Nov. 16: *Beloved* to p. 138

**Baby Suggs**

>Something I have keep a close eye on is the character of Baby Suggs and her similarities to biblical figures. Note how she washes Sethe before she sees her children. This is a practice performed in the Bible where the host would wash the feet of the person. It was a big deal when Jesus washes others’ feet.

¶What is the significance of the Beloved watching the two turtles mate? I never understood that.

>After reading this section, I was once again really amazed by Baby Suggs character. Her loving and vibrant spirit is developed even more in the haunting description of her own kind of religion, her own kind of love, her own kind of vibrance in a not so vibrant world. I was positively transfixed by the calling forth of the children to laugh and the men to dance and the women to cry. It was a remarkable how Baby suggs called upon some new sort of healing within the people that was focused exclusively on self love and not upon the Christian religion which can often lead to so much self hate. Baby Suggs commanded the situation with so much passion and so much color. It was striking how mere lines later the narrator states that Baby Suggs had been like this until 28 days after her daughter-in-law had arrived. It was almost as if Sethe ripped all this life and color from baby suggs and could only give her fake pieces of it from then on out.

**Paul D**

>I enjoyed this section of the reading a lot. I have not been to enthralled with the novel thus far but this section has proven much better than the rest in my eyes. I think the plot is thicker and the writing is better. It is a section that is rich with detail and history and I learned a lot about the characters. I am a real fan of Paul D, he is my favorite character hands down. I feel such a ridiculous amount of feminism out of this book that I enjoy rooting for Paul. Even though he should not have lain with Beloved I applaud him for trying to withstand her. I find his story to be one of the most interesting. A wanderer, conscious of the fact that something is amiss with Beloved. He is the most logical and is a rambling man. Independent, wandering, but caring and intelligent. Solem after a hard life, wise in the ways of life, and not afraid to speak his mind and stand up for himself and what he cares for. I think Paul is the only good thing the book has and once he leaves it is going to fall apart. Without Paul the household will crumble and Beloved will get her way. I will miss Paul once he is gone, he is a good guy.

>Paul D’s story about the rooster called Mister expands the comparison of slaves to animals further—in this case, the rooster has status, a name, and freedom, where Paul D does not. He
realizes that he is “less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub,” a truly depressing image. One
of the worst parts for Paul D is the fact that he got Mister out of his shell, literally gave him life,
and Mister still had more freedom than he did. The description of other slaves on page 78 all
show an animal status that they willingly, or out of necessity, take on: “hidden in caves, fought
owls for food…stole from pigs…slept in trees…buried themselves in slop,” live in the woods
for their whole lives. Finally the slaves extend their bestiality to family, as with the example of
the woman who believed ducks were her babies—the saddest part is, the woman had to steal
her “family,” proving that they have no sense of possession in the first place.

> pg.84: Irons
I was shocked to find out that the iron that kept Paul from speaking to Halle referred to a literal
tool. I interpreted the iron to represent some kind of repression. In establishing that the terms
"Sweet Home" and "sweet home men" are constructs used to further subdue the agencies of
many a slave on that plantation, we also establish the master's desire in maiming the humanity
of his enslaved persons. Certainly the conditions of Paul's bondage had debilitating effects but
this example speaks towards the master's power to retard or prevent social relations of an
enslaved person with people of like circumstances. In this regard, the irons are symbols of social
repression.

p.86 & p.138: Red Heart
In the first part of today's reading, Paul D uses the image of a rusted tobacco tin as a
representation of his heart: the vile smelling tobacco that lies at his core, and of which he is
ashamed, being hidden in a tin case so to prevent the shame of his true nature becoming
known. In this earlier part, he claims that his red heart has been replaced by that tin, but the last
paragraph would suggest that the true content of his tobacco tin is his red heart. Maybe the red
heart suggests a bestial nature, he does claim that his heart is less than that of a rooster. Thus, to
obtain a red heart may be to elevate oneself unto the level of a beast. In having sex with
Beloved, he is awoken to his own animal nature, that was released upon the lid having given
way.

> Although the focus of the story centers on Sethe's inability to remove herself from the past,
Paul D has his own problems in dealing with his long suffering history. I find the two parallel
each other in how they wish to cope with the past. Sethe wishes she could stop thinking about
the horrible events that happened to her and on page 83 we see her only means of escape is
insanity. A better ending for her entails sitting with butter on her face, completely crazy like
Halle. At least then she is excused from and removed from what went on. Paul D struggles with
a similar concept to Sethe's when he mentions the wildness in his eyes. He says there are ways
to put it in and take it out of your eyes, and his uncertainty about which is better raises
questions whether or not he believes it would be better or not to remain in that separate wild
state, lost in the moment, instead of being "free" from what is going on and being able to reflect
on the atrocities.
>I found the comparison in your notes on the manhood of Paul D really interesting. I think that
the fact that he is just called Paul D, one among the many Pauls, is a sign of lack of identity. We
can also compare his movements from place to place and never being able to settle in with a
woman until Serthe as a sign of a search for identity. He seems to find it when he comes to live
with Serthe. He seems to find a sense of purpose. Serthe seems to think that he is a man too and
not a coward as her Halle because he was able to exorcise the ghost.

I also think that Sethe found refuge in being attractive as a woman and that's why it is said
that she had milk enough for all.

Denver

Denver goes mute and doesn't return to ‘school’ because a boy asks her if it was true that
Sethe had been in jail, and that Denver had gone with her. The question sparks a memory in
Denver of that time, and she goes silent with fear—and not only silent but deaf also, until the
day she hears the baby ghost crawling up the stairs. Denver’s silence is comparable to Paul D’s
bit because he quite literally cannot speak. Both silences are a result, somehow, of that
oppression, of that imprisonment, of that fear. Even though Denver was never a slave as Paul D
was, the mere memory of an imprisonment is enough to produce the same result: silence and a
lack of education.

Beloved

Calling someone "beloved" to get rid of him/her is incredibly ironic because “beloved”
connotes not just affection but an even deeper, greater feeling... Her saying “call me by my
name” makes the situation intimate already—the fact that her name is also connotes a high level
of love is additionally intimate. I also found it ironic that Beloved admits to loving Sethe more
than anything, as Paul D loves her, yet she wants to be intimate with him to somehow drive
him out.

Love

>Again, the theme of love is mentioned. Love is defined differently by each character and can be
seen as follows:

- Denver - She loves her mother, but loves Beloved even more. She struggles with
  the balance of this love because Beloved is her only company, yet she notices her
  malevolent intentions with Sethe.

- Sethe - She loves all of her children and would do anything for them.

- Paul D - He has locked away his emotions and memories in a tobacco tin that
  replaced his heart. He is learning to love Sethe more and more each day.
Beloved - She is only concerned with Sethe and claims that she loves her, but her actions make us question her love.

The lady that helped Sethe and Denver once they crossed the river said, "If anybody was to ask me I’d say, 'Don’t love nothing.'" The idea is that things come and go, and it is up to you to risk loving something that might leave you. The degree of love and expression of love will be seen throughout the novel.

> “Nothing better than that to start the day’s serious work of beating back the past.”

- the past will hurt
- Who are the other people that are down where Beloved came from and what does she mean that some are dead? Are they all not dead?
- “This is where I am” Beloved is there to stay
- “She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have.” Is Beloved saying that she wouldn’t mind if Denver dies? Sibling jealousy?
- Denver and Beloved both love the story of how Denver was born.
- Seems as if water has a big healing power throughout the book.
- Denver is born in it
- “Her heavy knives of defense against misery, regret, gall and hurt, she placed by one on a bank where clear water rushed below.”
- “She begged him for water ad he gave her some of the Ohio in a jar. Sethe drank it all and begged more.”
- Seems as if Baby Suggs started a new community
- Sethe brought all of the grief to 124
- Stamp Paid- seems like a name he put together himself from reading random things.
- Why did Sethe only have 28 days of unslaved life?
- “Beloved’s fingers were heavenly” – heavenly because she’s dead?
- Three women in the middle of the Clearing
  - Three = trinity
  - why is clearing capitalized?
- Beloved’s breath smelling like new milk…doesn’t Sethe get the point??
  - “Beloved so agitated she behaved like a two-year-old”
- Beloved describes the Cardinal as a blood spot
- How did Denver go deaf? And why at that point?
- Paul D tried to kill his new owner?
  - jailed…part of a chain gang
- Water (rain) helped the prisoners escape
- Paul D locked his memories into his tobacco tin in his chest?

> And just when you think it couldn’t get any worse…Beloved tries to strangle her mother in her reincarnated ghost self? I am also quite disturbed that Denver would choose Beloved over her
own mother. She is that starved for attention? The reader is finally introduced to Sethe as a murder through Denver’s eyes. Although like the rest of the book it is hard to accept one character’s narration because they all link together. This book just keeps getting stranger and I find myself confused most of the time. True the pieces are starting to come together, but I have a feeling there will always be questions unanswered. Morrison’s style is haunting and addictive and keeps me reading.

General

> This novel gets more and more disturbing, but paradoxically, the prose is rich and beautiful. Toni Morrison uses a lot of imagery. Imagery, combined with personification, is often used to describe a character’s emotion. Using rich imagery and other forms of literary devices is much better than simply stating, “It had a great impact.” Morrison’s work adds deeper meaning and hold greater purpose. This is very effective when speaking of a topic as grave as slavery and life after slavery.

> I’ll break things down by chapter:

¶ Chapter 7: I felt like this chapter was interesting in that it seemed to fulfill a sort of ‘prophecy’ that was mentioned earlier in the book: I can’t remember the exact chapter, but I recall Amy telling Sethe something to the effect of “something that has died hurts when it comes back to life”. Here, in Sethe and Paul D’s "shared memories of violation", both characters discuss and confide their feelings in each other despite the pain that results.

¶ Chapter 8: I found it ironic that Sethe’s water breaks in the retelling of Denver’s birth upon stepping into a boat, while Beloved was ‘reborn’ years later not soon before Sethe is reminded of her water breaking upon returning from the carnival. Also, while Beloved’s description of her birth undoubtedly holds some parallels with the experiences of a fetus in the womb, for me, it brought to mind the stories of slaves who were brought to America via ship - and the dark small quarters they were forced to endure for extended periods of time.

¶ Chapter 9: Baby Suggs telling her listeners to love their hearts most of all - is this a response to Paul D’s "tobacco tin” comment? Ironic, because that’s where he claimed to 'store his shame'.

¶ Chapter 10: You mentioned the parallel between Paul’s ‘rebirth’ in this chapter with the ‘rebirth’ of Beloved. Adding to this, could one parallel the cramped darkness of the womb to the small boxes the prisoners were locked in?

¶ Chapter 11: Once again, we’re given the image of a daughter who sort of attempts to ‘take her mother’s place’ (I’m referring to scene when Paul D. first arrives and Denver attempts to win his attention). I felt like the sexuality that manifests itself in Beloved sort of forms a break in the parallel to her being the reincarnation of a dead infant. Regardless, I know you had mentioned
the irony of her asking to be called by name - could this not be a sort of 'identity insecurity' too?
- Especially, given that she never really had the chance to develop one?

>First, I must remark on Halle's reaction of smearing butter on his face. I understand that it signifies Sethe's stolen milk, however, I cannot say, with certainty, why butter (a more solid form of milk) and why on the face. It's slightly disturbing to find out that Halle saw and dealt with such problems so close to his escape.

¶I find Beloved's appearance to be quite disturbing, increasingly so, in fact. She continues to annoy me considering her intentions seem rather evil. May I again say that her appearance becomes more and more disturbing.

¶Finally, I must admit that I remain confused (even though I finished the novel). I think that perhaps I have not come to terms with the meaning of Beloved's original death and rebirth. What is the purpose of Beloved's rebirth? Why does no one explain the situation to Paul D earlier?

> This reading was so disturbing! It was a bit confusing too. I'm not sure I quite understand the parallel between the two mating turtles and Paul D/Beloved's relationship, but it certainly was NOT at all expected at all. Is Beloved doing this only to create tension without the household? Is she simply making Paul D uncomfortable so that he will leave 124 for good?

¶I also am a bit disturbed by Denver's relationship with Beloved, as it is definitely not a healthy one. Denver is far too dependent on Beloved for her own good and I know that this will only hurt her in the end. When she's not hanging around with her dead sister, she is bored, almost hopeless...as if she doesn't know of anything else to do with her time.

¶The last thing that confused me was Sethe's choking/Beloved's choking. Were these instances somehow related to one another? It just seems strange that Beloved would want to strangle herself, yet I could see why she would be able to strangle Sethe. Perhaps Baby Suggs actually was involved with one of these stranglings?