his eyes, to bite into them; . . . 'I was hungry,' she told Denver, 'just as hungry as I could be for his eyes.'" For Denver, "looking" at Beloved "was food enough to last. But to be looked at in turn was beyond appetite; it was breaking through her own skin to a place where hunger hadn't been discovered." In the logic of the unconscious world, the desire to get and "drink in" with the eyes is akin to the oral wish to consume. Psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut has written about the oral-visual relationship [in *The Analysis of the Self*, 1971]. If the mother is physically and emotionally distant from the child, if she withholds her body, he says, the visual will become "hypercathectic" for the child. One can also understand the connection from Benjamin's perspective in that the real hunger in this first relationship between self and other is the hunger for recognition—the desire to be, in Denver's words, "pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other." The gaze of the beloved other recognizes and affirms the wholeness and intrinsic value of one's being. Denver describes the quality of being looked at by Beloved: "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." The look takes Denver to a "place beyond appetite," to where she is "Needing nothing. Being what there was." To be recognized by the beloved is all the nourishment one needs; it brings one into coherence, into meaningful existence. Before Beloved's arrival, Denver craved this look from Sethe: none of the losses in her life mattered, she felt, "as long as her mother did not look away."

Sethe's eyes, however, are described as "empty"; Paul D thinks of Sethe's face as "a mask with mercifully punched-out eyes. . . . Even punched out they needed to be covered, lidded, marked with some sign to warn folks of what that emptiness held." Her eyes reflect the psychic loss and denial of self she has experienced on all levels in her life. The face of Sethe's mother was also masklike, distorted into a permanent false smile from too many times with the bit. Sethe comments that she never saw her mother's own smile. Sethe's mother, deprived of her authentic selfhood, her status as a human subject, cannot provide the recognition and affirmation that her child craves. The cycle is vicious, and thus Sethe's children, Beloved and Denver, will suffer the same loss. Beloved's eyes too are remarkable for their emptiness: "deep down in those big black eyes there was no expression at all."

The craving for mutual recognition—for simultaneously "seeing" the beloved other and being "seen" by her—propels the central characters in the novel. Beloved says she has returned in order to "see" Sethe's face, and she wants "to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too." When, as a child, Sethe is shown the brand burned into her mother's skin and is told that she will be able to "know" her by this mark, Sethe anxiously responds, "But how will you know me? How will you

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know me? Mark me, too. . . . Mark the mark on me too." Love is a form of knowing and being known. Beloved repeatedly commands Paul D, "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name." The hunger is to be touched, recognized, known in one's inner being or essential self. This yearning is poignantly captured in the image of two turtles mating. Denver and Beloved observe the turtles on the bank of the river: "The embracing necks—hers stretching up toward his bending down, the pat pat pat of their touching heads. No height was beyond her yearning neck, stretched like a finger toward his, risking everything outside the bowl just to touch his face. The gravity of their shields, clashing, countered and mocked the floating heads touching."

The yearning of Beloved, Sethe, and Denver to touch faces with the beloved other, to know and be known, is, like that of the turtles, obstructed and mocked by the shields or shells each has constructed. The shell, however, is a necessary defense; it attempts to preserve the self from a culture that seeks to deny it. As Joseph Wessling argues in ["Narcissism in Toni Morrison's *Sula*," *College Language Language Journal*, 1988] an article on narcissism in *Sula*, narcissistic defenses, such as "self-division" and an inability to empathize or experience human sympathy, may be "the price of survival" in an oppressive, unjust society. The shell also serves to protect the self and its boundaries from the intensity of its own frustrated desire. The hunger for recognition, as discussed, may be so overwhelming that it threatens to swallow up the other and the self, destroying all boundaries in one total annihilation.

The novel as a whole is characterized by a fluidity of boundaries, by a continuously altering narrative perspective that slides in and out of characters' minds, by a mutable, nonsequential time structure, and by an absence of the conventional lines between fantasy and reality. Such fluidity, as Nancy Chodorow [in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, 1978] and Carol Gilligan [in *In a Different Voice*, 1982] have argued, is characteristic of female, as opposed to male; modes of perception and expression. It derives from the preservation of an original identity and preoedipal bondedness between self and mother. The series of monologues by Beloved, Sethe, and Denver in Part 2 of Morrison's novel, however, suggest something more extreme and dangerous than mere fluidity of boundaries: the monologues reveal an utter breakdown of the borders between self and other, a collapse that is bound up with incorporative fantasies. Sethe's section begins, "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine." Denver's opens, "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's

milk," and Beloved's with the line, "I am Beloved and she is mine." After that sentence, Beloved's monologue is marked by a total absence of punctuation, highlighting the fantasy of merging and oneness at the essence of her plaintive ramblings: "I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own." Her words reveal the psychic loss—the denial of recognition—at the core of the fantasy:

there is no one to want me to say me my
name . . . she chews and swallows me I
am gone now I am her face my own
face has left me. . . Sethe sees me see her and
I see the smile her smiling face is the place
for me it is the face I lost she is my
face smiling at me doing it at last a
hot thing now we can join a hot
thing.

A similar merging fantasy also figures prominently in *Sula*, in the relationship between Sula and Nel. The two characters are described as so close that "they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the other's"; for Nel, "talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself"; and Sula eventually realizes that neither Nel nor anyone else "would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out to and touch with an ungloved hand." Each is compelled continually to seek the self through an other, and such blurring of boundaries can lead to one of the forms of domination and submission Benjamin describes: the self can surrender totally to the will and agency of the other, or the self can consume and appropriate the other as part of itself, as an object of its possession.

The repetition of the word "mine" in the monologues of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved suggests exactly this sort of possession and incorporation of the other as an object. "Mine" is the haunting word that Stamp Paid hears surrounding Sethe's house in ghostly whispers and is stressed again in a lyrical section following Beloved's unpunctuated monologue. In this section the voices of Beloved, Sethe, and Denver are joined (the identity of the speaker in each line is sometimes unclear) while at the same time each voice remains essentially isolated (the voices speak to but not *with* each other):

Beloved
You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me
I have found you again; you have come back to
me
You are my Beloved
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine

This form of possessing and objectifying the other, however, cannot satisfy—it imprisons the self within its own devouring omnipotence, its own narcissism. True satisfaction or joy, as Benjamin explains, can only be achieved through "mutual recognition" between self and other, between two subjects or selves.

Both sides of the power dynamic, both surrender to and incorporation of the other, are apparent in the relationship

between Sethe and Beloved. Toward the end of the novel, Sethe relinquishes herself completely to the will and desire of Beloved. She neglects to feed or care for herself and becomes physically drained and emotionally depleted. Sethe literally shrinks while Beloved literally expands and swells; both are caught up in a mutually destructive, frighteningly boundless narcissism. The prelude to Sethe's decline is an incident that again stresses lack of recognition at the source of this narcissistic condition. Sethe has been abandoned once again, this time by Paul D (her previous abandonments include those by her mother, her husband Halle, Baby Suggs, and her two sons), and to cheer herself, she takes Denver and Beloved ice-skating on the frozen creek. The three are unable to keep their balance, and as they fall on the ice, they shriek with both pain and laughter. The scene is redolent of childhood and of child-like helplessness. "Making a circle or a line, the three of them could not stay upright for one whole minute, but nobody saw them falling." The phrase "nobody saw them falling" becomes the dominant motif of the scene; the line is repeated four times in the two-page description. Sethe's laughter turns into uncontrollable tears, and her weeping in the context of the scene's refrain suggests a child's aching sense of loss or absence, specifically the absence of the confirming, legitimizing gaze of the other.

Once it is asserted that "nobody saw" her falling, that there is no "other" to confer the reality of her own existence on her, Sethe falls prey to a consuming narcissism. Suddenly she consciously recognizes Beloved as the incarnation of her dead child and surrenders herself totally to her. Sethe now feels that "there is no world outside" her door and that since her daughter has come back, "she can sleep like the drowned." In psychological terms, she retreats from external reality and succumbs to her destructive, narcissistic fantasies, to her murderously enraged child-self as well as her insatiable need to make reparation for her murderous love. Paul D recognizes, and fears, the narcissistic nature of Sethe's love: "This here new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began . . . more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed. It scared him."

Paul D is the one character in the novel who has the power to resist and disrupt the destructive, narcissistic mother-child dyad. Sethe recalls, "There was no room for any other thing or body until Paul D arrived and broke up the place, making room, shifting it, moving it over to someplace else, then standing in the place he had made." Sethe also tells Beloved that she would have recognized her "right off, except for Paul D." Paul D is the external "other" who triangulates the dyad, as the image of the "three shadows" of Sethe, Denver, and Paul D "holding hands" as they walk to the carnival emphasizes. The excursion to the carnival is Sethe's first venture into the community since the murder; Paul D has the capacity to lead Sethe out of her narcissistic isolation and into relationship with the external world. The claims of the angry baby Beloved, however, are still too powerful to allow for these other attachments: she makes her first appearance in the flesh immediately following the excursion.

While Paul D plays the role of the saving other in contra-

distinction to Beloved and the narcissistic dyad, he does not represent the typical world of the father. He is not, for instance, a token of male rationality countering the irrationality of the female world. He too is deeply affected by Beloved's irrational power—she literally “moves” him, making him physically restless and forcing him to sleep with her in the shed outside the house. His power lies precisely in his maternal, nurturing quality; he is that “other” with the power to recognize and affirm the inner or essential self. He is described as “the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could.” The women see him and not only want to weep; they also want to confess their deepest secrets, to expose all the pain and rage bound up with their true selves. Sethe thinks of how he “cradled her before the cooking stove” and is deeply comforted by “the mind of him that knew her own.”

Paul D has the power to satisfy the craving that fuels the novel, the craving to be “known,” to have one's existence sanctioned by the empathic recognition of the other. That Morrison bestows this quality on an African-American male character is an interesting, and unusual, point. A common criticism of black women novelists is that their portrayals of black males are often flat, stereotypic, or unempathic. For Morrison, the maternal nurturing quality is a form of love that is not restricted by gender; this view expands the possibilities, and is a liberating factor, for her characters. Yet Paul D, too, is not a totally reliable other: he temporarily retreats after learning of Sethe's murder of her child. Like all of the other black characters in the novel, he must work out of a condition of psychic fragmentation—his selfhood has been severely impaired, his status as a human subject denied by the slave culture. He feels that even the old rooster Mister was allowed an essential integrity of being denied him: “Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead.”

Only Denver does not see Paul D as the other women do; for her he does not play the same nurturing role. She sees him only as a threat, as an intruder into her intense, and deeply ambivalent, relationship with her mother. Denver is terrified of Sethe's murderous love: she has “monstrous and unmanageable dreams about Sethe” and is afraid to fall asleep while Sethe braids her hair at night. In her fantasies, “She cut my head off every night.” For Denver, the idealized, saving other is her father Halle, whom she calls “Angel Man.” Yet the father is significantly incapable of playing the savior role. The “other”—whether represented by mother or father—is always untrustworthy in Morrison's world, rendered thus by the social environment. As a result, the self remains trapped within its own destructive narcissism.

Sethe regards Halle as the ultimate betrayer: he witnessed her rape, she learns, but did not protest or try to protect her. His absent presence is worse than mere absence, for it confirms an essential hollowness and undependability of the other and of love. Yet Halle is not simply a “bad guy”; again, Morrison extends her compassion equally to her

male characters. The reader is allowed to see Halle too as a deeply wounded child. Traumatized by the rape of Sethe and the maternal violation that it also represents, Halle literally loses his mind—his selfhood shatters. Paul D observes him later squatting by a churn, with “butter all over his face.” He smeared that butter on his face, Sethe thinks, “because the milk they took is on his mind.” The image of Halle here recalls Beloved and the image at the psychological base of the book: it is the picture of a lost, greedy child whose ravenous hunger/love is out of control.

Ultimately Denver is able to escape the narcissistic vacuum, and she is helped not, as she had fantasized, by Halle, but by another maternal figure in the novel, Mrs. Jones. Denver is first propelled out of the house by literal hunger, for Sethe, locked in her obsession with Beloved, has become oblivious to food and to all external or physical considerations. Denver realizes that “it was she who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't, they all would.” Excluded from the Beloved-Sethe dyad, Denver is forced into the role of the outside other, and assuming that role is her salvation. She goes first to her former teacher Lady Jones, an old woman of mixed race who has long struggled with the contempt of the black community and, equally, with self-contempt. Lady Jones thus has a special “affection for the unpicked children,” an empathy with those, like Denver, who have never been recognized or “picked,” who have never had their existence validated or confirmed. After Denver asks her for food, Mrs. Jones compassionately croons, “Oh, baby,” and that empathic recognition of the hungry baby within finally frees Denver from the trap of her infantile needs: “Denver looked up at her. She did not know it then, but it was the word ‘baby,’ said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman.”

With this recognition, Denver for the first time begins to experience the contours of her own separate self. When Nelson Lord, an old school acquaintance, affectionately says, “Take care of yourself, Denver,” Denver “heard it as though it were what language was made for,” and she realizes that “It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve.” 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:

“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. . . . Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you!”

Baby Suggs continues to enjoin her people to love every appendage, every organ in their bodies, and especially to “love your heart.” This is the crucial lesson, but it cannot be learned in isolation; self-love needs a relational foundation and a social context. Thus even Baby Suggs is unable

to sustain her convictions and heed her own teachings. After Sethe's murder, Baby Suggs retreats and ceases to care about herself or others, showing interest in nothing except "colors."

Morrison's novel, however, is not hopelessly bleak or despairing. Her characters are wounded, but not all of them are ruined. Denver and Paul D, by courageously facing their inner terrors—Denver leaves the house even though she expects to be "swallowed up," and Paul D returns to Sethe and her fearful, murderous love—are able to salvage out of the wreckage a bolstering faith in both self and other. Paul D tries to pass this faith on to Sethe at the end. He assumes again a maternal, nurturing role. He holds Sethe, calls her "baby," and gently tells her not to cry. Beloved is gone and Sethe feels bereft and lost: "She was my best thing," she tells Paul D. He "leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. 'You your best thing, Sethe. You are.' His holding fingers are holding hers." While the word "thing" still suggests a sense of self as object (an objectification of self that perhaps no black person in the slave culture could ever totally escape), the scene between Sethe and Paul D at the end comes closest to that state of mutual recognition and attunement that Benjamin describes. Paul D's gently touching Sethe's face recalls the touching faces of the mating turtles; the relationship here is not one of merging or of domination but of resonating "likeness" and empathic understanding. Paul D recalls Sixo's description of his mistress, the "Thirty-Mile Woman": "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind." The beloved other has the power to give to the self its own essential wholeness. The role of the other here is neither as an object to possess nor even as a mirror for the self; as a "friend of [the] mind," the other is a subject in its own right, with an inner life that corresponds with that of the self. In such correspondence, in that mutuality of inner experience and suffering, lies the self-confirming and consoling power of the relationship.

Paul D tells Sethe in this final scene that "He wants to put his story next to hers." Throughout the novel, stories and storytelling are associated with the self and with the primary oral relationship at its root. Beloved is tireless in her demand, in "her thirst for hearing" Sethe's stories: "It became a way to feed her . . . Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling." Denver too feeds Beloved's craving for stories about Sethe, "nursing Beloved's interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved." Denver's storytelling, because of the empathic identification it involves, also allows her to feel a closer bond and oneness with her mother. As she narrates the tale of Sethe's escape to Beloved, "Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother." Paul D does not want to merge or incorporate Sethe's story into his own at the end; rather, he wants to "put his story next to hers." This suggests again an essential maintenance of boundaries, a balance of two like but separate selves, an attunement.

The novel does not end, however, with the scene between

Sethe and Paul D, but with one last lyrical section on Beloved. The refrain of the last two pages is the line, repeated three times: "It was not a story to pass on." The final section arouses a deep sense of pathos for that unrecognized, ravenously needy infant-self that is Beloved:

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away.

It was not a story to pass on.

The 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. Beloved's desolation, her sorrow, is a more extreme version of the same sorrow that all of the black characters in the novel experience. Thus Baby Suggs, finally freed from slavery, expresses not the elation of freedom but the deep sadness of not knowing her self, of not being able to read her own story: "The sadness was at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home. Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like." In the end, the novel is more about Beloved than Sethe. Beloved's character is both the frame and center of the book, and it is her story—or her desperate struggle to know and experience her own story—that is the pumping heart of the novel. Beloved's struggle is Sethe's struggle; it is also Denver's, Paul D's, and Baby Suggs's. It is the struggle of all black people in a racist society, Morrison suggests, to claim themselves as subjects in their own narrative.

Beloved demonstrates, finally, the interconnection of social and intrapsychic reality. The novel plays out the deep psychic reverberations of living in a culture in which domination and objectification of the self have been institutionalized. If from the earliest years on, one's fundamental need to be recognized and affirmed as a human subject is denied, that need can take on fantastic and destructive proportions in the inner world: the intense hunger, the fantasized fear of either being swallowed or exploding, can tyrannize one's life even when one is freed from the external bonds of oppression. The self cannot experience freedom without first experiencing its own agency or, in Sethe's words, "claiming ownership" of itself. The free, autonomous self, *Beloved* teaches, is an inherently social self, rooted in relationship and dependent at its core on the vital bond of mutual recognition.

