

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPORTANCE OF SURROGATE MOTHERS AND THE COMMUNITY OF WOMEN IN HELPING DAUGHTERS DEAL WITH TRAUMA IN *BELOVED*

In discussing the importance of “Maternal Practice and Maternal Thinking”, Sara Ruddick defines the duties of mothers in general and proposes three maternal demands to nurture their children: preservation, growth and social acceptance. Preservation is the task that Ruddick regards as “the constitutive maternal act” (qtd. in O’Reilly 27) which can be accomplished by maternal preservative love. Showing their preservative love, mothers priority should be to “keep safe whatever is vulnerable and valuable in child[ren]” (qtd. O’Reilly 27) and preserve the children’s lives. Mothers also need to meet the demand for children’s growth. This kind of demand can be fulfilled by maternal nurturance which is “to nurture its [a child’s] emotional and intellectual growth” (qtd. in O’Reilly 27). Another demand suggested by Ruddick is social acceptance. Mothers have to train their children in order for them to be accepted by society.

Using Ruddick’s notion as her basis, Andrea O’Reilly develops a more specific theory of motherwork that applies to the relationship between black mothers and their children. Motherwork consists of four maternal tasks, which are preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing and healing. O’Reilly agrees with Ruddick’s concept of maternal duty in preservation. She says, “keeping children alive through preservation love is an essential and integral dimension of motherwork” (32). After the task of preservation is ensured, O’Reilly supports Ruddick’s idea that the task of

nurturance should be supplemented in order to strengthen the children's psychological health. She goes further to develop the idea that nurturance includes the ability to protect their children from the effects of racism for black mothers with the belief that maternal nurturance helps children strengthen their ability to deal with terrible experiences in slavery. Children can "survive and resist the maiming of racism and, for daughters, sexism and grow into adulthood whole and complete" (33). O'Reilly believes that maternal tasks should include "the African American maternal custom of cultural bearing." The task of cultural bearing is necessary especially for African American women because it allows for the possibility of black children's empowerment.

O'Reilly believes that after these mothers fulfill their task of cultural bearing, the children will be better prepared to cope with racism and/or sexism. O'Reilly defines cultural bearing as "the task of rearing children in accordance with the values and beliefs and customs of African American culture and in particular the value of the funk and the ancient properties" (29). "The ancient properties" is a term used specifically to refer to "traditional conceptions of black womanhood" (20). O'Reilly explains the conceptions by borrowing Toni Morrison's images of "ship and safe harbor" and "inn and trail." Morrison discusses the images of "ship and safe harbor" in *Essence*, an interview with Judith Wilson (1981) where she uses these images to illustrate her standpoint on maternal identity. She believes that the qualities of being "ship and safe harbor" enable black mothers to be empowered. They become "complete human being(s)" (Taylor-Guthrie 135). The images of "ship and safe harbor" are compared to the qualities of mothers. The image of a "ship"—a vehicle that helps the passengers go through waves and storms—is metaphorically used to represent mothers who are strong, reliable and have survival skills. These mothers

have the ability to earn a living and the strength to cope with real life situations. At the same time, mothers should be a “safe harbor” for their children. As this metaphorical safe harbor, mothers should be able to nurture their children and to help them heal. The other images used to elaborate “the traditional conceptions of black womanhood” are the images of “inn and trail”—a path and a refuge during an overland journey. These images are parallel to the images of “ship and safe harbor”. The image of a “trail”—a series of marks or other signs of movement left by someone to lead the way—suggests mothers who have attained the wisdom to live their own lives and can lead their children the best way possible. The image of an “inn” is similar to a “safe harbor.” It suggests the mothers’ ability to be their children’s source of refuge from danger and/or troubles in their lives. The maternal qualities suggested by the images of “ship and safe harbor” and “inn and trail” are shown in the figure of the black mammy Morrison describes in her conversation with Anne Koenen (1980):

It seems to me that the most respectable person is that woman who is a healer and understands plants and stones and yet they live in the world. Those people are always strange, when they get to the city. These women know what time it is by looking at the sky. I don’t want to reduce it to some sort of heavy know-how, but it’s paying attention to different sets of information, and that information certainly isn’t useful in terms of a career. [...] It’s a quality that normally one associates with a mammy, a black mammy. She could nurse, she could heal, she could chop wood, she could do all those things (Taylor-Guthrie 81-82).

The black mammy can serve as the model for black mothers due to the fact that she has the African American wisdom to live her own life and is able to survive in all situations. At the same time, she is also a mother who can heal and nurse her children.

O’Reilly also includes “the value of the funk” into the maternal duty of cultural bearing because it helps the blacks to develop their African American identity which can lead to self-esteem and a complete sense of self. Valerie Boyd defines “funk” in “The Ritual” as “a rawness, an on-the-edge passion that’s in yo’ face.[...]”

The funk is the genius of black folks, the almost tangible, smellable, testable collective contribution of African Americans” (44). It can be said that the funk is a common value shared by all black people. It can be used to refer to as passion, wide range of emotions or anything which appeals to the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. O’Reilly clarifies her idea of the funk by referring to the funk in Morrison’s works. Morrison began using the idea of funk in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and referred to it as “the funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of a wide range of emotions” and indirectly explicated through literary devices such as metaphor, personification and juxtaposition (qtd. in O’Reilly 24):

My [Pauline’s] whole dress was messed with purple, it never did wash out. Not the dress nor me. I could feel that purple deep inside me. And that lemonade Mama used to make when Pa came in out in the fields, It be cool and yellowish (12).

Morrison uses color imagery to describe Pauline’s dress, her feelings, and food. Not only is color imagery used to draw a vivid picture of Pauline’s dress but also suggests how the stain affects the character’s feelings. The positive connotation alluded through the picture describing stain also suggests how black people appreciate beauty in nature. Moreover, Mama’s “cool and yellowish” lemonade reflects the black’s folkway of life, such as working in the field and down-home cooking which is, according to O’Reilly, life-affirming and contrasts with the life-denying ambition in capitalism (24). The laborious work and the heat in the field can be relieved with a drink of Mama’s cool lemonade. The word “yellowish” can also suggest Pauline’s zest and cheerfulness after she drinks it.

Black women are able to preserve the ancient properties and the funk by establishing a connection with their African-American culture and history largely through the maternal line. Mothers will empower their daughters by transmitting the

culture and history to the daughters by means of storytelling, songs or even soliloquies as Morrison's mother did: "[She had a] habit of getting stuck like a record on some problem, going on for days and days and then singing in between [...] just like a saga" (Taylor-Guthrie 172). By doing so, the mothers "import important life lessons about black strength and courage as well as instill knowledge [...], and pride in African American heritage that enable children to refuse the controlling images of blackness put forward by dominant culture" (O'Reilly 37). Morrison regards these mothers as ambassadors who bring the past to the present and preserve African-American culture for the next generation of the black community (qtd. in O'Reilly 23). The black daughters who live their lives replicating those of their foremothers, and define themselves according to the traditional conceptions of black motherhood as the ship and the safe harbor have the possibility of developing into free and strong black women.

The first three maternal tasks proposed by O'Reilly—preservation, nurturance and cultural bearing—are regarded as a "preventive or pro-active act" (38). O'Reilly believes that these tasks enable children to develop self-love and self-esteem. They will have a feeling of being loved and a sense of self as a black person. Having a strong black identity, black children will be prepared for the experiences of racism and/or sexism (38). For those blacks who never experience preservation, nurturance and cultural bearing in their childhood and suffer from racism and/or sexism, O'Reilly proposes "re-active or restorative practice" (38), healing, in order to restore the blacks who are physically and psychologically wounded. Healing is possible when psychologically wounded adults are able to relate to the generation before them, remember their mothers, mourn for the loss of their mothers, reconnect with their mothers and recreate themselves as mothered children (40-41). Similarly, when black

children reconnect with their mothers, they are able to heal their psychological wounds and develop their strong sense of self.

According to O'Reilly's theory, these four maternal practices can both protect black children from racism and/or sexism and, in cases where children are physically and psychologically wounded by slavery, restore them from those painful experiences. Unfortunately, black mothers in slavery had few opportunities to be with their children or to meet the maternal demands of preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing and healing. Barbara Omolade explains the black mother's situation under the yoke of slavery:

The female slave was a fragmented commodity whose back and muscle were pressed into field labor, whose hands were demanded to nurse and nurture the white man and his family as domestic servant, whose vagina, used for his sexual pleasure, was his place of capital investment (qtd. in Bouson 138).

According to Omolade, the white masters denied these mothers' chance to fulfill their role as nurturing mothers. The masters separated black mothers from their children, either by forcing them to work in the fields and in the white men's houses, or trading black children as property. In these situations, surrogate mothers played the nurturing role instead of the biological mother to ensure black children's physical and psychological well-being. After the abolition of slavery, the pattern of black families remained unchanged. Black mothers still had limited opportunities to be with their children. They had to work in order to earn a living and still required help from surrogate mothers in childcare.

Morrison's *Beloved* is a novel concerning mothers whose opportunities to perform their role as mothers were affected by slavery. Sethe's mother could not fulfill all four maternal responsibilities. During the Middle Passage, Sethe's mother did not preserve her children's lives by discarding the children who had been fathered

by white men. She decided to keep only Sethe whose father was a black man. Although Sethe could be regarded as a beloved daughter, being the only child her mother preserved during the Middle Passage, her mother was unable to provide her with a more conducive environment while growing up, having to work very hard on the plantation and left with little time to perform her maternal role as she exclaimed, “[my mother] must nurse me two or three weeks—that’s the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was [...] She never fixed my hair nor nothing” (60). Sethe’s mother could not provide food or look after her own daughter because she was required to spend her time working in the field day and night.

Apart from Sethe’s mother being denied the chance of fulfilling her maternal practices of preservation and nurturance, the conditions of slavery also denied her the opportunity to provide cultural bearing. Sethe retains very few experiences with her mother and they were fragments, not whole intact memories. Sethe can picture her mother toiling in the field, her scar, and the way she died. She has even forgotten her mother’s language. Moreover, Sethe’s mother was unable to relate to Sethe her terrible experiences both during the Middle Passage and under slavery. The only thing that Sethe’s mother tries to do is to establish a bond with her daughter by showing her the branded body:

One thing she [Sethe’s mother] did do. 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 burnt right in the skin. She said, “This is your ma’am. This,” and she pointed “I’m the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can’t tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark (61).

Sethe's mother showed her brand to Sethe because she feared that she would be mutilated and killed under slavery. However, this only tie with her daughter is destroyed as her branded body was brutally mutilated by the white master and Sethe is unable to separate her mother's dead body from a pile of dead people.

Because of Sethe's biological mother's limited opportunities to fulfill her maternal responsibilities, it is Nan, the surrogate mother who plays the maternal role instead. Nan raises Sethe and takes care of her while her mother is in the fields. Nan also performs her duty in cultural bearing as well. She is the best character to enable Sethe to develop ties with her African-American culture and her mother because she is an African woman who has survived the Middle Passage. Nan had been Sethe's mother's only friend. Fulfilling her role in cultural bearing, Nan relates to Sethe the terrible experiences that she shared with Sethe's mother during the Middle Passage and under slavery. However, the task of cultural bearing provided by Nan fails because Sethe is too young to remember the African language as she admits: "Words Sethe understand then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home [...]" (62).

Growing up with such incomplete maternal demands of preservation, nurturance and cultural bearing, Sethe becomes a victim of racism and sexism. Being compared to slaves in other plantations, the slaves in Sweet Home hardly experience racial prejudice. Their lives under the Garners' plantation are said to be much better than slaves on other plantations. Mr. Garner is kind to his slaves, calling them the Sweet Home men. He gives his slaves permission to learn, to marry, to obtain their freedom and to carry guns. He also takes their advice in planting. Mrs. Garner is also kind to Baby Suggs and Sethe who helps her in the kitchen. When Sethe wishes to marry Halle, Mrs. Garner gives her a pair of crystal earrings as a gift. After the death

of the Garners and the arrival of Schoolteacher on the plantation, however, Sethe's life becomes dramatically worse. Schoolteacher does not treat Sethe as a human being but identifies Sethe with an animal. He uses a measuring string to document racial inferiority of Sethe: "Schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth" (191). In "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science," Nancy Stepan regards Schoolteacher's scientific study of race as the way whites "elevate hitherto unconsciously held analogies such as the long-standing comparison of blacks to apes—into self-conscious theory" (qtd. in Bouson 140). Schoolteacher also further humiliates Sethe by instructing his students to scientifically describe Sethe as a member of the lower race by listing her human characteristics on one side and animal's characteristics on the other side and Sethe was categorized with the animals because she is not white. As a result, Sethe cannot claim her worth and value as a human-being and is overwhelmed with feelings of inferiority and shame.

Sethe's inferiority and her animalistic qualities are emphasized again by the way Schoolteacher's nephews abuse Sethe: "I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down" (70). The way they sexually assault Sethe in the barn and suckle from her breasts suggests that in the eyes of white folk she is nothing but an animal, "the cow, no the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses" (200). With that Sethe's dignity as a human-being is utterly destroyed and she believes that she is too dirty to even regard herself as a human-being.

Apart from being dehumanized, Sethe cannot show her love and claim possession of her own children. Almost nine years after Baby Suggs's death, Paul D, one of male slaves from Sweet Home, arrives at 124 Bluestone Road. In their

conversation about their painful experiences as slaves, Sethe narrates to Paul D about her difficulty in loving her children, “I couldn’t love em proper [...] because they wasn’t mine to love” (162). Sethe is also reluctant to demonstrate her love to her children because she feels that her children do not belong to her. Sethe’s denial to express her maternal love can also be suggested by the way the white men steal Sethe’s milk. Sethe rambled:

“They used cowhide on you?”
 “*And they took my milk.*”
 “They beat you and you was pregnant?”
 “*And they took my milk!*” (17 emphasis added)

Sethe’s emphasis of her stolen milk suggests how devastated she is. She takes the crime of having her milk stolen seriously. O’Reilly suggests that Sethe pays attention to her milk which is stolen by white men because she associates her maternal love for her children metaphorically with breast milk. Even after her children have been weaned, Sethe still expresses her love for her children by saying, “sure enough, she had milk enough for all” (100). Therefore, the stolen milk signifies that the fundamental duties of maternal love and the maternal nurturing are denied to her (O’Reilly 130).

Under the conditions of enslavement, Sethe also fails to fulfill her role in preservation and nurturance:

[...] I left you [Beloved] back at the house in the basket in the yard. [...] The shade moved so by the time I got back the sun was shining right in you. Right in your face, but you wasn’t woke at all. [...] So I picked up your basket and carried you over to the grape arbor. Cool in there and shady. [...], but I didn’t have the muslin. Flies settled all over your face, rubbing their hands (192-193).

She is unable to provide her daughter with a safe environment when growing up. She has to put her baby into the basket and carry her everywhere she works exposing her baby to hot weather and insects. Moreover, Sethe seldom has the luxury of spending

quality time with her children at home. O'Reilly suggests that Sethe's experience is very much the same as other slave mothers when taking care of her children (129). Sethe has to "dash[ing] back and forth between house and quarters—fidgety and frustrated trying to watch over them" (223).

The failure in fulfilling basic preservative and nurturing tasks can also be explained by the way Sethe lacks guidance, support or example from her mother. There is a disruption of the maternal line: her mother was mutilated and killed when she was very young. As a result, Sethe's mother has no chance to be a model for Sethe or to teach Sethe anything about motherhood. When Sethe moves into the Garners' plantation, she is the only woman in the slave community. There is no surrogate mother or any female community to help her with childcare:

So there wasn't nobody to talk to, I mean, who'd know when it was time to chew up a little something and give it to em. Is, that what makes the teeth come on out, or should you wait till the teeth came and then solid food? [...] I wish I'd a known more, but, like I say there wasn't nobody to talk to. Women, I mean. So I tried to recollect what I'd seen back where I was before Sweet Home [...] It's hard, you know what I mean? by yourself and no woman to help to get through (160).

Realizing the severe limitations of loving her children, claiming her possession of her children, fulfilling her maternal role in Sweet Home and her fear that her children will have to endure terrible experiences, Sethe is motivated by her maternal love to seek freedom for her children. She decides to send away her two sons to Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law, in Cincinnati. Feeling that living in Cincinnati, she can be free to love and nurture her children as much as she wanted. After she has sent her sons away with the wagon, she decides to escape from slavery with her little daughter, Beloved. When she arrives Cincinnati with her new-found freedom, Sethe is able to express her love to her children: "[...] 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). They have lived in Cincinnati for a while when Schoolteacher and his men are able to track Sethe and her children down in Cincinnati which is when Sethe decides to kill her own children so that they can escape the predicament of slavery. Sethe slits her daughter's throat with a handsaw and intends to kill her other children but is prevented from doing so when the slave masters arrive. Sethe not only loses her daughter in her act of infanticide, but also her two sons who witness the incident. Howard and Burglar develop a negative attitude toward their mother because of her murderous act. They suffer from the fear that one day Sethe will kill them in the same way she killed her daughter. In desperation, Sethe explains that her act is her attempt to protect her daughter:

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 (251).

Interestingly, in a conversation with Gloria Naylor, Morrison had a chance to discuss this poignant scene and explained Sethe's reason in committing infanticide:

[It is the reason of] a woman [who] loved something other than herself so much. She has placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself. That the woman who kills her children loved her children so much; they are the best part of her and she will not see them hurt. She will rather kill them, have them die (Taylor-Guthrie 207-208).

Sethe's love for her daughter motivates her to do anything, even kill her beloved daughter. J. Brook Bouson interprets the infanticide as Sethe's act of resistance against racism, reasoning that, "Sethe wants to protect her children from being

victimized by the destructive, dehumanizing forces of slavery and from succumbing to the defining and dirtying power of racist discourse, which constructs white identity as racially and biologically pure and black identity as impure and dirty” (146). This kind of discourse fills the lives of slaves with shame and obstructs their hope of attaining self-esteem.

Sethe intends to kill her children not only to protect them from racism but also from possible physical abuse, sexual assault and other dehumanizing acts:

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 colored 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 daughter out of the wagon. She might have to work the slaughterhouse yard, but not her daughter.

And on one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter’s characteristics on animal side of the paper. No. Oh on. May be Baby Suggs could worry about it, live with the likelihood of it; Sethe had refused —and refused still (251).

Sethe is haunted by her daughter’s death for years. She tries to repress her trauma and forget the memory by working hard but to no avail. Eighteen years after the act of infanticide, Beloved returns as a twenty-year-old woman. In “The Story Must Go on and on: The Fantastic, Narration, and Intertextuality in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Jazz*”, Martha J. Cutter proposes that Beloved is a floating signifier between “an actual survivor of the Middle Passage” and “the returned ghost of Sethe’s baby” (63). Cutter explains her idea that Beloved can be regarded as an actual survivor from the slave ship because of her descriptive response to Denver’s question, “What’s it like over there, where you were before?” (75). The description of her place suggests the deplorable experiences on the slave ship during the Middle Passage: crouching in the hold of a ship next to dying bodies, bodies thrown overboard, starvation and dehydration. Moreover, Beloved’s description of her experience on the

ship can be read as one of continued chain of sexual abuses: "Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light" (241). Cutter reads this as a description of "a girl who has undergone repeated and brutal sexual violation" (64). However, the critic admits that the novel makes many indications that Beloved is indeed the flesh and blood reincarnation of Sethe's dead daughter. This interpretation helps underscore the mother-daughter bond in the novel. Cutter supports this claim by referring to Beloved's scar, her possession of supernatural powers and the information that only Sethe's deceased child could know (65). Beloved and Sethe's dead daughter share certain identical characteristics as if they were the same person. Beloved has "fingernail printed" (202) on her forehead in the same shape with the mark Sethe made when she killed her own daughter. Apart from her mark, Beloved possesses information that only Sethe's dead daughter knew. Beloved knows about the diamond, Sethe's mother and earrings. She can also sing Sethe's song which Sethe claims she made up and taught only to her own children. Cutter also adds that Beloved can disappear, move Paul D from room to room and choke Sethe from afar (65).

Beloved is also described through the image of a baby in order to imply that she is Sethe's daughter who was killed eighteen years before. The word "crouching" is used to illustrate Beloved's posture and can be read as the image of a baby in the womb. Moreover, Sethe's description of Beloved also demonstrates her infantile qualities:

She had new skin, lineless and smooth, including the knuckles of her hands. [...] Her skin was flawless except for three vertical scratches on her forehead so fine and thin they seemed at first like hair, baby hair before it bloomed and roped into the masses of black yarn under her hat. [...] her feet were like her hands, soft and new (50-52).

Beloved's skin is described as if it were the skin of a new born baby, not of a woman in her twenties. Her baby-like qualities can also be suggested by her inability to engage in language:

I AM BELOVED and she is mine. I see her take flowers
 away from leaves she puts them in a round basket
 the leaves are not for her she fills the basket
 she opens the grass I would help her but
 the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are
 pictures I am not separate form her there is
 no place where I stop her face is my own and I
 want to be there in the place where her face is and to be
 looking at it too a hot thing (210).

Beloved's linguistic ability shows here is neither coherent nor logical, nothing but a series of sentence fragments with no connection. The statements are made without grammatical competence and no punctuation is used. Morrison uses this style to suggest the child's undeveloped language skills and general language incompetence.

There is also a bond between Beloved and Sethe. During Beloved's return, Sethe explicates endless urination which can be compared with the break of amniotic fluid during childbirth:

[...] the water she voided was endless. Like a horse, she thought, but as it went on and on she thought, No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born. [...] But there was no stopping water breaking womb and there was no stopping now (51).

Bianca Del Villano explains the possibility of Beloved's reincarnation and its effects in her "Ghostly Alterities: Spectrality and Contemporary Literatures in English." She indicates that Beloved's reincarnation is possible because Sethe cannot free herself from the painful memory of her daughter's death eighteen years before (100). Even though Sethe tries to forget this memory, it is buried deep in her subconscious. The return of Beloved causes Sethe to have varying reactions as the repressed memory is brought to the surface making her overwhelmed by the burden of guilt that she carries. Sethe also has psychological symptoms which begin with her

difficulties in narrating her traumatic experiences especially when she attempts to communicate the painful memory of her daughter's tragic death to Paul D:

Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin in down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off—she could never explain (163).

This act of circling her subject shows how Sethe cannot say directly what she has done or why. She starts by talking about her children, then moves on to her experiences in Sweet Home and ends her conversation with Paul D with the story of her children once again. This circular style of conversation which is also fragmented and never gets to the point implies both her trouble in confronting the painful past, and her continued suffering which have no end. When Sethe responds to Paul D's question, she does not answer him but she rambles on, giving pieces of information that have no connection with the issues being discussed. Instead of telling him about the infanticide, Sethe narrates stories about her children and her life in Sweet Home. This symptom of Sethe's linguistic incompetence is explained by Kristin Boudreau who says that it occurs when the experience of vivid pain dismantles language. The pain affects Sethe's psychological condition and results in "the impossibility of any intelligible utterance" (456).

Another psychological symptom displayed by Sethe is her intimate relationship with Beloved as compensation for her dead daughter, a mechanism, perhaps, to reconcile her with her guilt for killing her daughter. Although Sethe believes what she did was in the best interest of her daughter, infanticide is the most deplorable experience in her life, one that leaves her haunted by a sense of guilt for years. In order to free herself from guilt, she seeks forgiveness from her daughter by developing an intimate relationship with Beloved as soon as she returns. Sethe insists, "I won't never let her go. I'll explain to her [...] why I did it. How if I couldn't kill

her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her.

When I explain it she'll understand [...] I'll tend her as no mother ever tended a child" (200). The statement, "I won't never let her go" shows us Sethe's denial at being separated from her daughter and Sethe's desire to merge herself with her daughter. This kind of relationship is emphasized again by Sethe's use of possessive adjectives and pronouns which strongly suggests that they own or possess each other. Sethe claims, "When I tell you you mine, I also mean I'm yours. I wouldn't draw breath without my children [...]" (203).

Despite her serious limitations as a mother, Sethe does intend to be the best mother possible to her youngest daughter, Denver whose life is preserved by her mother. She is born in Cincinnati and never encounters any terrible experiences in slavery; however, she is hardly nurtured by her mother. Denver has been brought up with the feelings of insecurity which may be due to the fragmented nature of her family history that excludes Sethe's painful past. Sethe tells Denver only the story of Amy Denver, a white woman who helps Sethe when she gives birth to Denver on the river bank. As a result, when Denver learns the truth about the act of infanticide and her mother's imprisonment for murder from her classmate, Nelson Lord, she has feelings of insecurity and fears that her mother will kill her as she has killed Beloved eighteen years ago. Denver's reactions to her insecurity can be seen through her psychological symptoms. She even become deaf and dumb for two years after. Jean Wyatt and Bouson agree that Denver's symptoms are her defense mechanism after learning the truth about her mother (482, 156).

Apart from language denial, Denver's psychological and emotional insecurity manifests itself through "the monstrous and unmanageable dreams about Sethe" (103).

She [Sethe] cut my head off every night. Burglar and Howard told me she would and she did. Her pretty eyes looking at me like I was a stranger. Not mean or anything, but like I was somebody she found and felt sorry for. Like she didn't want to do it but she had to and it wasn't going to hurt. [...] That when she cuts it off it'll be done right, it won't hurt. After she does it I lie there for a minute with just my head. Then she carries it downstairs to braid my hair (206).

These psychological symptoms suggest Denver's dread of being killed that begins after Sethe refuses to tell Denver about her painful past. Denver has only a fragmented version of the family history and can neither accept nor understand her mother's murderous act and why death is preferable to a life of slavery. Moreover, Denver develops a negative attitude to the external world. She seeks refuge and retreats into her hidden boxwood bower where she is able to be "closed off from the hurt of the hurt world" (28). Denver also remains within the boundaries of 124 Bluestone Road. She believes that the world outside 124 is occupied by an evil force that can prompt a mother to kill her own daughter:

All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too (205).

At this point, it appears that Sethe and Denver cannot cope with their problems. Sethe is haunted by the guilt of killing her own daughter. In the same way, Denver is aghast with the truth about her mother's past deeds and her feelings of insecurity about the possibility that she may be killed by her own mother. Their inability to cope with these problems is exacerbated by the fact that their mothers did not provide them with the maternal practices defined by O'Reilly. In order to cope

with problems in their lives, Sethe and Denver require surrogate mothers and the community of women as strong maternal role models instead of their biological mothers.

Baby Suggs plays an important role in helping Sethe deal with her traumas. An African woman who survived terrible experiences of the Middle Passage across the Atlantic, Baby Suggs arrives in America to spend most of her life time being a slave. Baby Suggs is unable to spend time with any male counterpart long enough to feel love or beloved and has eight children by six fathers but is never able to spend long enough with any of them to establish a close relationship. According to her, “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). As a result, Baby Suggs is unable to perform her maternal role for her children. Being born under conditions of slavery, Suggs’s children are sold and taken away from the plantation:

Her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. To make up for coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her—only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who was promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not (23).

She barely even has any memory of her eight children, the only memory of her children being her first child’s favorite kind of bread. Baby Suggs confesses, “My first-born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. [...] Eight children and that’s all I can remember” (5). Fortunately, Baby Suggs has had Halle, her eighth and last child who remains with her for twenty years. For Baby Suggs, Halle is not just a man but a “*somebody*” (23). Not only does he sacrifice every

Sunday for twenty years to free Baby Suggs from slavery, but also develops a bond between mother and son. During the twenty years with Halle in Sweet Home, Baby Suggs has the chance to be a mother and express her maternal love. The day Baby Suggs is given her freedom after more than sixty years of slavery, she questions who she is. Her self-defining moment includes thinking about her abilities, her roles or duties and her relationships with others which help to form her identity as a free woman. The scene of self-defining is followed by Baby Suggs's claim of possessing her body and heartbeats. Baby Suggs then "opened her great heart to those who could use it" (87). This incident contributes to Baby Suggs's self-worth and the ability to extend her love and nurture for others. Baby Suggs has the nurturing quality of the "safe harbor" and the "inn." Her home, 124 Bluestone Road, becomes not only a way station but also a refuge for everyone:

124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed. Where not one but two pots simmered on the stove; where the lamp burned all night long. Strangers rested there while children tried on their shoes. Messages were left there, for whoever needed them was sure to stop in one day soon (87).

It also,

shook with their voices far into the night. Ninety people who ate so well, and laughed so much, [...] 124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, [...] where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? Giving advice; passing message; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone (137).

Especially for Sethe, Baby Suggs's daughter-in-law, 124 Bluestone Road becomes a refuge where Baby Suggs is able to provide her with all the maternal practices of

preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing and healing. Self-preservation and nurturance are the first two maternal practices manifested when Sethe flees from slavery to live with Baby Suggs at 124 Bluestone Road. Baby Suggs provides Sethe a shelter from Schoolteacher and his men and gives Sethe a warm welcome to Cincinnati. During Sethe's life in 124 Bluestone Road, Baby Suggs showers her with care and nurturance:

She [Suggs] led Sethe to the keeping room and, [...] bathed her in sections, [...] After each bathing, Baby covered her with a quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen. [...] When Sethe's legs were done, Baby looked at her feet and wiped them likely. She cleaned between Sethe's legs with two separate pan of hot water and then tied her stomach and vagina with sheets. [...] She helped Sethe to a rocker and lowered her feet into a bucket of salt water and juniper" (93).

Baby Suggs also act as a cultural bearer who passes down the values, beliefs and customs of African-American culture to Sethe. This role in cultural bearing is presented through Sethe's rememory process. When Sethe decides to return to the Clearing nine years after the death of Baby Suggs, Sethe recalls Baby Suggs's ritual and her philosophy, both the philosophy delivered to all the black in the Clearing and the philosophy that Baby Suggs intends to impart on Sethe. Her philosophy delivered in the Clearing aims to free the blacks from being shamed or tainted by the racial discourse.

Baby Suggs establishes her own beliefs and values according to African customs and rebels against the dominant white culture. Linda Krumholz suggests that Baby Suggs's morality is based on "a method of engagement" and "interpretation rather than on static moral dictates" (389). She believes that good and evil are indefinable and refuses to judge people by the definitions of good and evil as promulgated by a formal religion. Her personal version of a religion is not based on

rules, obligations or religious practices written in the Bible, rather she encourages black people to free themselves from these definitions and draws attention to grace within our self. At this point, Baby Suggs's religious belief is something very personal and spiritual. Moreover, she urges blacks to give more attention to the importance of feelings and emotions. During the ritual in Clearing, Baby Suggs asks her people to express their emotions and feelings:

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 about the clearing damp and grasping for breath (88).

Apart from expressing emotion, Baby Suggs also calls on the blacks to love themselves. She suggests:

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. [...] 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! (88).

Baby Suggs encourages her people to love every part of their bodies. This philosophy enables black people to realize their worth and develop their self-love. This self-love will help fortify them against societal injustice prejudices in the form of racism and/or sexism.

Moreover, Baby Suggs performs the rituals that challenge the predominant white culture and help to heal the psychological wounds of black people. She introduces her philosophy during her healing ritual in the Clearing. Baby Suggs teaches Sethe not to cling to the painful past, suggesting:

She wished for Baby Suggs' fingers molding her nape, reshaping it, saying, '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).

Morrison metaphorically compares holding a sword and a shield with how Sethe refuses to let go of her traumatic past. These memories have haunted Sethe because they always intrude into her thoughts:

If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. [...] Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you got here and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you (36).

Kathleen Brogan expands on this notion in “Getting Back One's Dead for Burial: Traumatic History and Ritual Reburial in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*” when she states that the word “rememory,” mentioned in the excerpt, is a repetition or a reenactment of the memory. The reenactment of the memory into Sethe's life is so powerful and overwhelming that she could “conceive of memory as a fully dimensional reality that [could] take procession of her and even more startlingly of others” (74). Brogan refers to it as “a physical externalization of memory, that is no longer dependent on or controlled by the rememberer” (74). As a result, Sethe warns Denver:

if you go there—you who never was there—if you got here and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you (36).

Whenever this painful memory intrudes into Sethe's mind, she always displays psychological symptoms as Denver describes:

The singer slow blink of her eyes; the bottom lip sliding up slowly to cover the top; and then a nostril sigh like the snuff of a candle flame—signs that Sethe had reached the point beyond which she would not go” (37).

Sethe's difficulty telling the unspeakable stories and her inability to move forward suggests that she is trapped within her traumatic past. In order to free herself from her painful memories or laying down sword and shield, Sethe needs to confront her "rememory" by revisiting the past which will help Sethe learn how to associate her painful past with other events in her life and how to put it in its place in her life history. Brogan also suggests that after the process of rememory, Sethe needs to transform her past which is repressed and cannot be narrated into "narrative memory" in order to be healed. Betty Jane Powell is in agreement with Brogan's narrative memory and asserts as well that sharing memory with others contributes to "diffusing pain" and "lifting the burden of memory when it becomes unbearable" (147).

In order to free herself from the painful past, Sethe decides to share her past with Paul D. He is another character who plays a supporting role in helping Sethe deal with her painful life experiences and can be regarded as Sethe's healer. In a conversation with Marsha Darling (1988), Morrison responded to Darling's question whether Paul D is a healer by answering in the affirmative: "very much, yes" (Taylor-Guthrie 250). Morrison explained that even though Sethe has strength, she needs some help from her surrogate mothers to cope with the unbearable situations (Taylor-Guthrie 250). Although Paul D is a male, he has characteristics similar to Sethe's surrogate mother. Sethe refers to his characteristics as "blessedness" which alludes to his unique qualities to other male characters. He is the kind of man that a woman can open her heart and express her feelings to. Sethe describes his qualities by saying he had,

the peachstone skin, the crease between his ready, waiting eyes and sees it—the thing in him, the blessedness, that has made him the kind of man who can walk in a house and make the woman cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could cry and tell them things they only told each other (272).

Sethe feels that Paul D is the kind of person whom she can tell things and cry with because both she and Paul D have shared some terrible dehumanizing and abusive experiences that took place on the Garners' plantation, especially under the dominance and control of Schoolteacher.

Despite having shared some horrible experiences with Sethe on Sweet Home plantation, initially Paul D cannot accept and understand her feelings, her maternal love and her reasons for committing infanticide. When Sethe shows Paul D her "chokecherry tree" (79), the scar on her back as a result of physical abuse, Paul D sees it as "revolting clump of scars":

May be shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because tree were inviting, things you could trust and be near; talk to if you want to as he frequently did since way back when he took the midday meal in the fields of Sweet Home (21).

Paul D's perception of Sethe's scar is negative. There are no images that suggest fertility and lushness.

In addition, Paul D cannot understand the maternal love that drives Sethe to the act of infanticide. Sethe believes that she has the right as a mother to decide what is best for her children. She insists that maternal love justifies her act of infanticide to prevent her children from being traumatized from a life of slavery. Paul D regards Sethe's act as immoral and unacceptable. He judges Sethe's love to be "too thick" (164) and also associates her action with animal instinct: "you got two feet, Sethe, not four" (165).

His inability to understand for Sethe's reasons for killing her own daughter is possibly stems from his refusal to recall his own traumatic experiences. Under slavery, Paul D had to endure the horror of being forced to suck the iron bit after his failed escape as well as being physically abused on the chain gang. These torturous

and dehumanizing events shamed him a great deal and he continuously struggled with these painful feelings and memories. As a result, he refuses to confront them and decides to keep those memories secret by pacing “one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he [gets] into 124 nothing in this world [can] pry it open” (113). Keeping his feelings and memories in the box, Paul D alienates himself from his emotions. He hopes to preserve himself from further psychological damage. In order to secure this protection, he sacrifices much of his humanity by foregoing feeling and gives up much of his selfhood by repressing his memories.

Paul D’s passivity and powerlessness are emphasized once again by Beloved’s sexual violation and her power over him. She seduces Paul D to have sex with her and moves him out of 124 Bluestone Road. Paul D decides to move out because he feels humiliated by Beloved’s power to seduce him combined with his own uncontrollable desire for Beloved. After he has left 124 Bluestone Road, Paul D sits drunk and struggles alone in the church basement with his painful feelings and memories. While spending time in the church, his tobacco tin which he uses to store his painful and shameful memories is “blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their play and pray” (39).

When Paul D’s memories are released from the tobacco tin, he is able to recount every event that has happened in the past, both his personal experiences and the experiences of others. Revisiting the past contributes significantly to his reconciliation with these experiences as he is freed from the past that has haunted him. He also develops a deeper understanding of himself and Sethe which results in his becoming an understanding and nurturing lover. He offers, for example, to bathe Sethe. This offer helps Sethe become aware of her body. When Sethe thinks of how Paul D bathes her in sections, “a consciousness of her [Sethe’s] body begins to

emerge” (Wyatt 484). Paul D is also the one who encourages Sethe to free herself from the past by promising her a better future. He proposes: “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody, we need some kind of tomorrow” (273). Moreover, he helps Sethe realize her self-worth. Helping her transform the maternal love and the way Sethe displaces her self—placing all that she values in life in her daughter—into self-love. He insisted, “You your best thing, Sethe. You are” (273).

Paul D’s healing process could not have succeeded without the help from the community of women led by Ella who shares some qualities with Sethe’s other surrogate mothers. Apart from her strength as a leader of the community of women, Ella has a contextual understanding of Sethe’s reason for infanticide because she herself has survived similar experiences under slavery which continue to haunt her as well. Ella was raped by a white man and his son, “the lowest yet,” and let her child fathered by “the lowest yet” die. When she recalls her child’s death, the thought of “that pup coming back to whip her too set her jaw working, and then Ella hollered” (258-259). Ella joins the community and exorcises Beloved:

Some brought what they could and what they believe would work. Stuffed in apron pockets, strung around their necks, lying in the space between their breasts. Others brought Christian faith—as shield and sword. Most brought a little of both. [...] When they caught up with each other, all thirty, and arrived at 124, [...] A woman dropped on her knees. Half of the others did likewise (258).

The ritual performed by the community of women reflects their cultural values as black people. The kitchenware used in the ritual suggests the black folk way of life, including down-home cooking, the characteristic of matriarchy and a belief that does not belong to Cristianity:

For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with allits heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words (261).

The assembly moves Beloved out with the meaningless sound that is different from the chanting of Christianity. Carolyn C. Denard explains “the sound that broke the back of words” is a sound beyond narrative—beyond the narratable” (55). After Sethe hears the voices of the community, she feels as if she is healed. She trembles “like the baptized in its wash” (261). Additionally, this scene can be regarded as Sethe’s rememory. It recalls the past that she shared with Baby Suggs and Baby Suggs’ teachings. It is possible to say that healing cannot be achieved on an individual level. Sethe cannot be healed when she is shunned by the community and spend her life in isolation. Healing process takes place only when Sethe is helped by her surrogate mothers—Baby Suggs, Paul D, Ella and the community of women.

The scene of chanting and exorcism is followed by Sethe’s attack on Bodwin, which further contributes to Sethe’s healing process because, as Bousoon suggests, it is a “reenactment of the infanticide” (157). In this reenactment, Sethe does not kill her beloved daughter but she protects her daughter and intends to kill the white perpetrator. Sethe associates Bodwin with the white slave traders and slave masters by describing how Beloved saw him as the man “with a whip in his hand, the man without skin” (262). As a result, Sethe attacks Bodwin with an ice pick. This scene demonstrates Sethe’s attempt to resist slavery and racism. Fortunately, Denver and the community of women prevail upon her to kill him, thus avoiding tragedy, but provide Sethe with an opportunity of revising and mending the act that has haunted her for eighteen years.

Denver also begins to understand her mother and the murder. Eventually she develops herself with the help of the surrogate mothers—Baby Suggs and Lady Jones—and the community of women. After Denver has learned about her mother’s imprisonment for murder, she shuts herself up within 124 Bluestone Road because

she fears that the evil force from the external world will force her mother to kill her. As time passes, Denver cannot watch her mother waste away and she decides to ask for the help from the community. Denver weaves a whole fantasy about her conversation with Baby Suggs in order to free herself from the negative attitude towards the external world and step back into the community.

“You [Denver] 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 defense.
 “There ain’t.”
 “Then what do I do”
 Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on (244).

After Denver is able to step out of 124, she asks for help from Lady Jones, her teacher. The nurturing Lady Jones warmly welcomes Denver into the community. She sympathizes with Denver and her family and openly responds to Denver’s plea for work and food for her sick mother. Lady Jones’ kind, soft voice used in her exclamation, “Oh, baby” (248), reassures Denver that she is a member of the community. Moreover, Lady Jones also shares some food to Denver and her starving family. The warm welcome and support of Lady Jones makes Denver realize her own value of being accepted and being loved by others in the community.

The help of the surrogate mothers and the community of women would mean nothing if Sethe did not have some characteristics which helped her develop her self. Sethe has some admirable characteristics. She can be regarded as a strong mother. She shows enough courage to escape from slavery to better her children’s lives and her own. There are no scenes that suggested her fear of being killed or punished for escaping from slavery. There are only descriptions of Sethe’s maternal love and the strong intention to keep her children safe. When Sethe needs to choose between death

and life in slavery for her daughter, she is strong enough to make a decision that is consistent with her own values. She believes that she has the right to commit infanticide—to keep her daughter in a safe place and to ignore the norm of being a good and nurturing mother—a norm that belongs to the white world. When Sethe is finally released from imprisonment, she becomes the head of the family and earns a living as a cook.

With the help of the surrogate mothers and the community of women and the strength of Sethe, she possibly moves into a better future. Although Morrison does not depict clearly that Sethe and Denver can free themselves from their trauma and develop their selves, the novel's closing scene gestures toward a better future for both Sethe and Denver. At the end of the novel, Morrison provides a picture of the family reunion for the readers. Paul D returns with a better understanding of Sethe's reason for committing infanticide and promises to take care Sethe. With Paul D's promise to fulfill the nurturing practices, Sethe's fragmented self begins to integrate. Moreover, Sethe's response to Paul D's confirmation that she is his "best thing" (273) suggests that Sethe has the tendency to achieve her self-worth in the future. The disappearance of Beloved also suggests Sethe's possibilities of freeing herself from the past and developing a complete sense of self. Even though there are Beloved's footprints left at the creek side, the tide will wash them away. Beloved will be only the thing that is "disremembered and unaccounted for" (275).

Denver is also another character who experiences positive personal growth. This is suggested by her ability to step out of 124 and become a part of the community, her successful negotiation with her mother's past and her self assertion as responding to Paul D: "I don't [want your opinion] she said. I have my own" (267). At the same time, she embodies hope for the next generation (Bouson 160). She

begins taking lessons from Mrs. Bodwin and considers attending Oberlin College someday.

In conclusion, maternal practices are very important duties that the mothers need to fulfill. With preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing and healing, children can develop their authentic adulthood. On the other hand, children who never receive the maternal practices have a tendency to grow up to be psychologically wounded adults. Sethe and Denver are the characters whose mothers seldom had the opportunity to fulfill these maternal practices. As a result, Sethe goes through suffering from psychological problems when surviving the terrible experiences under slavery and her act of infanticide. Denver also suffers from psychological problems when she hears that her mother killed her sister. In order to reconcile with the past, Sethe and Denver need the help of surrogate mothers. These maternal figures help Sethe and Denver by fulfilling the maternal practices that their biological mothers did not have opportunity of performing. After all maternal practices have been fulfilled, both Sethe and Denver are better equipped and prepared to cope with the problems that have haunted them, and move toward a better future.