Dec. 2: *Beloved*, Part III

>In my reading of the end of *Beloved*, I was most surprised by the section in which Beloved becomes pregnant. That really shocked and confused me. Until that point I had considered Beloved to simply be a reincarnated child, but when she was suddenly pregnant, it gave a new definition to the concept of babies having babies. It really scared me. It also brought a striking similarity to Sethe's pregnancy with Denver when she reached 124. It also was a striking parallel to Paul D's want to have a child with Sethe, but instead it was with someone that wanted to be and possess sethe. Like I said, I was a little terrified.

>I think a really important theme of this novel is stated in the quote "outhurt the hurter." It's important to think about is this a character's intention, or is it more of survival and doing things you don't necessarily want to do but have to out of protection. Consider which one Sethe fits under? Yes what she says may place her easily in one category initially, but perhaps on a deeper level she can fit into both.

>Also, what is the significance that when Beloved runs off into the woods he hair is made of fish?

>Stamp Paid brings up the idea that Beloved might be a different girl. He suggests “a girl locked up by a white man over by Deer Creek. Found him dead last summer and the girl gone. Maybe that's her.” It seems as though Beloved can’t be pinned to one character, she basically isn’t a character she’s a presence. Morrison makes it seem likely that Beloved is in fact Sethe’s daughter reincarnated and seeking love and revenge. But, Morrison also throws in twists so at the end you never really know if Beloved even existed and if she did you don’t know exactly who or what she was. Everyone even Paul D, Sethe and Denver eventually forget about her. So in the end who is Beloved and what happens to her baby if it even existed?

>Chapter 26: In response to your question "How can thirty women break the spell?": I thought this was particularly interesting - Lately, it seems that we’ve been talking a lot about the identity of Beloved, and how she may represent the 'haunting presence' of slavery as well as the reincarnation of Sethe’s deceased daughter. This may explain why it takes a large portion of the town’s community to exorcise the ghost: the residents of 124 aren’t the only characters in ‘Beloved’ that feel the ghosts haunting presence; the consequences of slavery are capable of haunting large groups of people, including the citizens of the community portrayed in 'Beloved'. Is this sort-of on the right track?

>Chapter 27: In response to your question "How is the end of the reunion between Sethe and Paul D different from the choral section 'You are mine/You are mine/You are mine'? To me, these lines ("Me? Me?") mark the foundation of Sethe’s new and possibly 'to-be-found' identity. That is, one that focuses on the importance of her (Sethe’s) own well being. Up until now, I think I'm pretty safe in saying that Sethe based the bulk of her self-worth on her children (hence the extreme feelings of guilt following Beloved’s death). "You are mine" not only implies that Sethe
considers Beloved an extension of herself (assuming it is Sethe who is speaking), but its repetition may shed some light on the urgency/importance of the statement.

Chapter 28: In response to question "what are the multiple senses of "It was not a story to pass on"?: A loaded quote - I found it intriguing that it seems to permeate the ‘forgetting of’ Beloved. At first, it seemed to serve as sort of a warning. However, the novel 'Beloved' itself actually DOES pass that story on: in fact, I would argue that the novel itself serves to remind its audience of a history (namely that of slavery...wasn't this book written in the 1980's?) that’s cruelty and luridness has been dulled by the passing of time. Of course, this interpretation brings into question the motives behind the narrator’s statement of ‘not passing on the story’ in the first place: could it serve to remind us that retaining the horrors of our past is easier said than done?

>I can say with certainty that Beloved is the kind of book that in order to semi-understand must be read more than once. After the first read I find myself still asking many questions. What was Beloved, really? As we have discussed, she may represent the baby or slavery, et cetera, but in my eyes she just seemed like a devil in disguise. Sethe may or may not have been in the wrong, but that does not mean that revenge should be the answer or the punishment. On page 323 and 324 I couldn’t help to think that, thank goodness they forgot her, she didn’t deserve to be remembered. Scarily enough, Beloved’s presence still seems to have a grasp on the place. On the positive side, I did enjoy the fact that the community had enough courage to come together and pray. That was a very special moment. Last of all, Paul D was so kind to Sethe at the end, it broke my heart, in a manner of speaking. All in all, a nice ending to an interesting novel.

>The lines, ”Down by the stream in the back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go. They are so familiar. Should a child, an adult place his feet on them, they will fit. Take them out and they disappear again as though nobody walked there,” on the final page seem to allude to slavery and racism and the pain that it has cost. The whole novel is an allusion of how to deal with it. Even though Beloved is ’disremembered’, I think she played a role in helping many people acknowledge their loss in their lives and when they faced it they found their healing. For example, the whole community and Sethe’s family was restored as a result of her coming back. For me, this is a good picture of people finding healing by facing the pains of the past.

>I was surprised that Part 3 was so short. It seems like the book took a long time to lead up to the point where Beloved is basically killing Sethe, and then didn’t discuss it as much as other parts. Denver notices that “the bigger Beloved [gets], the smaller Sethe [becomes]; the brighter Beloved’s eyes, the more those eyes that never used to look away became slits of sleeplessness. …She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life” (295). Sethe is compared to a child, showing that the mother-daughter roles have switched. Also, Beloved appears pregnant, further depicting this switch; however, Beloved is consuming Sethe instead of giving birth. Beloved “gets bigger” while Sethe gets “smaller,” implying an increase in Beloved’s power while Sethe appears to worsen.
The imagery of the “exorcism” is interesting because it is “spiritual,” if not biblical—the mentions of the devil, prayer, and baptism seem contrary to most of the novel, which uses Biblical allusions but doesn’t actively employ Christian rituals.

In the end, “by and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss. Beloved.” In forgetting “the water and what is down there,” Sethe must discard the paradoxical motherhood of love and violence that water represents. All “trace” of motherhood is “gone,” leaving Sethe with “weather.” Paul D tells Sethe, “‘You your best thing, Sethe. You are’” (332). Sethe has to stop defining herself by Beloved, “my best thing,” who represents not only her violent motherhood but slavery in general. In obtaining ownership of self, Sethe is able to free herself and choose love, thereby possessing mother love in its truest form.

I love the last chapter. It is so completely beautifully written, and emphasizes Beloved’s identity as a representation of slavery—she is “deliberately forgotten” and “has claim but is not claimed”—sometimes they remember her but they try not to.

A favorite quote: “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.”

—I read the essay prompt that says freedom is basically something that is a normally a positive influence in people’s lives. We see in the context of this book is something unfair, perverted or altered, and generally unobtainable even. After reading this, I think motherhood, its importance, and role in shaping the stories characters should be considered in a light similar to this.

Throughout the novel, we how bad having a mother can be for the children and the mothers themselves. Halle’s actions to sacrifice himself for his mother had detrimental effects on Baby Suggs, along with the loss of her children. Sethe ties in with a mother’s love being too thick. Her mothering caused her to kill one child and drive an inseparable wedge between that family. For the longest time, I felt terribly sorry for Denver because she was without a mother figure and played second banana to Beloved as babies and young adults in Sethe’s mind. But in the end, look at what this isolation gives Denver. A chance to obtain perspective on her mother’s state and finally allows her to grow.

Baby Suggs and her influence on Denver’s social efficacy in chapter 26 would suggest a taking up of her grandmother’s legacy. In Denver’s ability to mobilize the black community, as if to unify it as Baby Suggs once did, she demonstrates her own ability to gain public sentiment. This is likely because Suggs has a blood relation to Denver, Sethe does not share in this capacity because she is not related to Suggs. Seeing as this is a matter of lineage, then the provocative question may be: does Beloved possess this same quality and, if so, to what extent?

In chapter 27, Paul D claims that his past is made less shameful by Sethe’s yearning for her own. While Paul ran from his past and its dehumanizing effects, Sethe embraced her past and was so caught up in it that she could barely exist in the present, hence the vacant eyes and her deficient humanity. In Paul’s conviction to live in the future his past is reconciled. His hope in advising Sethe to do so as well is that it will do the same for her.
Also so chapter 27, Sethe claims that Beloved was her best thing which suggests that her life has lost something essential to it. In class we’ve discussed the shared personality dynamic between mother and child. In most mother’s lifetimes, they will have to give up this dynamic as the child grows to maturity. Sethe’s woes in chapter 27 are akin to that of any mother who is forced to depart with their matured child. Their children serve as mere extensions of themselves and, once they are divorced from that part of themselves, they find it difficult to live without. It is important for Paul D to tell Sethe that she must now live for herself, because to make apparent the reality of the situation is to further help the one dealing with it to accept it.

There are two prominent dynamic characters in Beloved, Sethe and Denver. Denver develops into a matured woman while Sethe deteriorates and becomes childlike. Denver’s role as a mediator is also important to the novel. I was proud of Denver assuming her role because, honestly, she is the only person aware of everything. She has her naive days in the beginning, but she finally realizes the situation and acts on it. Leaving 124 to reconnect with the community is the best thought she has.

The first thing I noticed in this reading is Sethe’s devotion to Beloved. Once she finally figures out that Beloved is her daughter returned, she devotes everything to her. Beloved tortures and manipulates her mother into getting more and more out of her. It is very reminiscent of the trickster ways in which Odysseus used hints and slowly gained more money out of the Phaeacians. Beloved embodies the trickster Idea that we discussed with Odysseus. Beloved sucks the life out of her mother, and seemingly out of 124 as well. I am confused on who lady jones is exactly. I see that she somehow knows Denver but I thought Denver never really left Sweet Home. I didn’t originally think that she knew what was going on. The exorcism at the very end was also surprising, though expected. The fact that so many would come out, when the town that had abandoned and betrayed Sethe in a way that caused Beloved’s death and the subsequent haunting by her, would come out to reverse the thing that they had caused, even unknowingly, is a sign of redemption in a way for the townspeople.

One passage from this reading was especially noteworthy for me: the exorcism.

"Vines of hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling". I thought it was interesting how "Jesus" is its own sentence. Put this way, it doesn’t seem to be statement of exclamation (like "Wow, she's so pretty!"), but it's as if Beloved actually IS Jesus. It's almost like Jesus' coming of the dead, with the difference here being that although people believe in her, none of her believers wish for her to stay.

The dazzling smile that she’s described with also gives her the illusion of an innocent, beautiful angel. Beloved (to me, at least) is the complete anti-angel, and yet here she is being described as if she were God's own kin. This makes the situation extremely creepy.

I have a question about her being pregnant, though. At first I thought she was almost in a mother Mary-like situation, impregnated without having a mate. However, then I realized that she had had sex with Paul D. Could that mean that Paul D would have been Beloved’s baby’s father? Or was the baby just symbolism for Sethe’s regression and not an actual being?