

1 Nov. 9: Acts of the Apostles 1-2, 6-9;
2 Book of Revelation 1-2;
3 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987) to p. 33
4 Vintage (p. 27 Plume)
5

6 >I found it disturbing how much Sweet Home was presented as idyllic or beautiful: obviously
7 the very name is evocative (and ironic), and Sethe remembers it as a beautiful place, yet
8 recognizes the true nature of the place, wondering if hell is pretty also. So far there have been
9 no “bad” memories or violent scenes depicted, and the Garners seem pleasant, even if they still
10 treat Sethe and the men very distinctly as slaves.

11 ¶Already in the first chapters of the novel Sethe’s willingness to do anything for her children,
12 and especially the one who is now a ghost, is obvious: when she tells Paul D about sending her
13 baby off without her, she focuses on “they took my milk,” while Paul D says “they beat you and
14 you was pregnant?” Even after her baby dies, she gives “10 minutes for seven letters.”

15 ¶Sethe’s relationship with Halle as compared to that with Paul D is interesting: Sethe regards
16 Halle as a brother, yet he is the one she marries, and they actually have sex, 4 children, and 6
17 years of marriage. This relationship seems to be a replacement for the lack of family that slaves
18 experience. Sethe appears to be more sexually attracted to Paul D, and they are no longer
19 slaves—they don’t have to have sex in a cornfield, but in a bed—yet the sex is over quickly and
20 doesn’t appear to bring them closer. They are only connected by their memories of Sweet
21 Home.

22 ¶Sethe’s “blessing” of a long marriage and having all her children with the same man actually
23 cause her more hurt. This relationship more closely resembles a real marriage and family, which
24 Baby Suggs never had, so when Sethe loses Halle, she is more affected than Baby Suggs could
25 ever be. I really like what Baby Suggs says: “A man ain’t nothing but a man...but a son? Well
26 now that’s somebody.” Relationship, and especially motherhood, gives more identity than
27 simple existence or even humanity—this is definitely the case for Sethe.
28

29 >While reading *Beloved* I was absolutely transfixed by the idea of love it portrayed and how
30 each character viewed and dealt with it differently. Baby Suggs talks about a time in which she
31 used to preach self love and appreciation and is ripped to a crippling despair by the death of
32 her eight children. Yet, Paul D. only loves each person just enough so that when they are gone,
33 he has a bit left to give to another. He locks everything away in his “tobacco tin” and is shocked
34 that Sethe is capable of loving Denver as much as she does. Sethe, it seems, only loves Denver
35 and has buried all other feelings deep within herself, but she does love Denver infallibly. It was
36 also remarkable and strange to me how the young slave men coveted Sethe so much. It was a
37 strange situation especially considering the thoughts they entertained of rape. Overall, sex
38 seems to be a huge and very complicated aspect of this book.
39

40
41 > There seem to be so many symbols here and there in *Beloved*. What impressed me most
42 among them was the meaning of the (haunted?) house, from which Sethe was unwilling to
43 leave. I feel it connotes more than the personal (or familial) tragic memories; the house
44 functions as a root of identity for her -- an African American who led a melancholic life.
45
46 >I don't have too much to say because I'm not sure what to say. However, I was curious, what is
47 the significance of the right hand? Why not the left?
48
49 >Acts emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the Spirit is to guide the
50 people and form a shield from the evils of the world. Along with the Spirit is speaking in
51 tongues. The Holy Spirit is Jesus (God) in spirit form. Thus, it can fill you and become your
52 inner guide.
53 ¶Revelation presents the advice given to the seven churches from Jesus Christ. The basic idea is
54 to keep the faith and actively support and obey His commandments. Those who continue to do
55 this will go to heaven.
56 ¶The common themes presented in *Beloved* are love, companionship, and freedom. The love for
57 children is seen in the chapters read. For example, it is evident that Sethe still loves her child
58 despite her haunting of the house. Companionship is sought by each character. An intimate
59 companion and simple friendship are seen. Sethe and Paul D begin to see each other intimately
60 while Denver sees the baby's spirit as company and feels lonely after it is banished by Paul D.
61
62 >The idea of Sethe carrying a cross was an interesting concept that I had not previously
63 considered. I was intrigued by the idea that Sethe had the tree on her back, which could
64 symbolize the wood used for the cross. It could be said that the burden that Sethe carried
65 ranged from sadness and guilt to loneliness. Also, the all-nurturing mother idea was rather
66 intriguing considering that Destiny described her mother as the person who would not blink,
67 would not turn away from what needed to be done.
68 ¶However, overall, I found the reading to be rather difficult to follow at first. Perhaps the
69 introduction and the wording can be blamed. The back and forth concept with Sethe and Baby
70 Suggs' is a key point, but sometimes hard to read along with. Nevertheless, the story steadily
71 increased in intensity, especially when Paul D arrived. He brought in a different element that I
72 cannot yet describe. It might be the mixture of old and new, but I cannot be sure.
73 > Because this is a novel that deals with slavery and then the escape from slavery, freedom is a
74 central theme found throughout this type of story. There is a part in *Beloved* that is different in its
75 conceptions of freedom and the desire for freedom compared to other narratives on slavery.
76 Sethe says that Halle gave her [*Baby Suggs* – RG] a freedom to her when it didn't mean a thing.
77 Normally, one would expect freedom to be one of the only things worth valuing or pursuing,
78 the one thing that gives hope and stays in the back of an enslaved person's mind. It is
79 differently viewed here as something worthless. Contrast this to Douglas, who wanted freedom

80 from slavery and freedom to pursue education as his ultimate values and the things he sought
81 above all else

82 >This novel is probably the most disturbing slave narrative I have read. The reader is plunged
83 into the middle of the action yet is still kept confused. I find the image of Sethe selling herself
84 to a man in order to bury the baby she murdered. Sethe killed a child who came from her own
85 womb which to me seems like an unforgivable act. She then further violates her womanhood
86 by selling herself or is she atoning for the sin of her child?

87 ¶The image of Sweet Home is another confusing image. The name itself is ironic why is it
88 called Sweet Home when such horrible things happened there? What exactly happened in
89 Sweet Home? "It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty
90 place too."

91 >What I found particularly interesting about this weeks reading, centers around the whole
92 notion of one being 'haunted'. In many of the novels/writings that we've read for class this year
93 dealing with the topic of slavery, we've been introduced to plenty of examples of ex-slaves
94 who've felt 'haunted' by the traumatizing events of their pasts. In 'Beloved' however, this
95 pattern seems to falter: many of the characters (primarily Sethe and Paul D) seem instead to
96 CHERISH the memories provided by their past lives of servitude. This becomes even more
97 problematic, when we consider the violent ghost of Sethe's deceased daughter. Not only is this
98 'haunting' taking place in a house that may have traditionally represented a means of freedom
99 for the escaped slave (let alone a female one), but the ghost's presence seems to be attempting to
100 will them out of the house entirely. This contrast undoubtedly changes the dynamic between
101 characters in the novel. On a side note, understanding that the death of 'Beloved' was not by
102 any means under the 'happiest of circumstances', are we given any inference as to why she's
103 acting in such a violent way towards her former family?

104

105 >Beloved:

106 -All characters have interesting names

107 -Why is the grandmother pondering color?

108 -Did Sethe name her daughter beloved or did she just put that on her gravestone? Who would
109 cut a baby's throat? Is that actually how she died?

110 -Characters don't talk proper English which shows that they were definitely not schooled

111 -Interesting how even Paul D notices the evil of the house before he even enters it.

112 -Is Sethe blind?

113 -The young men had taken to calves? Really?

114 -What does it mean that Halle bought her with five years of Sundays?

115 -I was shocked to find out that their dog, named Here Boy, lived after being beaten up like that.
116 The dog's name is very weird.

117 -Denver calls her mom ma'am, this is a sign of ultimate respect and a bit like servitude.

118 -Boys breast fed off of Sethe, she was more upset that they took her milk than that they
119 whipped her.

120 -Paul D feels her up and she lets him.
121 -Paul D steals Denver's company away from her and also takes her mom.
122 -Interesting lines: "slowly, methodically, miserably she ate it."
123 "nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children."
124 -call Native Americans "Redmen"
125 Bible:
126 -Judas is cursed by Peter and replaced by Matthias b/c he betrayed Jesus
127 -The arrival of the Holy Spirit can be compared to that of being possessed by something evil.
128 -God wants John to spread the story of how God appeared
129
130 >It is strange that Denver's biggest complaint with living in Sethe's house is that she feels cut off
131 from society- that she is devoid of friendships or respect- but not that her house is haunted
132 (p.17). I've referenced Maslow's hierarchy of needs once before this year and i will do so again
133 to make a point: that the haunting is not a bad(physically harmful) haunting. If it were a bad
134 haunting, then Denver's complaint would be about her dead sibling's ghost. In the hierarchy,
135 before esteem(respect by others) and love or belonging(friendship) are one's physiological
136 needs. If the haunting were bad, then Denver should feel as though her physiological need to
137 subsist was in jeopardy and if this were, in fact, the case, then she would not have cared about
138 social isolation, so much as her own physical well being. What makes the haunting bad has
139 nothing to do with the nature of the 'haint' but more of how the protagonist perceives the mere
140 presence of it: that it is a constant reminder of her(Sethe's) inescapable past. However, the
141 haunting is beneficial for Denver who finds pleasure in the company of her dead sibling's ghost,
142 it being the only company she has apart from a mother whom she resents (p.23).
143 ¶The scene involving Paul D holding Sethe's breasts is crucial to the understanding of Sethe's
144 character (p.20-21). Sethe expresses relief in having the burden of her breast, now a reminder of
145 the milk for her unborn child that was both wasted and stolen, taken from her. This is almost to
146 say that, in weight being literally taken from her shoulders, that some emotional baggage is also
147 taken from her by this action. To feel relief in the temporal absolution of past baggage suggests
148 a constant struggle with her past and an exhaustion in dealing with it's weight on her
149 conscience. Sethe is depicted as a character with a tragic past that does not have enough
150 strength to accept that tragedy and to attain liberation.
151
152 >To comment on your notes, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues is a unifying
153 factor because it brings the whole world together as opposed to the incident of Babel where
154 people were scattered through it. We talked about the new concept of God coming into
155 covenant with all people in class as something unique to Christianity. I think that this is the first
156 clear proof that it was meant for all people.
157 I find this statement interesting, "...nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces
158 included her children." What do you think about the attitude towards family in this novel.
159 Personally,I find this notion very different from the one in FD's story because in FD's case
160 family seemed to mean a lot more than it does in the 'Beloved'.
161

162 >Beloved, like The White Tiger, exhibits another story about oppression by family. Though
163 Sethe is technically a free woman, she is still haunted by the ghost of her baby, which in turn
164 brings back haunting memories of her time as a slave. Grandma Baby Suggs shares the same
165 problem, as her 8 children were also taken away from her. This situation is extremely similar to
166 what Balram faced during his search for freedom, as he was being constantly reminded of the
167 death of his Tb-infected father. Family, here, holds back yet another victim of servitude from
168 attaining freedom.

169 ¶As for the passage in the Bible, I was not really surprised by much. It yet again discussed the
170 disciples' issues with gaining followers of Jesus. The story of Saul, however, was quite
171 interesting; he was an unfaithful man given a second chance by the Lord, and yet his worldly
172 companions wished to murder him. The book of Revelation also gave me a strange thought. I
173 realized how, though Heaven is a passage to ultimate freedom, if one sins and follows in the
174 path of Satan, he/she will be forced to live an eternity of servitude in Hell. It's such a cool
175 concept.