

[연구논문]

Resentment Sanctioned: Reading Sethe's Anger in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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As Barbara Schapiro has suggested, Morrison's *Beloved* dramatizes "the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery" on African and African-American slaves (194). The novel renders the "interior life,"¹⁾ the unrecognized emotional life of the "Sixty Million and more," visible through the depiction of the life and struggle of

1) In "The Site of Memory," Morrison observes two deficiencies about the nineteenth-century slave narratives. On the one hand, they are usually silent about the "more sordid details of" the violence of slavery; on the other hand, for Morrison, "there was no mention of their [slaves'] interior life" in slave narratives (109-10). Patterson also recognizes the absence of the written record of slaves' emotional life. He says, "Certainly we know next to nothing about the individual personalities of slaves, or of the way they felt about one another. The data are just not there, and it is the height of arrogance, not to mention intellectual irresponsibility, to generalize about the inner psychology of any group" (11). For sociological approaches, any attempt to generalize the interior life of individual slaves may be unthinkable "arrogance." Yet, in the imaginary work of fiction, as Morrison's work proves, it is an important achievement that adds to the recovery of the reality of slaves.

Sethe and other ex-slave characters in and around 124 Bluestone Road (*Beloved* 3).²⁾ In this emotional drama, black anger is the governing impetus.³⁾ In the course of dramatizing sufferings and conflicts among the black people in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1873, the novel makes it clear that the anger penetrates both the slavery past and the present life of ex-slaves. The novel plots black anger in two layers. One is Beloved's anger, which overtly appears on the surface of the narrative and defines the mother/daughter relationship as complicating as it is affected by slavery. The other is Sethe's anger that she feels regarding her abusive slavemaster Schoolteacher. As an undercurrent that runs throughout the narrative, Sethe's anger colors the motivations of her actions under slavery and in the aftermath. The novel's main plot consists of depicting how Sethe's anger about the white slavemaster leads to Beloved's rage at her mother and whether or not the mother will be able to be forgiven by the outraged daughter as well. Put it another way, black (female) anger is the key to understanding the drama about how the black woman

2) Hereafter quotes from Morrison's *Beloved* will be marked within the text without the author's name and the title of the book.

3) Anger, rage, and resentment are similar, but distinct: anger is the most general term to indicate the unpleasant emotional state which occurs when one experiences harm or injury afflicted on oneself. Rage denotes the "ferocity" and "violence" of the emotion. Etymologically, rage implies "insanity" (*OED*). While anger does not necessarily recognize the cause, resentment is accompanied by rational (or even moral) judgment about the cause. For instance, Sethe "was angry, but not certain at what" (76); she felt "right resentment at what could have been his [Halle's] cowardice, or stupidity or bad luck" (113). Resentment also conveys an element of volition in it. The *OED* defines resentment as "(a feeling) of *ill will* against a person or thing," and the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as "a feeling of indignant displeasure or *persistent ill will* at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury" (Italics added).

Sethe will be able to reinstitute herself as self and mother.

Yet, interestingly, in comparison with *Beloved's* anger, which overtly asserts within the narrative and, combined with her enigmatic characteristics and role in the novel, proves its valence as the object of critical responses, Sethe's anger has not been well recognized so far. Is it because it is too "natural" to imply that the black woman Sethe gets angry at the injustice of slavery and at the abusive slavemaster? Or is the moral complexity of the infanticide a more attractive issue than the emotional basis of the act for critical analysis?⁴⁾ Marianne Hirsch is probably the only scholar who has mentioned "anger" in connection with Sethe:

When Sethe tries to explain to *Beloved* why she cut her throat, she is explaining an *anger* handed down through generations of mothers who could have no control over their children's lives, no voice in their upbringing. *Beloved* suggests why that *anger* may have to remain unspeakable, and how it might nevertheless be spoken. (*Mother/Daughter Plot* 198; italics added)

In these brief remarks on the novel, Hirsch intuitively notices that the frustrated mother feels anger under the dehumanizing conditions of slavery, which especially distorts and destroys motherhood. However, more remarkable about Hirsch's comment is that she recognizes Sethe's anger in its repressed form. In other words, Hirsch notices that Sethe does not explicitly *speak about* her anger in

4) Notably, for example, speaking of Sethe's infanticide of *Beloved* as an "unhomely moment," Bhabha focuses on the significance of the representation of the incident. He says, "[a]s we reconstruct the narrative of child murder through Sethe ... the very historical basis of our ethical judgments undergoes a radical revision" (144).

relation to the white violence and the perpetrators and at the same time that, nevertheless, Sethe's anger is discernible in the text. In fact, I argue, Sethe herself does not recognize her anger, let alone direct it at Schoolteacher until Beloved returns from "[o]ver there" and makes her remember things that are "unspeakable" (190, 71). In other words, most of the time, Sethe's anger is repressed until Beloved returns and has her remember the past and confront the white master.

In this article, referring to what literary critics and philosophers have discussed about the relationship between the emotion of anger and the sense of self, I will explore the subtle change in Sethe's affective state from grief to resentment in relation to her self-understanding. In due course, I will argue that Morrison's novel affirms Sethe's black female anger as an expression of her self-understanding which asserts herself against the racial other of the white master.

1. Relating Anger and Sense of Self

In *The Artistry of Anger: Black and White Women's Literature in America, 1820-1860*, Linda M. Grasso historicizes women's anger by claiming that the nineteenth-century's "gendered ideologies have historically precluded anger from women's emotional repertoire" (5). In the era of the "grand republican experiment" after the revolutionary war, according to Grasso, "[f]or women to express unwomanly feelings" such as anger "would mean undermining the basis of their

authority, for then they would be acting like men in the marketplace” (23, 24). In spite of and against the cultural constraints, however, “women create an art form to express publicly the angered discontent that is culturally prohibited,” Grasso observes (5). Included in Grasso’s discussion are Lydia Maria Child, Maria W. Stewart, Fanny Fern, and Harriet Wilson. According to Grasso, these women writers are able to recognize and express the gendered and racialized anger “[t]hrough a sophisticated invention of masking techniques” (16).

Considering that women, both black and white, were denied of the right to feel anger in the nineteenth-century America, it is not surprising that Sethe, who is a “mere” ex-slave woman, does not recognize anger in her relations with Schoolteacher. Being illiterate and still internalizing slavery ideologies, Sethe is not fortunate enough to understand her “angered discontent” let alone invent any language or art forms to express her anger. Nonetheless, Morrison’s novel has what Grasso calls “textual signs” (7), which allow us to observe Sethe’s unconscious anger: “Attacking, blaming, whining, nagging, crying, and self-imposed silence may all be signs of an unidentified discontent that is being ineffectively addressed and expressed” (15). Maybe Sethe’s anger is repressed, and thus “ineffectively addressed and expressed”; nevertheless, in the form of “attacking,” “nagging,” and “self-imposed silence,” it is there to be recognized.

Recognizing Sethe’s suppressed anger is important, for the emotion of anger is in close relationship with the sense of self. Philosopher Jeffrie G. Murphy argues that resentment, an angry emotion that is accompanied by the judgment of wrong-doing, is a manifestation of

“self-respect” when a person is morally injured: “[R]esentment (in its range from righteous anger to righteous hatred) functions primarily in defense, not of *all* moral values and norms, but rather of certain values of the self, ... the primary value defended by the passion of resentment is *self-respect*” (16; italics original). Grasso also highlights the link between the emotion of anger and the sense of self: “[T]he expression of anger and the creation of an autonomous self are integrally linked” (13). In both Murphy’s and Grasso’s formulations, “an autonomous self” is a precondition for a person to be able to *feel* and *express* anger. “Before a woman can recognize her anger,” Grasso observes, “she has to recognize that she is entitled to a self” (13). However, Morrison’s novel renders the process in reverse. In the novel, Sethe recognizes her being a self only after she has recognized her resentment about the injustice of slavery and has directed it toward Schoolteacher. According to Hirsch, Sethe’s final words, “Me? Me?” (314), is a “double assertion of herself” and heralds the coming of “a subject” that is “constructed in question and in relation” (Hirsch, “Maternity and Rememory” 103). For Sethe, getting angry at the white master is followed by her recognition of her being a self, which is affirmed in relation to the others.

Recent scholarly responses to the novel, informed by trauma studies in particular, have considered Sethe’s insistence on the past being “unspeakable” as a symptom of victimhood of traumatic experience and fixated Sethe as a passive victim of the trauma of slavery (71).⁵ When we recognize Sethe’s anger in its repressed state

5) Ramadanovic is exceptional. Identifying *Beloved* as a trauma narrative, which is, according to him, one of the “variations on the modern Western narrative in the

and note her gradual change in terms of her recognition of anger, we can understand her “silence” in a different way than those scholars. Two critics who misread her silence are Florian Bast and Roger Luckhurst. The ex-slave characters’ “voicelessness,” Bast argues, is “marked by a significant loss of the characters’ ability to express themselves and their trauma” (1072). In Bast’s reading, Sethe and other ex-slave characters remain as the victims of slavery since their inability to tell their own stories forestalls any meaningful agency for the black subjects. Likewise, interpreting the scene where Sethe tries to explain the infanticide to Paul D only to “circl[e] him the way she was circling the subject” (187), Luckhurst identifies Sethe’s bodily and narrative “circling” as an analogy of the symptom of traumatic experience. For him, “circling” is a sign that indicates that Sethe is unable to confront or break out of the definition imposed by the slave master (91). Certainly there are textual evidences that affirm approaching the novel from the perspectives of trauma studies and allow us to interpret the characters’ inability to tell their own stories as an aspect of their traumatic symptom. However, there are other, to borrow Grasso’s term, “textual gestures” that help us understand “silence” as a sign of anger (7). Earlier in the novel when Paul D asks about the “tree” on her back, Sethe, for the first time, discloses one of the instances of her traumatic experience of slavery, that is, the sexual abuse of her body, the “milking” by the whiteboys and Schoolteacher. As Paul D shows more concern about

very basic sense that [it is a story] of becoming an autonomous subject (nation and person),” Ramadanovic considers Sethe’s silence to be what he calls a “narcissistic, self-defining phase” (178, 181). I will talk more about Sethe’s “narcissistic phase” later.

the fact that they “used cowhide on [her],” who was “pregnant” at the moment, she flares up with anger and exclaims, “And they took my milk!” (24-25). Eighteen years of silence about her extreme humiliation is not so much a result of inability to speak as a way of suppressing her anger that does not find a proper outlet.

Reading the novel from the perspective of trauma studies risks the African-American character’s subjectivity. As it focuses on Sethe’s fragmental and incomplete story-telling, often times trauma paradigm suggests that the subject of trauma cannot fully recover her subjectivity to the extent that she is able to own and tell her own story. When anger paradigm converges with trauma paradigm, however, it opens a space where we can think of a different mode of subjectivity in between passive victimhood and autonomous self, both in political and narrative terms. That is, if we consider how Sethe gradually recognizes her anger and finally comes to enact it, we will be able to affirm that she is an active subject although she may not be an articulating one. Indeed, although Sethe does not rationalize her angered discontent, she reacts to the cause toward the end of the novel. The novel’s end has Sethe “feel anger, and then recognize, accept, and direct it at the real enemy,” Schoolteacher, after her interaction with the returned-from-the-dead daughter (Grasso 4).

If we can understand Sethe’s violent attack on Edward Bodwin toward the end of the novel as an instance of her expression of the resentment toward the white master, then the significance of the occasion is well explained by J. Giles Milhaven’s notion of “vindictive anger.” “Vindictive anger is good,” Milhaven argues, “because it is an elemental lunge of our self to be with others as

their equal in power and will. Our wanting to make others suffer for making us suffer is our wanting to make ourselves equal to them in personal power and freedom. However blind be our rage and however brutal and inhuman be the act we in our rage strain to do, we are straining to be by that act, with the other person as equal persons” (176-77). With Milhaven, if we directly express our anger at a person who has overpowered us to suffer, by doing unjust harm to us, it is nothing but our struggle to assert ourselves as equal with the person. Acting out her anger, Sethe is asserting herself as a subject who is “equal to [the slavemaster] in personal power and freedom.”

2. Anger, Grief, and Slavery

From the very beginning of *Beloved*, Sethe’s angry feeling, coupled with the “spiteful” baby ghost’s “powerful spell,” saturates the novel about Sethe’s “powerful love” in its repressed form (9, 11). As the novel begins, we find Sethe remembering an instance of her powerful and sacrificial love. After the funeral of the crawling already? baby and after her return from the jail, Sethe goes to purchase a tombstone for her daughter who died without a name. She wants to have “Dearly Beloved” on the tombstone. But she barely has the “money” to engrave even the lone word “Beloved”; she has to pay the engraver by having sex with him for ten minutes. “This act, which is recounted early in the novel,” Margaret Atwood remarks, “is a keynote for the whole book.” For Atwood, this scene epitomizes

the reality of African-Americans' life "in the world of slavery and poverty, where human beings are merchandise, everything has its price, and price is tyrannical" (49). I add, this scene sets an emotional keynote of anger for the entire novel, which Sethe is unconscious of or repressing, so Beloved returns to make Sethe feel, recognize, and accept it. In her memory of the incident, "those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil" (11). At this moment, Sethe certainly feels mortification and anger to the extent that she thinks of death, "the grave."⁶) But she fails to recognize her anger as it is; instead, she projects it onto the engraver's son: "She thought it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the *anger* in his face so old" (11; italics added).

From our twenty-first century's point of view, Sethe's "prostitution" testifies that slavery permeates the "free" territory in disguise. This scene where Sethe barter[s] her body to pay the engraver is the microcosm of the "free" North where ex-slaves are nothing but the prey of the capitalist market. In this "free" market, the black female body is "voluntarily" enslaved. The ruthlessness of the "contracted" sexual violence is more acutely registered because of the semblance of voluntariness. In fact, Sethe's "barter[ing]" is in continuation of the violation of African and African-American women that not only

6) "Death" is one of the "telltale signs," Grasso observes, "of women's forbidden angry expression." The other signs include "illness, acts of sacrifice, supplicating tones, captivity motifs, hunger, and emaciated bodies" (7).

Ella, Sethe, and Baby Suggs have experienced on American plantations but also Sethe's own mother and Nan had to undergo during the Middle Passage (212). Avery Gordon has aptly noted the link between slavery and the capitalist market: "This trauma [of the Middle Passage] links the origin of Slavery with a capital S to the origin of modern American freedom, to the paradigmatic and value-laden [sic] operations of the capitalist market. This is a market whose exchange relations continue to transform the living into the dead, a system of social relations that fundamentally objectifies and dominates in a putatively free society" (168-69). Like on Sweet Home, Sethe's black female body is objectified and thus violated in this "free" territory by white patriarchal power.

Yet Sethe does not have this kind of historical consciousness about slavery let alone the capitalist market. She does not recognize the violence both of slavery and of the "free" market as such. In other words, she does not recognize the imbalanced power relations between the engraver and herself. Consequently, she does not recognize how unjust and wrong the engraver's outrageous demand is. Rather, she internalizes the racist patriarchal ideology which considers black woman's body a sexual object and reproductive tool and which at the same time demands that women should be chaste. In this way, double bound, she puts the burden of chastity on her own shoulders; she more or less blames herself for the "transgression." Sethe's insistence on her powerful maternal love and on her sex with the engraver as an instance of it is an attempt to excuse her transgression. And excusing herself, she also feels relief at not becoming a prostitute permanently. As an ex-slave woman, even

a convicted one, Sethe thinks, she could have ended up in a worse situation, like being one of the “Saturday girls of the slaughterhouse”: “I got close to it myself when I got out of jail and bought, so to speak, your name” (235). Rather than feeling anger, she feels relief at being only almost a Saturday girl. Saturday girls’ work is a way on which a free black family relies to survive: “That has got to be something for a woman to do ... to pay for what their children needed, or their ma’ammies” (235). Ironically, at the same time while Sethe acknowledges these women’s work as a necessity, still she despises it. Sethe has this dubious attitude toward Saturday girls, for she does not understand that their choice has been socially determined. That is, without recognizing the prostitution as one of the few jobs that are available for black women in the racist patriarchal society, she blames individual women for their degradation. Her gratitude to the Bodwins is the inversion of this individualization of social evil. Sethe thinks that “the Bodwins got [her] the cooking job at Sawyer’s” so that she can “smile on [her] own” (235).

Double bound by the practice of slavery and by the norms of the patriarchal society in this way, there seems to be no room for African-American slave women to feel “righteous anger” toward the white people. The space where resentment should be is full of grief: “not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief” (12). Morrison’s novel suggests that African-American slave women’s grief is as much about the loss of self as it is about the loss of family relations. As Schapiro has aptly put, “in a racist, slave society ... [t]he mother, the child’s first vital other, is made unreliable or unavailable by a slave system which either

separates her from her child or so enervates and depletes her that she has no self with which to confer recognition” (194). Deprived of both her own mother and daughter by slavery, Sethe is no self who has no one to confer recognition upon.

In this selfless status, Sethe’s affective state in the beginning of the novel is more grief than anger or resentment in relation to white violence. As Paul D steps into the house of 124 Bluestone Road, he immediately recognizes “a pool of red and undulating light,” which “lock[s] him where he [stands].” The presence of the baby ghost makes him ask Sethe, “What kind of evil you got in here?” To Paul D’s question, Sethe insists that “It’s not evil, just sad” (15-16). Of course, the baby ghost is an “evil” one, that is, an angry ghost. Beloved is outraged and resentful of Sethe’s “too thick” love, which results from the evil of slavery (191). Sethe’s insistence on its being “sad” reflects her own understanding of the situation and her own emotional response to it. In her grief, Sethe mourns for the dead daughter, for whose death she blames only herself without acknowledging the original sin of slavery as the historical context of her transgression.

Mourning for her Beloved, Sethe is also mourning for her lost self. For Sethe, she is permanently lost because she is “dirty”:

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 [Sethe] 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. (289)

The word “dirty” refers to the “milking” incident. The violence caused Sethe to run away in spite of the fact that she was six-months pregnant and it “broke” Halle permanently (83). Although Denver believes that Sethe and other ex-slaves “lived through and got over it,” it turns out that they did not. Sethe’s insistence that “[Beloved] was her best thing” ironically registers that she has not gotten over it yet (314). In other words, she still lives under the spell of slavery and in that world her self is hopelessly “dirty” and dead: “It [Slavery] dirty [her] so bad [she] forgot who [she was] and couldn’t think it up” (289).

Indeed, Sethe refuses any social interactions with other people and leads a lifeless life. In her reverie, Sethe confesses to Beloved, “When I put that headstone up I wanted to lay in there with you.” She “would have if Buglar and Howard and Denver didn’t need [her]” (236). In her lifeless life, Sethe lives in order to protect the other daughter Denver from slavery and the power of slavemaster. In other words, she is not only haunted by what she calls “rememory,” but she lives in it. The rememory of Sweet Home resists forgetting and “just stay[s].” Sethe says to Denver, “Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world” (47). And this “rememory,” Sethe believes, affects other people when “you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else.” Sethe continues, “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 go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over—over and done with—it's going to always be there waiting for you" (47). In her relationship with the "rememory," Sethe is a passive victim in double senses. On the one hand, Sethe is a mere slave woman who cannot help suffering the white violence without resenting or resisting; on the other hand, she also has to bear the violence of haunting rememory which resists her effort to forget. In her passivity and sorrow, Sethe's only work is "beating back the past" so that she can "keep [Denver] from the past that [is] still waiting for her" (88, 54). And in her passivity and sorrow, Sethe is "oblivious to" the "strong feeling" of anger (50).

Yet that Sethe is oblivious to the anger or represses it does not mean that she does not feel anger ever at all. She does feel the anger, but she does not recognize it in connection with the white master. Repressed, unidentified, Sethe's anger is displaced. On one occasion, Sethe's anger toward the two whiteboys and Schoolteacher surfaces to her consciousness yet is directed to an anonymous "whiteboy." On her way to her three children in Ohio, Sethe almost gives up her life and waits for "an easeful death." While groaning, all of a sudden, she hears a voice saying, "Who's in there?," which makes her think that "she was about to be discovered by a whiteboy" who "too had mossy teeth, an appetite":

She [Sethe] told Denver that a *something* came up out of the earth into

her—like a freezing, but moving too, like jaws inside. “Look like I was just cold jaws grinding,” she said. Suddenly she was eager for his eyes, to bite into them; to gnaw his cheek. (41-42; italics original)

This passage is noteworthy, for it is one of the rare moments in the novel where Sethe feels an angry emotion against Schoolteacher and his two pupils. That she is reminded of the whiteboys who “had mossy teeth, an appetite” shows that at this moment she is resenting the two whiteboys and Schoolteacher who sexually violated her on Sweet Home. Yet what is more interesting about this passage is that Sethe herself does not recognize the anger as such. She can only identify the anger as “*something*,” something that has been unknown to her. Sethe is not familiar with the idea of, in Milhaven’s words, “vindictive anger” in her relationship with her white master. But, somehow, maybe because she is expecting an imminent death, she is able to feel it. Death’s leveling power may summon Sethe’s strength to demand equality with her white perpetrators.

During the eighteen years between her run-off from Sweet Home in 1855 and Paul D’s appearance at 124 Bluestone Road in 1873, Sethe’s latent anger is displaced mostly unto her absent husband Halle. During the time, for Sethe, Halle is a malfunctioning black father and husband who fails to protect her children and herself. She, inappropriately, blames him for the malfunctioning. The “empty space of not knowing about Halle” is “a space sometimes colored with righteous resentment at what could have been his cowardice, or stupidity or bad luck” (113). When Sethe realizes that Halle saw her sexually violated by the whiteboys and lost his mind, this empty

space is “filled ... with a brand-new sorrow” (113). Sorrow or grief implies that she now considers Halle to be a lost one and another victim of the white violence. However, before Sethe accepts Halle’s social death, she directs her angry emotion toward her husband. When Paul D tells her about Halle’s seeing the occasion, her immediate response evinces her anger: “He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?” (83). What is implied in her response is that she understands the whiteboys’ sexual violence as a moral injury that needs to be taken care of, that is, needs to be avenged. It is a significant move that she recognizes white violence as a moral injury, but still, from our understanding of anger, her response is problematic. It is problematic in the sense that she does not recognize herself as a subject who can avenge the wrong. Instead, she thinks her husband as the one who has to do something on her behalf. Her understanding of the situation is still within the frame of the patriarchal ideology: only a man can, if he ever can, bring justice to the wrong of slavery.⁷⁾ In other words, resenting her husband rather than the white perpetrators, she perceives herself not as equal with the latter in power and will.

In this regard, considering Sethe’s sense of self is firmly established enough for her to think of resisting Schoolteacher around 1855 has no ground. She does neither have appropriate self-

7) In another occasion, right after she was violated by the two whiteboys, Sethe seeks for a way to do right to the wrong, by telling about it to Mrs. Garner. But the white woman turns out be as powerless as Sethe. When Sethe tells Mrs. Garner “what they done to [her],” the white mistress “couldn’t do nothing but cry.” And Sethe “couldn’t do a thing for her [Mrs. Garner] but wipe her face” (233). Both black and white women cry. They are helpless and powerless in front of the ruthless master.

understanding nor agency to resent or take revenge. Petar Ramadanovic is wrong when he calls Sethe's infanticide the "most Oedipal moment" in the novel:

Unable physically to overpower the posse or to protect her children and herself, Sethe decides to kill them all. In the process of this desperate act, she entirely changes the nature of the relation that defined her, thus altering also the terms that informed her master's possession, that is, her children. What makes the event Oedipal is the fact that she appears as the patriarch's rival who names her own kind against his notion of family, which treats her and her children as if they were not human beings in their own right. (185)

Apparently Sethe's reaction halts Schoolteacher and his posse. Schoolteacher gives them up and returns empty-handed to Sweet Home (175). However, as I have shown above, in Sethe's perception, the power relationship has not yet been challenged or has not yet changed. Well into in 1873, Sethe believes that Schoolteacher has power over her and her children and that still he waits for them on Sweet Home. The most Oedipal moment in the novel is enacted later when Sethe attacks Edward Bodwin, which I will talk about later.

When Schoolteacher comes to reclaim her and her children under the provision of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, Sethe's reaction to him is an act of frustration or desperation rather than that of vengeance or resentment. As Barbara Christian has aptly noted, rewriting the historical Margaret Garner story into Sethe's story, Morrison removes the elements which would make us conceive the "rationale of Garner having been raped and so killing the child is her way of getting back at the master" (214). The littler girl Margaret Garner killed was

“almost white, was a little girl of rare beauty” (May 28). Based on this fact, people suspected that she was a daughter between Garner and her master Archibald K. Gaines and that Garner sought revenge by killing the girl. But, in Morrison’s story, the crawling already? baby is the daughter between Sethe and Halle. Killing her own daughter cannot mean that Sethe avenges herself against Schoolteacher. That Sethe kills her daughter and attempts to kill the other children in order to move them “[o]utside this place, where they would be safe” is a manifestation of Sethe’s utmost despair in this world (190).

At the moment of the infanticide, Sethe is a very passive subject. Apparently she insists that she overpowered him by saying, “I stopped him [Schoolteacher]” (190). But it should be noted that “[a]fter the shed, [she] stopped,” too (232). That is, she may have made a lunge to prove herself equal with Schoolteacher in power, but, ironically, she proves herself to be powerless in front of the sheer power of slavery. The only possible thing she can do against the slavemaster and slavery is to move her children and herself to the other world. Her life after the incident shows that her self is regressive in the sense that she refuses any interaction with the outside world. She fears that the past will invade the yard of 124 Bluestone Road again and take Denver back to slavery. Her serious work is to “beating back the past,” that is, to remember the past as little as possible (88). Trying hard neither to remember the past nor to feel anything about it, she vainly attempts to deny her vulnerability, until “emotions sped to the surface in [Paul D’s] company” (51).

On the one hand, if we follow Martha C. Nussbaum’s argument

about an emotional subject, that Sethe is emotionally numb in her regression suggests an abnormality of slavery as a social condition. “Emotions,” Nussbaum argues, “involve judgments about important things, judgments in which, appraising an external object as salient for our own well-being, we acknowledge our own neediness and incompleteness before parts of the world that we do not fully control” (19). In Nussbaum’s notion of emotions, an emotional subject is an autonomous subject who emotionally responds to a situation over which she does not have a control and, to that extent, to which she is vulnerable. In other words, the emotional subject, in a normal condition, is a subject who acknowledges her vulnerability. However, in such an abnormal condition as slavery, one seems to be unable to or should not acknowledge her “own neediness and incompleteness before” the master. For the acknowledgement of vulnerability is nothing but the denial of being a subject. Thus, neither able to acknowledge vulnerability nor to deny it, one becomes emotionally indifferent to protect oneself.⁸⁾ In a similar vein, drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis, Ramadanovic calls this inward withdrawal of self as a “narcissistic phase” of a traumatized self and identifies its major function as “self-preservation” (179).

On the other hand, however, Sethe’s emotional numbness implies selfaccusation. As she kills her daughter and tries to kill the other children, Sethe denies exactly her vulnerability vis-a-vis the slave master and slavery. Sethe certainly understands Schoolteacher as the

8) In her last years, especially after Sethe’s infanticide, Baby Suggs lives an emotionally indifferent life. When Stamp Paid comes across Baby Suggs several weeks after the incident, he notices “in her eyes” that “indifference lodged where sadness should have been” (205).

one who has power over her and her children. However, in her judgment, she decides not to acknowledge her “own neediness and incompleteness before” the master’s possessive power to which she is utterly vulnerable; instead, she asserts herself, in a similarly possessive manner, to control it. Sethe’s claim of her children is that of possession; they are her “best *thing*” (314; italics added). Her assertion turns out to be disastrous, nothing but killing herself by killing her “best thing.” During the eighteen years of regression, Sethe is afraid that Beloved “[is] mad with [her]” (212). In other words, for all those years, she is accusing herself for killing Beloved.

As Ramadanovic has argued, Sethe’s “narcissistic phase” is “one of the early phases” of Sethe’s traumatized self “becoming an autonomous self” (179). The novel depicts that Sethe’s emotionally regressive state eventually leads to a more active form of selfunderstanding. For Sethe to attain a more positive self, however, it takes not just a man’s affirmation of her female self, as Ramadanovic has suggested (181). Sethe’s trauma is a gendered one, but hers is a racial one more than anything else. Sethe’s reinstitution into a self and subject is fulfilled only when she confronts the past and remembers the history of slavery. It is through Beloved that Sethe comes to remember the past of slavery and feel the anger, without being haunted by the past and overwhelmed by the sorrow. Beloved urges Sethe to remember and tell her story so that she can recognize and acknowledge the anger and direct it towards the enemy.

3. Enactment of Sethe's Resentment

Sethe's becoming a self in relation to the ultimate other of the white master is accomplished when she attacks Bodwin out of resentment. Nussbaum insists that emotions are "forms of judgment" and that "the real, full recognition of [an] event [...] *is* the upheaval," that is, the emotional response (22, 45). In Nussbaum's "cognitive-evaluative" view, emotions are not physical nor neurological responses that come after judgment but judgment itself (23). If we follow Nussbaum, then, Sethe's resentment that manifests itself in her attack on Bodwin registers Sethe's *full* recognition of Schoolteacher's harm and threat. The novel describes Sethe's attack on Bodwin as follows:

It is when she lowers her eyes to look again at the loving faces [of Beloved and Denver] before her that she sees him. Guiding the mare, slowing down, his black hat wide-brimmed enough to hide his face but not his purpose. He is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing. She hears wings. Little humming-birds stick needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thinks anything, it is no. No no. Nonono. She flies. The ice pick is not in her hand; it is her hand. (302)

Sethe's attack on Bodwin is a repetition of her earlier reaction to Schoolteacher, yet it is a repetition with great difference from the first one. For Michael Hogan, the difference is concerned with the object of "offer[ing]." Reading a sacrificial logic into Sethe's reaction toward the white man, Hogan argues, "[i]n attacking the white man, Sethe offers herself—rather than her child—for sacrifice" (176). What Hogan basically argues is that by offering herself instead of her

daughter this time, she proves herself to be sacrificial instead of being selfish. Yet we should remember that Sethe's murdering of her daughter was disapproved by the black community not because she was selfish. That is, Sethe did not kill her daughter in order to protect herself. Moreover, for Beloved, whether Sethe "offers" herself or her daughter does not make any difference. Beloved would not appreciate Sethe's sacrifice as far as she leaves her alone, unprotected against the "man without skin" (302). The most important difference that Sethe's violent attack makes in comparison with the earlier occasion is that she runs toward Schoolteacher and not toward her daughter. The change in the direction of her reaction implies that she now understands herself to be powerful enough to confront the slavemaster. Indeed, Sethe throws "her hand," that is, her self to confront the slavemaster without any mediation such as a butcher knife or an "ice pick" (302).⁹ Sethe's violent attack on Bodwin exactly enacts what Milhaven has mentioned about resentment, that is, "an elemental lunge of [her] self to be with [Schoolteacher] as [his] equal in power and will." Although momentarily, like when Schoolteacher invaded the yard of 124 Bluestone Road eighteen years ago, her emotions of fear, anger, despair, and grief converge, but, this time, it is the anger, rather than the fear and the despair, that holds her and makes her run toward "him" not toward "her best thing."

The other point that makes the second occasion different from the first one is that Sethe misrecognizes Bodwin as Schoolteacher.

9) Margaret Garner used a butcher knife to cut the throat of her child (May 28). We do not know what Sethe used to kill her daughter in *Beloved*.

Referring to George Lipsitz, Gordon suggests that Sethe's mistake is "an insightful mistake" because Sethe's mistake represents what "is illegitimate by existing standards and paradigms" (162). What is "illegitimate" here is her understanding that there is no radical difference between a Bodwin and a Schoolteacher. "Sethe knows," Gordon argues, "the precarious difference between the kind man and the owning man is secured, always uncertainly, by the sympathetic heart of the liberal abolitionist's morality, its limitations registered by the arbitrariness, the accidental nature of its kindness" (162). In other words, although Bodwin is an active abolitionist, his attitude toward the black is, at best, patronizing; he does not really consider them his equals. Denver has to notice a black figurine servilely serving the Bodwins, "sitting on a shelf by the back door" of their house (293). The limitations of the kind white abolitionists' understanding of free black people are clearly registered in the image of a "blackboy" with "mouth full of money" (293): there are no *blackmen* but only *blackboys*. In the white mind, black people are competent only in "a delivery or some other small service," and they are always ready to say "At Yo Service" to the white needs (294).¹⁰⁾

Granted, Sethe's attack on Bodwin is not just a personal and individual black mother's effort to protect her daughters and herself from her slavemaster. When Sethe attacks Bodwin, she is attacking the white men who have injured, maimed, and destroyed black women throughout the history of slavery and even after. Indeed, the novel has the thirty black women who have their own memory of

10) For a discussion of the Bodwins' patronizing attitude toward Baby Suggs, see Mayberry 174-75.

slavery to join and witness Sethe's and, by extension, their own resentment and to direct it to the white man.

4. Conclusion

In the *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* Orlando Patterson argues that slaves are "socially dead" persons and that their social death is characterized or, in his words, "constitute[d]" by three elements of "naked violence," "natal alienation," and "the generalized condition" of "dishonor" (3, 5, and 11). That is, what characterizes slavery is that it renders sheer violence to individual slaves, breaks down any meaningful relationships among them, and consequently deprives them of honor. On the one hand, that Sethe feels resentment toward the injustice of slavery and toward the abusive slavemaster and directs it to him signifies that she begins to perceive her subjectivity and agency in relation to the white master. Put it another way, Sethe's naked attack on Bodwin is, to borrow Patterson's terms, an ex-slave's "naked violence" against her slavemaster in order to regain her "honor." In this regard, Morrison's novel acknowledges Sethe's expressed anger as means to be ontologically equal with the white man.

On the other hand, however, the novel recognizes the angry emotion's destructive power. As Bishop Butler has well noticed, excessive resentment can result in the chain of retaliation and consequently the destruction of a society.¹¹⁾ So the community

11) For Butler's warning against the destructive aspects of the excessive resentment,

women and Denver intervenes in Sethe's emotional outburst, and, in doing so, they prevent her from killing Bodwin.¹²⁾ They also forgive and accept Sethe. Being forgiven, Sethe becomes a mother that is loved and cared about by her daughter, a woman that is loved by a man who not only understands her past but also is willing to share his story with her, and a member of the black community. Moreover, the forgiving black community, overcoming the resentment toward the past violence and the fear of the future violence, lays a bridge for the next black generation to cross to go further out in the world where they could interact with the white as their equal.

Beloved has gone. But it should be noted that all these acts of resentment and forgiveness are predicated on the return of Beloved, that is, the remembrance of what she signifies: the atrocities of transatlantic slavery, individual slaves, their suffering, sorrow and repressed vengeance. After black (female) anger is fully acknowledged, the novel projects itself toward the future and the reconciliation between the races. While the novel looks forward to the future, it also insists that we do not forget the past. For remembering the past, no matter how painful it is, makes it possible for a Denver to know where to start from and where to go. In other words, we can dream of a different future when we remember the past. The memory of slavery's past still lingers at the very end of

see his sermons "Upon Resentment" 142-47 and "Upon Forgiveness of Injuries" 155-65.

12) It is suggested in the novel that if Sethe had killed Bodwin, it would have brought about a disastrous outcome not just on Sethe but on the entire black community. Stamp Paid says, "[I]f she had got to him, it'd be the worst thing in the world for us" (305).

the novel; its last word is “Beloved” (316). It is the novel’s tribute to the harassing and enduring memory of slavery.

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Abstract

Resentment Sanctioned: Reading Sethe's Anger in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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An ex-slave woman's getting angry toward her slavemaster seems to be natural. Yet in Morrison's novel *Beloved*, it turns out to be very difficult for the ex-slave woman Sethe to get angry toward her slavemaster Schoolteacher. Indeed, the novel's main plot is to depict how Sethe comes to recognize the injustice of slavery and her own experience in the South as moral injury at which it is natural for her to direct her anger. Referring to literary critics and philosophers, who support that anger is an expression of the self's sense of moral injury and of her claim of being equal with the one who has morally injured the self, this article purposes to show how Sethe regains her selfhood in relation to the racial other of white master by following the trajectory of her emotional responses to the injustice of slavery. In the beginning of the novel, Sethe feels sad about the past rather than being angry about the moral injury and the injustice of slavery. Being saturated with sad memories of her past, Sethe's anger is repressed and displaced until her dead daughter Beloved returns and makes her remember her past experience of slavery on Sweet Home. Eventually, this article argues that it is not until Sethe enacts the anger toward the slavemaster that she comes to affirm her self and to be forgiven and embraced by the black community.

Key Words

subjectivity, selfhood, injustice of slavery, repression of anger, enactment of resentment, forgiveness