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Unspeakable thoughts unspoken: Black feminism in Toni Morrison's Beloved

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UNSPEAKABLE THOUGHTS UNSPOKEN:
BLACK FEMINISM IN TONI MORRISON'S BELOVED

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State College,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Erica Angle

June 1996
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ABSTRACT

Feminism is a response to gender issues, women fighting for an equally acknowledged voice among men. White feminists tend to struggle against gender issues within a gender community; yet, many have made a habit of ignoring the voices of black feminists who are also fighting for racial equality. Because many black feminists feel they can't trust white feminists to respond to gender and racial issues, they find more support within their racial community than a gender community. Some black feminists groups such as the Combahee River Collective "feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists advocate" (Davis 16). Although the racial community is a source of support against racism, it too can ignore the black woman's struggle with Black woman's voice: "... we struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with black men about sexism." According to bell hooks, black women have a viable voice existing within their matriarchal home, and she urges women to change the "nature and direction" of their voice, to expand it within the community. These two elements-- community and voice-- are essential goals of black feminism.
Nellie McKay asserts that the trio section's rhetoric ("trio section" named for the voices of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved) in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* reflects such black feminist goals. Morrison's writing struggles with oppression at a community level: "She does not advocate as a solution to their oppression an existential, political feminism that alienates black women from their ethnic group" (McKay 172). But Morrison's rhetoric is also more complicated than what McKay notices, because Morrison *does* alienate her female characters from their ethnic group. When the trio section begins, Sethe has locked the doors of house 124, isolating herself and her two daughters from the community. Instead of having a viable voice, as hooks believes exists within the home, the women instead have "unspeakable thoughts unspoken," suggesting that each has no voice at all, or at least one that is highly complex and problematic. Morrison is complicating the theories of black feminism through her rhetoric: given the Combahee River Collective, hooks, and McKay's readings, we might expect to find her female characters within the racial community, but Morrison isolates them in their home; we might expect the women to have a viable voice existing within the home, but Morrison silences them. Do these so-called complications mean that black feminism—in terms of community and voice, is absent in *Beloved*’s rhetoric? By exploring how Morrison's
rhetoric addresses the elements of community and voice, I propose that

*Beloved* does reflect black feminism.
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Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is divided into three parts. During the second part of the text, the reader will encounter an oddly written group of four chapters. These chapters are inconsistent with the text as a whole, containing poetic language, unassembled text which breaks grammar and type setting rules, and a surge of voice from the three female characters, Sethe, Denver, and Beloved. The latter characteristic is why these four chapters have been called the "trio section."

The trio section has been discussed, although not in great depth, in various ways. Satya P. Mohanty uses an historical approach to the trio section's chapters, where Sethe's, Denver's, and Beloved's voices represent a cultural image of braiding, or story telling: "[The] fusing voices and emotions [make] possible the new knowledge we seek about our postcolonial condition" (61). The women's voices discover for the reader the "dead and unremembered of the Middle Passage" (63). Instead of "braiding," Linda Anderson, also using an historical approach, speaks of the trio section as being a "lyrical monologue" where Sethe and Denver desire to possess Beloved. The women's ties have been broken by slavery, and the trio section's chapters "collapse boundaries between
past and present" (141) in an effort to rejoin the women. Besides the historical, there are interesting community themes in the trio section; the four chapters for Dana Heller represent fragmentation, "dismantl[ing] the boundaries that separate family from community, private from public concerns" (106) and for Karla Halloway take on more mythical attributes, the women's voices producing "prosopoeic (re)memory" in text where the voices collapse into one another and then merge again, revising time and space (518). At a literary level, critics usually acknowledge some type of atypical community existing in the trio section. At a rhetorical level, David Lawrence explains "word-shapes" that reflect Beloved in the trio section:

[they] embody her tenuous physical and psychical shape . . . her units of self-representation are fragmented memories, word-pictures, and sensations, articulated without clearly established frames of reference--inside and outside, past and present, cause and effect. Even the gaps on the printed page suggest the danger of the disintegration of her being. (196)

For Lawrence, the rhetoric of the trio section, expresses in text the fragmentation, the gaps--a general disunity and need for unity (perhaps the unity that a community can provide?)--that Halloway, Anderson, Heller, and Mohanty notice on a literary level.

Although useful and interesting because of diversity, these interpretations do not get close enough to the actual fragments, the
speakers of the "unspeakable thoughts unspoken," the black women existing within the gaps. There have not been many black feminist approaches to the trio section, and surely few, if any, which go more in depth than a few paragraphs or pages. And yet a black feminist approach has its place within the corpus of the trio section's criticism, offering another interpretation of Morrison's *Beloved*. When Anderson writes that the desire for the women to rejoin has "[sprung] first of all from the deprivation they share as daughters, the loss of a relationship to the mother" (139), she recognizes the obvious gender issues in the trio section but chooses to explore in more depth the more historical issues of the slave trade, and how they affect the chapters. Sethe, Denver, and Beloved are joined through Anderson's reasoning that they each share a loss and deprivation as women: Sethe's loss of her African mother, Beloved's loss of Sethe (by Sethe's protective/murdering hand), and, as Sethe and Beloved begin to possess each other, Denver's loss of her mother. Similarly, when Mohanty focuses on the historical effects of braiding a story, and how that act makes a "connection" with readers to the Middle Passage, he does not explore braiding as a uniquely feminine act of story telling. Women might braid many stories together, trying to make something that is unmanageable manageable, much like the reason hair is braided. Braiding hair is also a comforting activity;
perhaps there is some comfort to be gained also by braiding one's personal tragedy with another's, so that the result is tragedy becoming a community battle. Both Anderson and Mohanty raise interesting issues that are left unexplored--why are they unthinkable thoughts unspoken?

I do not mean to suggest that critics have ignored black feminist issues, only that black feminism raises different questions and looks at different themes than those explored by critics I have mentioned. This is what happens with Anderson and Mohanty but also in Heller's ideas that "the boundaries that separate family from community" in the trio section are drawn around a black family--a black family containing three women. How does this gender/racial segregation affect the voices she says merge into one consciousness yet at the same time remain separate and autonomous? (106). What are the black feminist implications of the rhetoric that Halloway touches upon in her mythical interpretation: Morrison uses "elements of speech and device that black women writers have used so effectively" (Halloway 518), and Lawrence breaks down into "units" of "word-shapes"? What I have noticed by reading the trio section's criticism is that black feminism can be applied to literary and rhetorical analyses but has not been, so when Anderson asks "where do we situate them?" (141), meaning the chapters in the trio section, I think of how the trio section has yet to be situated with black feminism.
But what is black feminism and why does it exist aside from feminism, a more commonly heard term? "Feminism," to use a general definition, responds to the oppression of women. Feminists might fight for job opportunities and job salaries for women that equal those of men; they might fight the sexual exploitation of women by the media, by men, and in our language, advocating words like "mailperson" over "mailman."

Feminists may be against pornography, try to bring more women into political offices or leadership positions in churches, want better healthcare for mothers, target government spending towards lower income families headed by unwed women, and form support groups for women who have been battered by their husbands, boyfriends, or fathers. Feminism is an ideology produced by a community of feminists, who struggle to be the voice for women, to speak out against such oppression. However, not all feminists respond to oppression in the same way, which explains the many different levels of activism within feminism, ranging from passive to militant, much like our political spectrum ranges from a left to a right wing.

Race is one factor that influences feminist response. A white feminist might notice that a particular company has only forty-five women in management positions, but seventy-five men. A black feminist might look at the same company and notice that, of those forty-five
women, only ten are black women. The black feminist would be responding to both racist and sexist issues, whereas the white feminist has only responded to sexist issues. This is not to say that all white feminists blatantly ignore racist issues, but, not having first-hand experience with racism, they may be blind to them, just as men, not having first-hand experience, may be blind to sexism. Consider another example. In Patricia Ward Scaltsas' essay Do Feminist Ethics Counter Feminist Aims? she speaks of a project for feminist ethics to construct a better moral theory in philosophy, one that informs women's actual experience of morality and their moral concerns (23). Scaltsas stresses that Whichever approach is taken, feminists should be constantly vigilant to reject explicitly any possible implications of a restrictive view of women's position (23), never thinking that she is being restrictive by not stepping outside her own racial identity to question what a black woman, an Asian woman, or a Latina might need in a moral theory.

Scaltsas' cause is a gender issue, as she states, but her part in ignoring any racial issues contributes to the frustration that black women such as Barbara Smith feel. In Toward a Black Feminist Criticism, Smith speaks of how feminism is too often blind toward black women:

I think of the thousands and thousands of books,
magazines, and articles which have been devoted by this time, to the subject of women's writing and I am filled with rage at the fraction of those pages that mention Black and other Third World Women. I finally do not know how to begin because in 1977 I want to be writing this for a Black feminist publication, for Black women who know and love these writers as I do and who, if they do not yet know their names, have at least profoundly felt the pain of their absence. (158)

Clearly, though feminism advocates voice, white and black feminists have two separate voices they are fighting for. Similarly, though feminism advocates community, white and black feminists derive their voices from two separate types of communities. Black feminists may struggle from within their racial community made up of black women and black men, whereas white feminists may struggle within their feminist community, made up of women--predominantly white women.

Community and voice have become two separate terms in white and black feminism because of two separate types of oppression. White women's oppression by men has traditionally taken the form of forced domesticity, being responsible for the maintenance of home and family. As white women tried to break tradition, they fought for a choice to work outside or inside the home. They fought for an education equal to that of a man's, if they chose to pursue one. They fought for a vote, to choose politically as men were able to choose. Black women have a history of being oppressed by white men, black men, white women--even white
children—giving new meaning to "forced domesticity." Black women have always been working women, coming to this country without a choice, as slaves. "Freedom" from slavery meant that their husbands now expected them to work as domestics in white women's houses and then to come home to take care of their own family and chores. There was little choice for the black woman, only survival. White women fighting for jobs, education, and votes would not change the black woman's social status, which was at the lowest level in society. It would not afford them the privileges that the white woman already had, such as Sojourner Truth addressed in the Akron Convention for Women's Suffrage in 1851:

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches and to have the best places everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over mudpuddles or gives me the best places. And ain't I a woman? . . . I have borne thirteen children and seen most of 'em sold into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me, and ain't I a woman? (27)

Except for Jesus, it seems that only black women themselves were aware of black women's voices.

Feminism tends to ignore the compounded oppression of being both black and female. "The women's liberation movement has generated a number of theories about female inequality. Because the models usually focus exclusively upon the effects of sexism, they have
been of limited applicability to minority women subjected to the
constraints of both racism and sexism" (Malson 41). It seems that black
women have common interests in two minority groups, black males and
white females. The question is where their trust should lie. Perhaps not
with the white women, who have separate goals, as Diane K. Lewis
addresses: "'How relevant are the truths, the experiences, the findings of
White women to Black women? I don't know that our priorities are the
same, that our concerns and methods are the same' " (49). "Priorities," "concerns," and "methods" are of particular interest to me in Lewis'
passage. A priority of feminism is voice, but because white women have
not suffered from racism, their concern for voice revolves around sexist
issues--making white women's voices their concern, ignoring most of the
black women's racial oppression. A method of "feminism" to achieve
such voice is through the community, but community also works
differently in white and black feminism.

White feminists may be separatists, separating themselves from
the community and forming a sub-community comprised entirely of
women (much like we saw in the 60s and 70s), in order to have as little
contact with men as possible, and to have as much voice as possible. For
the white feminist, a gender community is a stronger support system
than her racial community. This white feminist "answer" to male
oppression is not always the best answer for the black woman, who may receive more support from a black community including men than what any sub-community of white women could offer. As the Combahee River Collective explains:

Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism. (16)

Black feminists then are concerned with racial oppression as well as women's oppression but may not seek to solve their problems by moving away from their racial community.

Despite the racial support that a racial community offers, black women still struggle with men about sexism, implying that a racial community does not immediately spur the voice that a gender community might. bell hooks writes that: "Black men may have excelled in the art of poetic preaching in the male-dominated church, but in the church of the home, where the everyday rules of how to live and act were established, it was black women who preached" (5). According to hooks, black women make up the rules of the household. This type of voice would be one with the practical power of authority: giving permission, denying, praising, punishing, delegating. This type of voice would also be
in charge of an everyday dose of love, sympathy, and fear. The voices of men in the household are powerless until Sunday in the pew, because home is a place of matriarchy in the black community, where women preach seven days out of the week. Amen. However, believing that women's voices have a practical power within the home which the men's "poetic" voices within the church cannot equal is assuming that church is a less important place for black women to have a voice.

And this just can't be true; the community meets within the church. The community is strengthened by the church and the church creates decisions and policies that govern the community. If the church is, indeed, "male-dominated," then it would seem that these poetic voices carry more authority than the voices making the everyday rules of how to live and act will ever reach. Men's silence within the home is not as limiting as the women's silence within the church. In "Women in the Church" Jacquelyn Grant states that though women may be perceived as the backbone of the church, such silence as has been discussed makes them the background: "This is borne out by my observation that in many churches women are consistently given responsibilities in the kitchen, while men are elected or appointed to the important boards and leadership positions. While decisions and policies may be discussed in the kitchen, they are certainly not made there" (14). Women's
authoritative voice within the home becomes trivialized in light that their "given" responsibilities in the church are within the kitchen, a smaller version of the home where they are now limited only to discuss what the men decide. Ultimately, these male decisions rank higher than who will do which chores, what money will be spent upon, how we will live and act within the home--they are all about living and acting within the community. The home may be a matriarchy, but the community is ruled by a patriarchy, and who cares if the women rule the roost if the men own the farm? Black women's voices become inviable outside of the home, somehow losing respect from men.

If this respect has ever existed. What I have discussed may be seen as a paradox of power: men, with such a powerful voice within the community to determine things that affect a whole community of people, may not govern their own homes, may be voiceless about decisions affecting only a handful of people. The resentment that men might feel towards such a voice has been turned on black women such as Michelle Wallace, who spent much of the 70s hearing how her voice, how all black women's voices, were "loud and domineering" (7), tyrannical, destroying the black man's masculinity. Wallace made the decision to go into the community to find out where her voice fit in with black men's. She calls this, interestingly enough, doing a "general housecleaning" (7) of her
values, showing, as Grant previously showed, that when women's voices do extend into the community they are somehow affiliated with the home. The end result of this affiliation in Grant's passage was that men trivialized the women's voices; Wallace was met with a similar fate when she joined the National Black Theater:

We had much to make up for by being gentle in the face of our own humiliation, by being soft-spoken (ideally to the point where our voices could not be heard at all), by being beautiful (whatever that was), by being submissive--how often that word was shoved at me in poems and in songs as something to strive for. (17)

What black men were wanting from Wallace was for her voice to fit under theirs, to be submissive inside and outside the home. So much for matriarchy. These men were more blatantly disrespecting black women's voices within the home than suggested in Grant's passage; the same voice that bell hooks proudly calls "preaching," these men throw back into Wallace's face accusingly as preachy. It seems that black women traditionally have had a "type" of voice within their home, but the viability of this voice, as hooks describes, is challenged by things that Grant and Wallace notice, the patriarchal rule of the racial community and male resentment of a matriarchal home. Such strife shows the truth in the Combahee River Collective's earlier passage, that black women do struggle within the racial community about sexism with black men.
If it were not for a strong sense of matrilineal heritage—the history of foremothers, the lives of mothers, grandmothers, and aunts—black women might be silent. Missy Kubitschek explains the functional support of her matrilineal heritage: "They empower me to speak. I am no longer content to feel sheer bafflement and frustration when I think that I have suffered or that I am oppressed. It is precisely that Black women's history—from servitude and slavery to freedom—tells me how to live, how to survive, and how to be'" (3). As a black woman Stetson sees that her own life is a mixture of the servitude, slavery, and freedom. Patricia Hill Collins would say that the life that Stetson lives has been handed down from black women's foremothers:

All African-American women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent. This commonality of experience suggests that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in a Black woman's standpoint. For example, one core theme is a legacy of struggle. (23)

Perhaps black feminists are part of a legacy of struggle, modeling their survival after the survival their foremothers achieved through more oppressive conditions. As Carolyn Rodgers writes:

My mother, a religious-negro, proud of having waded through the storm, is very obviously, a sturdy Black bridge that I crossed over on. (78)
Her mother's legacy of struggle, how she waded through the storm, is an inspiration to the poet, who uses her matrilineal heritage to attain a voice through the poem. The black feminist struggle with men against racism and about sexism in the racial community shows that they have found means of attaining a voice.

But not all women look for a voice from their matrilineal heritage. Iva E. Carruthers, a radical on race relations, believes that black women's voices work to the disadvantage of the racial community: The assertion that black females are the most oppressed group in the world, A over B model, and/or that the feminist movement may have some benefits for black women if approached cautiously, is leading us further down the path of Aryan control of our families (15). The black community has already been afflicted enough by the white race, as she adds: our first mistake, then, was to recognize these aliens as a part of the human family, i.e., like us (12). According to Carruthers, these aliens have brought to the black community an equally alien feminism, the impetus for black women thinking that their need of voice comes before their being needed as mothers of the community--that is, mothers to the community of black men: "What greater service to, or for that matter, influence on, a community could a woman have than to be the barometer and perpetuator of a son's development as a child, husband,
and father?" (13 italics mine). Carruthers believes that women's voices must speak vicariously through their sons, husbands, fathers, uncles—the patrilineal heritage. But what happens to the daughters of these mothers? What about their development? Who will be the barometer and the perpetuator of their voices if it speaks against perpetuating the patrilineal cycle? What happens to the individual voices of lesbians in the racial community, who do not desire marriage and may not desire children? Carruthers' ideas would provoke the same type of struggle for the Combahee Collective as a black man's might, because she believes that black women's voices should be submissive to black males'. Stetson and Carruthers find two different means of voice in racial community. Both examples show that the racial community may be the cornerstone of black feminism but that black feminism is not necessarily the cornerstone of the racial community.
Black feminism may also be the cornerstone of the trio section, but the trio section is not necessarily the cornerstone of black feminism: it does not directly reflect black feminist values. Earlier I wrote that many critics in their historical, mythical, or rhetorical interpretations of *Beloved* pay little attention to the trio section and usually concentrate on the fragmentation of its chapters. Feminist critics pay the same limited attention to the trio section as other critics, often writing only a few sentences or paragraphs as a side note to their larger interpretation of *Beloved*. Perhaps the trio section is easier not to include: where others see fragmentation, feminist critics see Sethe, Denver, and Beloved's voices as possessive, creating a glitch in their feminist theory. Rebecca Ferguson mixes a feminist interpretation with similar ideas David Lawrence has about some of the rhetoric in *Beloved*:

> While the rediscovery of possession and belonging here is deeply moving, none the less troubled aspects lie within the very framework of the language, and arguably they are a prelude to a process which becomes progressively more destructive then constructive in the reuniting of Beloved with Sethe. (118)

What Ferguson does not explore is where the "reuniting of Beloved with
Sethe" takes place—in the trio section where Morrison's language is the most possessive. Each chapter repeats the possessive word "mine" to show ownership of Beloved or Sethe, much like a master would possess or own a slave. Certainly there is no part of black feminism that promotes possession, particularly if "possession" has connotations of slavery.

Barbara Schapiro, also using a feminist interpretation, describes the "fluidity of text" in Beloved to be characterized by a continuously altering narrative perspective that slides in and out of characters' minds, by a mutable, nonsequential time structure, and by an absence of the conventional lines between fantasy and reality. Such fluidity, as Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan have argued, is characteristic of female, as opposed to male, modes of perception and expression. It derives from the preservation of an original identity and pre-oedipal bondedness between self and mother. (202)

Within the trio section, where this fluidity is at its peak, something more extreme and dangerous happens than mere fluidity of boundaries, because the "borders collapse between self and others" (202). Schapiro's "collapsing borders" also point to the possessive features of the chapters, another example of how the trio section is not the cornerstone of black feminism. Schapiro and Ferguson make it seem as if the trio section is no place for a black feminist critic but instead is a deconstructionists' haven: the chapters certainly seem to be a seam in the black feminism of
the text as a whole.

But I am reminded of Madhu Dubey:

It is tempting to make direct connection here, between black women's fictional stance and their positioning in contemporary ideological discourses. We might say, for example, that black women writers could not possibly represent the subjectivity of presence because black women suffered from a double ideological absence, from the categories of both black and woman. But such an argument would fail to recognize the different dynamics of ideological and fictional constructions of identity. That black women were ideologically constituted as absent does not necessarily mean that their fiction will helplessly reflect this absence. (30)

To say that black women writers only create black women characters who resemble ideological realities is limiting, for it assumes that the writer's creative expression of voice is as powerless and/or silent as history has made her ideological voices. But in fact black women writers have an empowered voice through their fiction and may choose to create "present" black female characters as a retaliation against ideological absence. Or--not to limit these writers to presence--they could also create absent black female characters as a blatant reminder of ideological absence. The choice, power, and voice belongs to the writer, whose fictional and ideological selves need to be separated in order to dispel any expectations about their fiction.

Schapiro, Ferguson, and other's interpretations of the trio section
might have more room for black feminism and thus expand in length if they were to separate Morrison's fictional and ideological selves. They notice that the trio section is a metaphor for the possession that black women have had historically as slaves. Ideologically, black feminism does not promote possession; however, this does not mean that the trio section is a gap in the black feminism of the text. Perhaps Morrison is using her fictional self to rock the ideological boat, so to speak: perhaps she has a black feminist purpose in her writing of the trio section. This thesis will explore not possession in the trio section, but community and voice; I am going to question the black feminist purpose of community and voice in the trio section to show how Morrison's fictional identity twists black feminist ideology.
CHAPTER TWO

THE TRIO SECTION: A SEPARATIST BLACK FEMALE COMMUNITY

In *Beloved*, although sexism and racism exist, the hardest oppression is the result of Sethe killing her crawling already? baby. Sethe, in her efforts to overcome this horrible memory—or rememory—separates herself and her daughter Denver from the racial community. When the crawling already? baby returns as Beloved to house 124, Sethe does not reach out to her racial community for help, but in. Since all three women share the oppression that has come from the infanticide, Sethe reasons that seclusion in house 124 can offer the best support for them and can eventually alleviate the oppression. Sethe is trusting in a separatist solution, but the three women are not white feminists. Karen Fields sees the sub-community not similar to white separatists, but representing an effort by Beloved to gather her matrilineal heritage, encompassing several generations of disunity, including Sethe's mother, perhaps also her mother's mother and Denver (144). The "disunity" of the matrilineal heritage gathered within this sub-community cannot be a cohesive history, but a fractured one, meaning that neither Sethe, Denver, nor Beloved will find here the same type of "empowering" voice that Stetson experienced. Are these women instead experiencing what
Carruthers warns about matrilineal heritage--destruction of the family unit?

No--the family is already destroyed before Sethe, Denver, and Beloved withdraw from their racial community and into their matrilineal heritage. Carruthers' ideas seem to be more challenged than advocated. Since Carruthers believes that black women's voices should enhance and strengthen the more important voices of black men, Morrison's trio section presents a predicament to her theory: what are the roles of black women's voices in a family without any men, as in house 124? Carruthers' beliefs center around a nuclear family and a racial community, both of which are missing in the trio section. Adding to that point, black feminists like Stetson, whose voices are empowered by their matrilineal heritage, are empowered within their racial communities, which consist also of men. Perhaps Fields thinks that the matrilineal heritage is unsuccessful because Sethe, Denver, and Beloved have separated from the men, from the racial community.

For Maggie Sale the racial community in Beloved has a strong voice which develops through Morrison's call and response mode of writing. Call and response creates a "meaningful and functional" voice for the racial community that also invites readers to participate in the story. Sale can pick out call and response tropes throughout Beloved.
except in the trio section which, instead, is a "web of possession" that excludes readers (47). Sale, like Ferguson and Schapiro, recognizes the possessive qualities of the trio section; the resulting disunity does not create the unified community voice that exists in the racial community. However, a unified voice does not just come from a racial community consisting of men and women because Morrison also shows that women, in the absence of males, can have a unified voice—as long as they aren't completely separated from their racial community. The most "meaningful and functional" instance of call and response is when Ella rounds up a community of thirty women and they go to house 124 to get rid of Beloved. Unlike the women in the trio section, these women are not separate from the racial community but are only acting within it; thus they are able to use their matrilineal heritage for an empowering community voice. Denver hears the power of a community prayer, where individual voices are indistinguishable: "Yes, yes, yes, oh yes. Hear me. Hear me. Do it, Maker, do it. Yes" (318). And when Ella hollers, the other women find a voice from acknowledging a common history: "Instantly the kneelers and the standers joined her. They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (318). This voice coming from matrilineal
heritage is powerful enough to send Beloved back to wherever she came from, and afterwards the women return to the racial community to tell the story to men and other women, which is how Paul D and Stamp Paid find out Beloved is gone. The women that Ella rounds up are able to empower their voices from their matrilineal heritage because they never separate themselves from their racial community.

Nothing I have ascribed to the trio section thus far reflects the ideas of voice in black feminism or the ideas of the racial community. Instead, I have been showing how the trio section is unlike black feminism, how it is a possessive sub-community that creates a disunified voice. If the trio section is a seam in the black feminism of the text, then Beloved is the wedge that disrupts the community and voice. From the beginning, as a live, crawling already? baby, her death innocently distances Sethe and her family from the racial community. When Sethe first arrives at house 124 she is part of the racial community for twenty-eight "Days of healing, ease and real talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own, which made it better" (Morrison 116). Sethe has a voice in the "real talk" of the racial community that heals her experiences as a slave, that "made it better."
After the murder of her crawling already? baby, the "throng" of the racial community that gathers as Sethe leaves for jail stops the real talk that Sethe drew support from. The "black faces stopped murmuring . . . . Sethe walked past them in their silence and hers." "The singing would have begun at that moment" but the combination of the baby's murder and Sethe's proud attitude silences the voice of the community that before had made it better (187). The baby's death innocently distances Sethe and her family from the racial community, but they are not yet completely separated. Denver eventually goes to school at Lady Jone's house, Baby Suggs still speaks to Stamp Paid, Howard and Buglar do chores around town, and Sethe also works as a cook in the town restaurant. It is not until the baby comes back to house 124 lonely and rebuked as the baby ghost that she purposefully and completely begins to separate the family from the racial community in order to possess Sethe. The baby ghost does this by excluding the male characters Howard and Buglar, Paul D, and, to some extent, Stamp Paid from house 124 before the trio section begins. These males are the last ties the women have to the racial community, and their exclusion from house 124 affects the women's voices in the trio section.

The first males to leave house 124 are Sethe's two sons, Howard and Buglar. The "spiteful" baby ghost, with little difficulty, frightens each
of the brothers away to get closer to Sethe. Buglar leaves after he looks in a mirror and it shatters, and Howard leaves after two tiny handprints appear in a cake; after that "Neither boy waited to see more" (3). Morrison disposes of Howard and Buglar on the first page of the text; therefore, they do not have a presence in the story or develop as characters as Paul D and Stamp Paid do. Howard and Buglar have no dialogue in the text, they have no narration of their thoughts, they have no description other than their age when they leave house 124: "Howard and Buglar had run away by the time they were thirteen years old" (3). Even Sethe and Denver's memories never fully describe Howard and Buglar. Denver only thinks about "how it was before: the pleasure they had sitting clustered on the white stairs--she between the knees of Howard or Buglar---while they made up die-witch! stories" (23). For Sethe "124 was so full of strong feeling perhaps she was oblivious to the loss of anything at all. There was a time when she scanned the fields every morning and every evening for her boys" (28). And, of course, Howard and Buglar are unable to speak for themselves because of their early departure.

Why does Morrison have the baby ghost remove Howard and Buglar so soon in the story? One reason is to eliminate any male resentment in house 124 before it gets to the level that Wallace
experienced. Of course, unlike Wallace's male "friends" who resented the matriarchal nature of their home that emasculated them, the boys' resentment is unquestionably valid: "Buglar and Howard grew furious at the company of the women in the house, and spent in sullen reproach any time they had away from their odd work in town carrying water and feed at the stables" (127). How could they not resent their mother for trying to kill them? How could they not resent growing up in house 124 around the loud and domineering presence of their dead sister's ghost? If Howard and Buglar were to have more presence, to essentially grow up in the text, then their resentment might lead to the voices that Wallace heard, dictating her "place" as a submissive one. And if Howard and Buglar were to use this voice towards the baby ghost, then their voices might have the power over it that is reserved for Paul D, but Howard and Buglar aren't meant to be that threatening. Morrison may also have the baby ghost remove the boys early so that it can begin to possess Sethe.

Looked at in this way, the boys are removed through a twisted type of sibling rivalry, but what is odd is that Denver is not a participant. The actions of shattering the mirror and placing handprints in the cake show the baby ghost's need for attention and scare the boys away. When the baby ghost returns as Beloved, she is more direct and explicit in a conversation with her sister Denver that the attention she wants is from
Sethe: "She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have" (93). Beloved tells Denver that she can go, but she does not force Denver out of house 124. Denver is also not scared of her dead sister as her brothers are; she asserts that she belongs in the house, creating no sibling rivalry from Beloved: "Then stay, but don't ever tell me what to do. Don't ever do that" (94). It seems that only male voices and male presence intimidate the baby ghost; she kicks Howard and Buglar out before they can ever tell her what to do, silencing Howard and Buglar through their absence.

Morrison may want Howard and Buglar's silence noticed more than their presence. bell hooks writes that to recognize the silence of people is also to begin thinking about what oppresses them: "now when I ponder the silences, the voices that are not heard, the voices of those wounded and/or oppressed individuals who do not speak or write, I contemplate the acts of persecution, torture--the terrorism that breaks spirits" (8). Howard and Buglar's silence and absence suggest that the baby ghost has been the cause of their persecution and torture, has been what breaks their spirits and drives them from house 124. Their silence and absence also suggest that Morrison makes them an extreme case of how male resentment could come from the home. The baby ghost, as an oppressor, might create a resentment in Howard and Buglar similar to
the resentment that Wallace was confronted with. The boys could resent that they have no voices in their own home but, unlike in Wallace's confrontation, the boys are not silenced by a mother, sister, aunt, or other female relative—a matriarchy; they are silenced by a ghost that takes a supernatural authority. By the time they each reach thirteen years of age—puberty, when they begin to test their male adult voices—they realize that they are still silenced and may always be silenced by the ghost's supernatural authority. Before the ghost can completely shatter their masculinity, they run away.

But to contemplate Howard and Buglar's silence is also to notice another pair, a pair more oppressed by the baby ghost: the silent and often unreliable voices of Sethe and Denver, who keep much of the story unexplained. Foremost, Sethe is silenced in authority. House 124 traditionally should be a matriarchy, with Sethe in charge, but Morrison asserts early that the opposite is true: "124 was spiteful, full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and Denver were its only victims" (3). Sethe represents the head of the household by being the only adult female there, but she has no real authority and is equally a "victim" to the baby ghost's rule as her children are. Yet she doesn't exhibit the resentment that I suggested
Howard and Buglar feel; though Sethe has no authority in house 124 she does not run away because of her maternal bond to the ghost. This maternal bond keeps Sethe from asserting a matriarchy; she instead tries to reason with the baby ghost, which does not come to her voice:

"Grandma Baby must be stopping it," said Denver. She was ten and still mad at Baby Suggs for dying. Sethe opened her eyes. "I doubt that." she said. "Then why don't it come?" "You forgetting how little it is," said her mother. "She wasn't even two years old when she died. Too little to understand. Too little to talk much even." "Maybe she don't want to understand," said Denver. "Maybe. But if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her." (5)

Sethe doesn't feel guilt for killing her oldest daughter. She puts faith in her own voice to make it "clear" to the ghost why she died. But the baby ghost doesn't listen to Sethe's voice and doesn't come when Sethe calls it. Why would it listen to Sethe's excuses? Sethe puts too much faith in her own voice and does not realize to what extent her authority is silenced.

Sethe is more consciously silent about Denver's birth, forcing Denver to embellish the story unreliably, "giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her," in order to please Beloved: "And the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more Beloved liked it" (96). There is also the matter of Denver's physical silence for two years after hearing Nelson Lord's questions: "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when
she went?" (128). When she asks her mother about Nelson's question, Sethe does not give any "scraps" on which Denver can formulate an answer; only Denver's unreliable baby memories describe the time spent in jail: "a darkness, a stone, and some other thing that moved by itself" (128). But Denver is very aware that her mother murdered her sister, and her deaf-muteness is psychosomatic, stopping when she hears her sister's ghost crawling up the stairs: "the return of Denver's hearing, cut off by an answer she could not bear to hear, cut on by the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs, signaled another shift in the fortunes of the people of 124. From then on the presence was full of spite" (127). Perhaps Denver coming out of silence coincides with the baby ghost becoming spiteful because Denver now creates more of a diversion of Sethe's attention. After Denver speaks, Sethe becomes confused about who should she give her attention to: "What to jump on first was the problem: that Denver heard anything at all or that the crawling-already? baby girl was still at it but more so " (127). Soon after Denver finds her voice, Howard and Buglar decide to go find theirs and leave house 124. Howard and Buglar could fill in so many of these gaps that the women's silence creates--they would be old enough to remember Sethe and Denver's time in jail and the murder attempts in the shed. But would they talk, or would they be as silent as their mother and
sister? The answer can only be guessed at because they are never given a chance. In the absence and silence of Howard and Buglar, much of Beloved remains untold, helping to keep this a story that will not be passed on.

Morrison may also use Howard and Buglar to establish the baby ghost's authority in house 124. With Howard and Buglar gone, the obvious voice of authority would be Sethe's; as a mother she might be doing what hooks has called the preaching of the home, acting the matriarch in a setting where no males would oppose or resent her voice. But because no males oppose or resent her voice is also evidence that Sethe and Denver are now isolated more from their racial community. Voice seems to operate on a system of checks and balances in the racial community: the (women's) voice in the home checks the (male's) voice in the community, so one will not completely dominate the other. Thus there are male gripes about matriarchy in the home, as seen in Wallace's passage, and there are female gripes about the patriarchy in the community, as seen in Grant's passage, that help to diffuse complete matriarchy or patriarchy in the racial community as a whole. Who will keep the voice in house 124 in check if there aren't any males, no contact with the racial community? The women? Women may have a powerful voice aside from men, as Ella's group of women does, but not in
complete isolation from the racial community. Ultimately, the progressive isolation from the racial community allows the voice in the home to dominate: Sethe has no control over the baby ghost who has become so oppressive in house 124 that Sethe and Denver decide to summon it: "Sethe and Denver decided to end the persecution by calling up the ghost that tried them so. Perhaps a conversation, they thought, an exchange of views or something would help. So they held hands and said, 'Come on. Come on. You may as well as just come on.' The side board took a step forward but nothing else did" (5). The ghost will not be coaxed out of hiding by the women's attempt at a "conversation." To "come on" or not to "come on" is going to be its decision; thus it is the baby ghost who gains authority of house 124 when Howard and Buglar leave, not Sethe. And the host is confident in this power that it has over the women in the house until the next male, Paul D, steps into house 124.

Unlike Howard and Buglar, Paul D is present, not absent, in *Beloved*. Descriptions, an omniscient narrator, and dialogue create a cohesive male image of Paul D, making him more integral to the story than the boys: "Except for a heap more hair and some waiting in his eyes, he looked the way he had in Kentucky. Peachstone skin; straight-backed. For a man with an immobile face it was amazing how ready it was to smile, or blaze or be sorry with you" (9). These are Sethe's
thoughts about Paul D after seeing him for the first time in eighteen years. Sethe takes more time and description to think about Paul D than about her sons, showing that Paul D is more distracting to the attention that Sethe gives to the baby ghost than are Howard and Buglar. Remember that Sethe concentrated more on the ghost in her home than on the absence of her sons: "124 was so full of strong feeling perhaps she was oblivious to the loss of anything at all. There was a time when she scanned the fields every morning and every evening for her boys" (28). But now Sethe is concerned more about the loss that the ghost in house 124 represents, or at least until the last of the Sweet Home men arrives at her door. Then Sethe stops thinking about the ghost in the house long enough to give Paul D, in a few sentences, what Howard and Buglar did not get in the whole text: description, presence. Although this is an unintentional way that Paul D begins to divert Sethe's attention away from the ghost, he also is actively in pursuit of Sethe. It seems as if he wants to possess her as Beloved does when he plans for Sethe to have his child: "And suddenly it was a solution: a way to hold on to her, document his manhood and break out of the girl's spell--all in one" (158). Paul D has stepped into house 124 and reinstated a checks and balances system for the baby ghost: Paul D threatens the baby ghost's authority by his voice, his presence, his mutual need for Sethe, and the baby ghost
also threatens his authority—or his "manhood."

This sounds like Wallace again—is the baby ghost becoming the loud and domineering voice that black males resent? Only when provoked, because Paul D's presence and voice first threaten the authority of the baby ghost. On the third day that Paul D is in house 124, he tells Sethe that he wants to make a life with her, and he shows her by taking her and Denver to the town carnival. This is the first interaction with the community that Sethe and Denver have had in eighteen years and is more evidence that Paul D's presence is threatening to the baby ghost's authority. He is exposing Sethe and Denver to the racial community whose homes operate on the traditional power of matriarchy—between them and Paul D the ghost's authority in house 124 is challenged. Sethe seems ready for this interaction because some of the people in the community smile at Sethe and "Sethe returned the smiles she got" (61). But Sethe is also cautious about the interaction, not fully believing that the ghost will allow the intrusion of the racial community. When she notices that Denver's, Paul D's, and her shadows are holding hands, she takes it as a sign that perhaps it could happen, "A life. Could be" (59). But it won't be. The shadows make it appear that the three are holding hands, but the real disunity of this trio is foreshadowed by the overpowering stench of dying roses: what was
once alive is now dead but is also visibly dead in front of Sethe and Denver, creating a disapproving stench. When the three get back to house 124, Beloved is there waiting for them.

But Beloved is not there only because Paul D has threatened to bring Sethe and Denver into the racial community again. When Paul D first steps into house 124 the baby ghost exhibits the reaction that Sethe and Denver were not able to provoke from it. As if on cue the baby ghost begins to shake the floor boards (more of a response than the side board taking a step forward) after Sethe begins to wonder if there might be some space for Paul D in the house. Paul D has not been in the house for more than an hour, yet, amidst all the shaking and commotion that ensues in his honor, he immediately tries to take control of the situation with his voice: "God damn it! Hush up! . . . Leave the place alone! Get the hell out" (22). Whereas Sethe and Denver coaxed and gently made efforts to have a conversation with the baby ghost, Paul D orders the ghost to leave and begins to match its violence by throwing around the furniture. Paul D chooses the testosterone approach -- "You want to fight, come on!" (22) -- over the women's coaxing "You may as well just come on." The difference in voice is obvious: Paul D asserts more power and control, typical of a patriarchy.
His voice seems to get more results than just a side board stepping forward because the house stops shaking and everyone notices that "It [the baby ghost] was gone" (23). Now that the baby ghost is gone, Paul D quickly asserts himself as head of the household: "There was not room for any other thing or body until Paul D arrived and broke up the place, making room, shifting it, moving it over to someplace else, then standing in the place he had made" (49). When Paul D breaks up the place he breaks up the baby ghost's authority. Paul D seems to have all the control; he does the arriving, the breaking up, the shifting and the standing. The baby ghost, who prior to his presence had called all the shots, does the leaving. Is Morrison saying that black feminism will not only not conquer women's oppression but that black women must somehow depend upon an oppressive male voice? No. Morrison is saying that black feminism exists not to conquer oppression, but to struggle through it. Black women cannot depend upon the black man's voice to solve their oppression from within their community: Paul D's voice has a false sense of power; he is not able to check or to balance the authority in house 124 because the baby ghost comes back to reclaim her space.

In the chapter that begins "A fully dressed woman walked out of the water" (62), the baby ghost, now in the human form of Beloved,
comes back to re-establish herself in 124 and to possess Sethe completely. As a baby ghost she could not frighten off Paul D as she did Howard and Buglar, but as the woman Beloved, she gains enough power over him through seduction to force him out of 124. Soon Paul D is sleeping "around the house" (163) instead of inside of it. Paul D first thinks that he is creating his own absence from house 124 by resenting the matriarchy there. The self-diagnosis is "house-fits, the glassy anger men sometimes feel when a woman's house begins to bind them, when they want to yell and break something or at least run off" (141). But there is no matriarchy existing in house 124, which is not a woman's house at all but belongs to the same force that made Howard and Buglar run off. Not realizing this, Paul D is run off as well but leaves more slowly than the boys. He first leaves Sethe's bed to sleep in a rocker, then he feels more comfortable sleeping in Baby Suggs's room. From there he moves to the storeroom and is again uncomfortable until he moves completely from the home and into the cold house: and it was out there, separated from the main part of house 124 . . . that he realized the moving was involuntary (142). In the cold house Paul D realizes that it is not Sethe's voice that is binding him to stay in house 124, that, in fact, he wants to stay in house 124 (this in fact is what brings him back to house 124 after Beloved is gone), but he understands that he is being
involuntarily "prevented" from doing so (142). As the text comes closer and closer to the trio section of part two, Paul D is pushed further and further away from house 124 by Beloved: "She moved him . . . imperceptibly, downright reasonably, he was moving out of 124" (Morrison 140). While Paul D once had power through his voice over the baby ghost, he loses that power to Beloved.

Ironically Morrison rests Paul D in the traditional place where hooks describes men's voices to be the most powerful: in the community church. But instead of preaching and having a voice, even a poetic one, he is alone and only thinking: "Sitting on the porch of a dry-goods church, a little bit drunk and nothing much to do, he could have these thoughts" (272). Paul D's voice is not suitable to preach or make decisions in the community; his voice is as useless in the church as Grant's women who are confined to the church kitchen to discuss the policies of men. Paul D's case is more pathetic though because he sits in his pew alone--he cannot have a discussion but only thoughts. And what he keeps thinking about is how he has been usurped from house 124: "Just when doubt, regret and every single unasked question was packed away, long after he believed he had willed himself into being, at the very time and place he wanted to take root--she moved him" (272). Ironically, Paul D moved the baby ghost from house 124 in the same
way--just when she was comfortable and confident in the authority that Howard and Buglar's absence had brought to her. With Paul D out of house 124, Beloved can again continue to possess Sethe. The trio's isolation from the racial community is nearly complete.

Morrison uses Stamp Paid's character to make the isolation of the women complete. Stamp Paid spends much of his time at house 124 until Sethe attempts to kill her children rather than let them go back to Sweet Home. After the murder of the crawling already? baby, he returns only twice to house 124. The first time was when "He had stepped foot in this house only once after the misery (which is what he called Sethe's rough response to the Fugitive Bill) and that was to carry Baby Suggs, holy, out of it" (209). After Baby Suggs's death and Beloved's return, Stamp goes again to house 124 to check on Sethe, but this time he can't enter the home, feeling "a stranger at the gate" (212). It is the "unspeakable thoughts," the preaching of the women, that refuse him admittance. "He thought he heard a conflagration of hasty voices--loud, urgent, all speaking at once . . . The speech wasn't nonsensical, exactly, nor was it tongues . . . something was wrong with the order of words" (211). Stamp Paid is welcome in all of the community's homes without even a knock, so when he is denied entrance to house 124 one page before the trio section begins, it shows that Morrison has
completely isolated Sethe, Denver, and Beloved: "When Sethe locked the door, the women inside were free at last to be what they liked, see whatever they saw and say whatever was on their minds" (245). By the time that the trio section begins, Morrison has created a separatist environment for the three women, completely isolating them from the racial community. But if the men are not present and the women are isolated from the community, we must also wonder who is meant to hear these voices. The powerful preaching (according to hooks) that black women do from inside their home is only "unspeakable thoughts unspoken" (245), and for the women in house 124, their "preaching" has questionable purposes.
"Unspeakable thoughts unspoken" represents questionable voices coming from a sub-community isolated from the racial community. Black feminism advocates that black women's voices are the strongest from within the racial community, and Morrison's unspeakable thoughts unspoken calls attention to the possible silence of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved—a silence that, for black feminists, should not exist:

This emphasis on women's silence may be an accurate remembering of what has taken place in the households of women from WASP backgrounds in the United States, but in the black communities (and diverse ethnic communities), women have not been silent. Their voices can be heard. Certainly for black women, our struggle has not been to emerge from the silence into speech but to change the nature and direction of our speech. (hooks 6)

The passage is referring to women who live in the black, or racial, community, who already have a voice. Thus the goal for black women's voices is not to emerge from silence into speech but to change the nature and direction of that speech, to have that speech exist beyond the parameters of the racial community. But for Sethe, Denver, and Beloved, the possibility of silence does exist because they are no longer a part of the racial community. Their struggle is to emerge from silence into
speech and, for this to happen, they must change the nature and
direction of their speech back towards the racial community and away
from the sub-community that Beloved has formed.

In the first three sentences in each of Beloved's three parts,
Morrison repeats "124 was silent," "124 was loud," and "124 was quiet."
Notice that "house" is absent, directing attention to the adjectives
describing house 124--spiteful, loud, and quiet, which are attributes of
the baby ghost and Beloved who haunt it. Morrison wants the house to
represent Beloved rather than just a home. Sethe and Denver both
respond to the house more like they do to Beloved. When Paul D asks
Sethe to leave house 124 she thinks to herself: "This house he told her to
leave as though a house was a little thing--a shirtwaist or a sewing
basket you could walk away from or give away any old time" (28). Sethe's
twisted sense of loyalty towards the house seems to parallel the twisted
sense of loyalty she has for her children, which made Beloved a victim of
infanticide: Sethe couldn't walk away from her crawling already? baby
when school teacher came, but she also couldn't give her away to school
teacher to live the life of a slave in fact she intended to kill her children
then kill herself). Denver responds to the house with more awe than
intensity: "Shivering, Denver approached the house, regarding it, as she
always did, as a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits. Her steps and her gaze were the cautious ones of a child approaching a nervous, idle relative (someone dependent but proud)” (37). Though Denver approaches the house with caution, she is also as intrigued by its dangerous and questionable nature (how will the nervous, idle relative respond to her?) as she is with Beloved: "Nothing was out there that this sister-girl did not provide in abundance: a racing heart, dreaminess, society, danger and beauty" (94). Although Sethe felt responsible for the house as she would for Beloved as a daughter, Denver feels intrigued with the house as she does for Beloved as an older sister. But both women are powerless with respect to the house just as they are victims to Beloved: "For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims" (3).

As the house seems to become a part of the women, the women also seem to become part of the house, to be possessed in its address, 124. This number relates to the women's voices in the trio section, their order of chapters. Morrison often uses numbers in her writing: "Her successful communities of women are almost always triadic. Important addresses have the base number of 7, such as '7 Carpenter's Road' and '124 Bluestone Road,' where the numbers total seven" (Samuels 136). A
few characters in *Beloved* are named after numbers, for instance Sixo and the Thirty-Mile Woman. Sixo, after being caught trying to escape Sweet Home, cries out as he is being burned to death, "Seven-0! Seven-0!" The number "Seven-0" implies a sequence, referring to what will come after Sixo, his child that the Thirty-Mile Woman is carrying. Paul D, Paul A and Paul F are examples where letters, not numbers, suggest a sequence with characters that are never mentioned: Paul B, C, and E. As a sequence these letters after the Pauls' names may represent the numerical order in which they came to Sweet Home, their order of birth, or some other order. The use of numbers representing and creating an order of people brings up the questions: Was there ever a Paul G? Was Sixo's father named Fivo?

Soon after Sixo is murdered, Paul D connects himself with numbers when he learns his worth. This is the "dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain" (278). Beloved, herself, carries a name that has been paid for. Denver says to have recognized her "Not right away, but soon as she spelled her name--not her given name, but the one Ma'am paid the stonecutter for" (256). Yet another character whose existence is attached to a number, or dollar value, is Joshua, who renames himself Stamp Paid after handing over his wife to his master's son, believing thereafter, whatever "his obligations were, that act had
paid them off" (227). Debt is also a concern of Denver's when Beloved asks about her birth, "She was coming to it now, and she loved it because it was all about herself; but she hated it too because it made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver, had to pay it" (95).

Sethe represents the "1" in 124 because she is the first to narrate in the trio section: "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine" (246). In the same way, Denver represents "2" in 124 because she is, just as obviously, the second to narrate: "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk" (252). What is not so obvious is where Beloved is placed in the 124 sequence. She certainly narrates the third chapter: "I am Beloved and she is mine" (259); however, there is no printed "3" in 124. She also certainly narrates part of the fourth: "I am Beloved and she is mine" (264), but to assign Beloved to "4" would be a mistake, since there is something about the text in chapter four that breaks the pattern of the other three chapters.

Chapters one, two, and three begin like four, with a character introducing herself, but these first three chapters belong solely to the individual narrators. There is no intrusion from any other narrator in the text; the chapters contain only the thoughts of the woman who initially introduces herself. In chapter four, Beloved narrates for only a page and a half of text before the chapter becomes a dialogue. Beloved's
short narration in chapter four is also very different from Beloved's narration in chapter three, which is both confusing to understand and look at: "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 but the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are pictures" (259). Presumably it is Sethe whom Beloved is watching, but what is Sethe's purpose in dissecting the flowers? How can Sethe open the grass? What does Beloved mean, that she can't say things that aren't pictures? Furthermore do these words represent thoughts, fragments, or what? There are no periods that end them and no commas or semi-colons that might connect them. Chapter four contains punctuation, contains no gaps in the text, and is less stream of consciousness, making the text more understandable:

Sethe is the one that picked flowers, yellow flowers in the place before the crouching. Took them away from their green leaves. They are in a quilt now where we sleep. She was about to smile at me when the men without skin came and took us up into the sunlight with the dead and shoved them into the sea. (264)

Both passages have similar content, each referring to Sethe, flowers, and leaves, but chapter four's passage, at least the first portion where Beloved has not yet joined in a dialogue with Sethe and Denver, is more coherent.
But coherence is not a characteristic of Beloved's. When Beloved first arrives at house 124, Paul D, Sethe, and Denver are confused about her physical appearance, which does not cohere with the time frame of the late 1800s:

Women who drink champagne when there is nothing to celebrate can look like that: their straw hats with broken brims are often askew; they nod in public places; their shoes are undone. But their skin is not like that of the woman breathing near the steps of 124. She had new skin, lineless and smooth, including the knuckles of her hand. (63)

The physical effects of slavery are still a reality, yet Beloved has a newborn baby's appearance: smooth skin that has not been challenged by hard work, left lineless and new. Beloved's physical appearance never becomes coherent—she has an equally confusing departure from house 124. Paul D returns to the home after Beloved is gone, trying to "Make sense out of the stories he had been hearing: whiteman came to take Denver to work and Sethe cut him. Baby ghost came back evil and sent Sethe out to get the man who kept her from hanging. One point of agreement is: first they saw it and then they didn't" (328). Beloved is the "it" the community agrees they have briefly seen at house 124; but they do not ascribe "her" to Beloved, showing they are confused about her physical appearance.

Perhaps the clarity of Beloved's voice in chapter four is
accomplished through Beloved's last thoughts in chapter three: "now we can join" (263). These thoughts seem to construct chapter four, because the chapter becomes a place where the voices join in text. Morrison constructs the dialogue to join Beloved with first Sethe:

Where are your earrings?  
They took them from me.  
The men without skin?  
Yes.  (265)

Beloved next connects with Denver:

We played by the creek.  
I was there in the water.  
In the quiet time, we played.  (266)

Finally, all three women join in text:

Beloved  
You are my sister  
You are my daughter  
You are my face; you are me.  (266)

Beloved is a more coherent voice in chapter four because she has joined forces with Sethe and Denver; she cannot then be "4", because "4" represents a union of all three women's voices, the voice of the sub-community.

Now it seems as if my theory of 124 representing a sequence of voices doesn't work, because Beloved can't be assigned a number. The problem resurfaces: Beloved is the third voice, yet there is no printed "3" in 124. The operative word here is "printed"; Beloved should be assigned
the "3" because, even though it is not printed, Morrison does allow the "3" to exist. Morrison has to be careful when it comes to Beloved because Beloved is a part of history that will not/should not be remembered; recall that "This is not a story to pass on" (336). Morrison calls attention to Beloved by beating around the bush, so to speak. "In the very process of calling attention to the absence of human bodies from the discourse of slavery [Morrison] necessarily circles the subject" (Gates, *Toni* 349). Beloved is implied by the text and the 124 but not directly named or intended. Morrison expresses Beloved as a voice, not in printed numbers like Denver and Sethe, but by circling her as a subject, by a 3 that is signifyed to readers.

Before questioning why Morrison chooses to do this, the term "signifying" should be explained. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., states that "The most important features of Signifyin(g) are 'indirect intent' and 'metaphorical reference'" (Gates, *Signifying* 85). The "metaphorical reference" of 124 may be that each number represents the chapter and order in which Sethe, Denver, and Beloved speak, except for "4", which represents a sub-community voice; Morrison's "indirect intent" is that Beloved comes across as an unprinted "3." Gates goes on to say that "'apparent meaning serves as a key which directs hearers to some shared knowledge, attitudes, and values or signals that reference must be
produced metaphorically" (86). The apparent meaning of 124 is that it is the address of Baby Suggs house on Bluestone Road. But the way that 124 is repeated without the "house" directs readers to a shared knowledge, and to Morrison's indirect intent: readers are more inclined to think 1234 when they see 124 because that is the more logical progression of numbers. The "3" is absent and something seems to be missing—Beloved.

Readers are going through a process that resembles Peter Rabinowitz's thoughts about signifying—shared knowledge between author and reader: "the reader moves from what appears to be said to what is really said, or at least from one level (which, if not literal, is more immediate or more close at hand) to another (which is more distant, more mediated). I call this activity signification" (77). Rabinowitz's definition implies that signifying is also an intention of the author. For signifying to work effectively, the author and the reader must be involved. Claudia J. Brodsky writes that "In written discourse, and especially in fictional narrative where the total speech situation is highly artificial, the reader is called upon to perform complex tasks of interpretative construction before narrative meaning can be adequately established" (4). In Beloved, part of the complex task for the reader is to recognize the signifying, to construct a "3" for Beloved.
Morrison may have a specific purpose for her readers, which is why she chooses to signify Beloved. Earlier I wrote that Maggie Sale recognizes a racial community in Beloved that creates a strong voice through Morrison's use of call and response. Sale demonstrates how call and response invites readers to become a part of the racial community in the text--except in the trio section, where the disunity of the voices excludes the readers. Sale factors readers into such a large portion of Beloved's racial community that, because there is no call and response in the trio section for the reader to participate in, there can also be no racial community there. This has been a contributing reason for why the trio section being seen as a seam in the black feminism of Beloved, but signifying accomplishes what call and response does not accomplish in the trio section--the readers' active participation. Signifying is the way that Morrison brings the racial community back into the text. Morrison revealed during an interview with Sandi Russell that the reader's involvement in the text is important to her: "I [allow] the reader to come in and experience, to work with me in the telling of the story. Black literature is open-ended, participatory . . . I have to provide places and spaces so that the reader can participate" (McKay 45). As call and response is participatory representing a place where the readers become a part of the racial community, signifying also provides a space to bring
Besides making readers a part of the racial community, Morrison must signify Beloved to limit Beloved's power. In 124 she is talked around, and she is never directly addressed but implied, limiting her presence. To name Beloved as "3" would give her power. As if in revolt of Morrison, Beloved searches for the power that signifying denies her, temporarily gaining some of this power when Paul D addresses her. Beloved manages to move Paul D all around house 124 and the outside as well, but she never has the power to make him leave until after she confronts him in the cold house: "You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me by my name" (143). Beloved promises to leave if he calls her, but "He said it, but she did not go. She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear" (144). Paul D does not talk around Beloved, but directly to her, calling her by name. As a result, she gains control over him; Paul D leaves and Beloved becomes the dominating presence in house 124. But Morrison cannot let Beloved become the dominating force, or acquire the same power, in the 124 sequence.

Mary Daly's research of contemporary African culture alludes to some reasons why Morrison may choose to limit Beloved's power. Daly has found that, on the subject of ritualistic genital mutilations, excision, and infibulation, naming can also have an empowering effect. The
oppressive nature of the "procedure" is much like Beloved's reason for being signified: "These ritualized atrocities are unspeakable also in a second sense; that is, there are strong taboos against saying/writing the truth about them, against naming them" (55). Naming "them" might make the women completely under their mercy and so they talk around them instead, and are not completely overpowered. But the act of ignoring then, to some degree, is also empowering, since it is how African women survive the "ritualized atrocity." Perhaps Morrison signifies, or ignores, the atrocious Beloved to empower Sethe and Denver because, like Africa's genital mutilations, Beloved is never named. She progresses from the crawling already? baby to the baby ghost to Beloved, an adjective that has been taken from her headstone. At the end of the story, for the family fully to be rid of Beloved they must be constantly forgetting her, pushing back "rememory": "Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed" (336). In this way Morrison keeps her characters safe from any recurrence of Beloved's oppression.

Not having a name is a way of limiting Beloved, controlling oppression; signifying works the same way because it limits her
existence. Beloved is not printed for readers as a "3" nor does she ever fully materialize as a character. This begins with her presence as a ghost and continues when she becomes a woman, constantly partially present and constantly partially absent, constantly hinted at. "Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once" (164). Carol Boyce Davies says of Beloved's appearance: "In many ways, the physical manifestation of Beloved is a conjuring of that absence and rupture, pain and trauma, which Beloved represents. Thus the unified voices at the end, claiming Beloved, separately and collectively. Looked at another way, she is a necessary concentration of history, which has to be confronted and put in place for wholeness to be regained" (55). Beloved is not living so much as she is in a limbo that continues only through the company of Sethe and Denver: "It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself" (164). This passage is just like in the 124 sequence, where Beloved as a signified "3" depends upon the presence of Sethe, "1", and Denver, "2," to be recognized as a presence. Within the four chapters of the trio section, for Beloved to have a presence and a voice in the fourth chapter, she needs to depend upon chapters one, two, and three.
By chapter one of the trio section Sethe has been completely separated from her racial community. She also speaks of other aspects of separation in chapter one, how she is first separated from her mother and then her eldest daughter, and how the life-sustaining milk she carries for her babies is taken away from her. Physically, Sethe also complains of feeling not complete, but separate from herself--"split in two" (249). The text in chapter one is colloquial and incomplete for Sethe, representing her fragmented thoughts with fragmented sentences: "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing. I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick" (246). Sethe addresses Beloved in the third person here, talking about her, not to her. And, since she does not address Denver in her chapter, she is--at least at first--also separate from her daughters in this chapter.

But Sethe does not want to be separate from Beloved. Now that her oldest daughter has come back to her in the flesh, Sethe plans that she "won't never let her go" (246), putting faith in her voice to reason with Beloved: "I'll explain to her, even though I don't have to. Why I did it. How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (246). Sethe thinks that her voice has an authority over Beloved, that her voice is powerful enough to convince
Beloved that her murder was justified. Sethe has felt this authority over Beloved throughout the text, as when she tried to summon Beloved, as the baby ghost, from house 124. Then Sethe's voice barely caused the baby ghost to shake the floor boards, yet she still thought that "if she could only come I could make it clear to her" (5). The basis of Sethe's motive to possess Beloved is to "make [Beloved's murder] clear to her"; then, Sethe feels, she and Beloved can live a happy life together, just the two of them. Sethe continues to mistakenly think that her dead daughter is willing to listen to her. But who does Beloved listen to? As a baby ghost she seemed to listen to Paul D when he ordered her out of house 124, but then she came back, more powerful as Beloved, and this time kicked out Paul. Sethe's voice is not threatening enough that the baby ghost/Beloved is forced to listen--Beloved is interested in never letting Sethe go, but Sethe is too focused on possessing Beloved to be worried about her own possession.

This possession begins to take place when Sethe stops talking about Beloved in third person and brings her into the text through the second person:

Now I know why Baby Suggs pondered color her last years . . . She was well into pink when she died. I don't believe she wanted to get to red and I understand why because me and Beloved outdid ourselves with it. Matter a fact, that and her pinkish headstone was the last color I recall. Now I'll be on
the lookout. Think what spring will be for us! I'll plant carrots just so she can see them, and turnips. Have you ever seen one, baby? (247)

The transition bringing Beloved into the text is very subtle--Sethe makes a third person remark about Beloved's death, but she then uses "us," meaning her and Beloved, followed by asking Beloved a direct question: "Have you ever seen one, baby?" This use of the second person invites Beloved's presence into chapter one, but Sethe is not able to hold Beloved in conversation: "I wonder what they [Sethe's mother and other slaves] was doing when they was caught. Running you think? No. Not that. Because she was my ma'am and nobody's ma'am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she, now?" (250). Sethe's voice here does not have the authority to get an answer from Beloved. She asks her once "would she?" and follows with "Would she, now?", but Beloved's voice does not come into chapter one; there is no answer, just as Beloved never answered when Sethe summoned her in house 124. But what does Sethe expect Beloved to say--that running away from your daughter is worse than killing her? Sethe does all the talking in chapter one; Beloved is just listening to Sethe's questions, listening as Sethe finally gets her chance to explain to Beloved her murder, as she tries to make it all clear: "When I put that headstone up I wanted to lay in there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you warm, and I
would have if Buglar and Howard and Denver didn't need me, because my mind was homeless then. Now I can. I can sleep like the drowned, have mercy" (251). Beloved has finally come, but Sethe can't make the murder clear to her. Instead of Sethe possessing Beloved in conversation, Beloved is able to possess Sethe in her own way: getting all of Sethe's attention. She now wants to devote all her attention to Beloved---"when I tell you you mine, I also mean I'm yours" (250), but Chapter four will show the inequality of this statement.

Like Sethe, Denver is also completely separate from the racial community and speaks of other aspects of separation in chapter two. Denver is separate from her brothers, Baby Suggs, her father, and her sister, Beloved. She also shows a feeling of being separated from her body. Similar to Sethe feeling split in two, Denver is slightly more visceral, blaming Sethe for this feeling of disjointment. "She cut my head off every night . . . After she does it I lie there for a minute with just my head" (254). Unlike in Sethe's chapter, Denver's text is not dominated by fragments, but has more complete, complex sentences: "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk. The first thing I heard after not hearing anything was the sound of her crawling up the stairs" (252). Yet these complete, complex sentences, like Sethe's fragments, show that Denver's thoughts are also
disjointed—her sentences do not relate to each other. They also refer to Beloved in the third person, as Sethe does during the first part of chapter one. But, whereas Sethe eventually changes to directly addressing Beloved in the second person, "when I tell you you mine, I also mean I'm yours," Denver is still using third person in the last sentences of chapter two: "She's mine, Beloved. She's mine" (258). Although Denver wants Beloved as much as Sethe, the sisters will not become a union. Denver does not show Sethe's need to be possessed with an "I'm yours." And, although both make a claim for Beloved with "mine," only Sethe is speaking directly to Beloved with "you," empowering Beloved with presence. Whereas Sethe and Beloved seem to consume each other, Denver is left alone.

But limiting Beloved's presence is not Denver's intention. Denver does not want to be separate from Beloved, for she feels that, since she has drunk some of her sister's blood, Beloved is a part of her. But there is also some guilt involved in this drink. When Denver drank this blood she was an infant, unable to stop her mother from killing Beloved. Now, as an adult, Denver's desire for Beloved is to protect her as she couldn't before: "It's all on me, now, but she can count on me. I thought she was trying to kill her that day in the clearing. Kill her back. But then she kissed her neck and I have to warn her against that. Don't love her too
much. Don't. Maybe it's still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children, I have to tell her. I have to protect her" (253). Denver feels too responsible for Beloved; she is obsessed with protecting her, perhaps to alleviate her guilt of being the surviving daughter. And Denver is so obsessed with protecting Beloved from Sethe that she quickly brushes off any danger Sethe might be in: "But then [Beloved] kissed her neck and I have to warn her against that." Yet Sethe has not made any attempts to harm Beloved--it is Beloved who tries to "Kill [Sethe] back." Denver's guilt muddles her observation about who needs protecting from whom. Consequently, Denver underestimates Beloved's power as Sethe does, and, also like Sethe, Denver does not think that Beloved would ever harm her. Baby Suggs tells Denver the real aim of Beloved: "It wouldn't harm me because I tasted its blood when Ma'am nursed me. She said the ghost was after Ma'am and her too for not doing anything to stop it. But it would never hurt me" (258). Denver is more correct than Sethe when she thinks that Beloved will not hurt her. However Sethe is more correct than Denver in assuming that Beloved has come back for her: "When I came back to 124, there she was. Beloved. Waiting for me. Tired from her long journey back. Ready to be taken care of; ready for me to protect her. This time I have to keep my mother away from her" (253). Beloved has not come back for Denver;
Beloved has not come back to be taken care of, but to take care of Sethe. Neither Denver nor her mother can spot the real person in danger: Sethe. And because Beloved begins to exclude Denver from the sub-community, Denver will still have a voice when Sethe becomes silent in the union.

Morrison may have black feminist intentions for Denver's voice, because as the sub-community shrinks from a trio to a duo, excluding Denver, she becomes the only woman to speak of the racial community in her chapter. Chapter two shows that Denver is torn between the community within house 124 and the community outside it. On one hand, Denver is still rejecting the racial community because she associates it with the danger Sethe poses to Beloved: "Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on into the yard if it wants to. So I never leave the house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too" (253). But Denver also shows signs that she has wanted to be a part of the racial community, for instance after Baby Suggs's burial: "Ma'am wouldn't let me go outside and eat with the others. We stayed inside. That hurt" (257). Denver wants to get back to the racial community and she wants a family that will include males: "We should all be together. Me, him and Beloved. Ma'am could stay or go with Paul D if she wanted to" (257). Denver gives Sethe the choice to stay with a
family that includes "him," Denver's father, or to go with Paul D. Denver
does not see an option for Sethe to be without a male, showing that her
idea of family, of being "together," is still a nuclear one that has
connections with the racial community. In chapter two Denver exhibits
the black feminist values that will play a key part in saving Sethe from
Beloved's possession.

In chapter three Beloved shows intense feelings of disjointment.
Just as Denver and Sethe both feel a separation from their bodies,
Beloved is worrying about exploding: "I am going to be in pieces" (262)--
and has been trying to get away from her body: "we are all trying to leave
our bodies behind" (260). The text in Beloved's chapter also shows the
most disjointment. More dramatic than Sethe's fragmented sentences,
Beloved's text is stream of consciousness. "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" (259).
The text is more visually fragmented than Sethe's; it contains no
punctuation but is separated by large gaps. While chapter one and two
contain normal, indented paragraphs, chapter three has no ordered
system of indenting and no normal-looking paragraphs. What might
have been paragraphs is separated by the largest gaps, making the text
seem to have eight sections. Morrison may intend for these gaps to call
attention to Beloved just as the gap in 124 (the signified "3") calls
attention to her. Visually, the gaps are easier to spot in chapter three
than in the 124 sequence and draw the reader in out of curiosity, if not
confusion. The gaps in the text may also reflect Wallace's ideas about
how spaces and gaps work in black women's fiction, acting as "a kind of
road map of where the bodies--the bodies of those that have been ignored
or negated--are buried." The road map here is another way to involve
readers; if Morrison intends to draw the readers into a racial community
by signifying Beloved as a "3" in the 124 sequence, then when readers get
to chapter three, they also become a part of the racial community by the
more obvious gaps in the text. These gaps around Beloved also make
her the most "negated" character in the novel, but not the most "ignored"
assuming that readers notice the gaps. Certainly they make her the
character in the trio section who is most desperate for a union: "I am
looking for the join I am loving my face so much my dark face is
close to me I want to join . . . she knows I want to join she chews
and she swallows me I am gone now I am her face . . . I want to
be the two of us I want the join" (263).

Beloved wants to be a pair and not a trio, and the woman she
wants to pair up with is Sethe and not Denver. Beloved never mentions
Denver in chapter three at all, because she needs Sethe to make "the two of us." Her desire for Sethe shows in the first sentence of chapter three, "I am Beloved and she is mine" (259), where Beloved uses a possessive "mine" like her mother, but points it toward "she" rather than "Sethe." Thus the mother and daughter each begin their chapters by claiming each other. But in the second section of chapter three, Beloved does not continue to speak of Sethe in the third person, nor does she switch, as Sethe does, by bringing her mother into the text through use of the second person. Beloved brings another presence into chapter three by using "we," but it is not Sethe: "we are all trying to leave our bodies behind the man on my face has done it it is hard to make yourself die forever you sleep short and then return in the beginning we could not vomit now we do not now we cannot" (260). "We" does not include Sethe because these are not experiences Beloved has had with her. "We" does not include the racial community, even though the "we" includes "the man." The man and Beloved are part of a large, suffering group of people; the critics generally agree that "we" symbolizes stolen Africans experiencing the Middle Passage, since Morrison refers to a ship, cramped people, men without skin—or white men—and the sea. Beloved brings the presence of heritage into chapter three, different from the matrilineal heritage that I previously noted through Fields. For
Fields the trio section gathers several generations of disunity, and the voices of the trio section are not empowered by matrilineal heritage as they should be. Perhaps the disunity and questionable voices Fields notices are more specifically caused by what Beloved gathers in chapter three: a heritage that, unlike matrilineal heritage, no one really knows anything about, that hasn't been passed down from generation to generation because the memory of it is unspeakable and unspoken. The journey of the Middle Passage is not a "sturdy bridge" like Carolyn Rodgers' mother represents in the poem I discussed in chapter one of this thesis. What waits at the end of its crossing is hundreds more years of struggling through slavery before anyone is able to have an empowering impact upon future generations.

Beloved does not stay a part of this "we," or the Middle Passage, for long. The second section of text ends with "my own dead man is pulled away from my face I miss his pretty white points" (260). Beloved and the man seem joined through their faces, but the man is pulled away from her by some force, and Beloved's face is left separate. This first example of separation in the second section becomes more apparent in the third section of text, where Beloved's "we's" begin to disappear: "We are not crouching now we are standing but my legs are like my dead man's legs . . . the men without skin push them through with poles
the woman is there with the face I want . . . she has nothing in her ears" (260). Beloved begins with "we," collectively not crouching but standing, then uses "my," recognizing that her legs are similar to the dead man's, but are not "ours"--her face and now her legs are separate. She next sees "the woman." The woman is Sethe, because Beloved also notices that "she has nothing in her ears," that she is missing the diamond earrings Beloved has always paid attention to. "The woman" is an odd way for Beloved to refer to Sethe, resembling Sethe's reference to "the one-armed woman" (250). It seems that both women still associate their mother, or in Sethe's case, motherly figure, with childhood descriptions. Just as Beloved separated from the man through their faces, Beloved needs to join with "the woman" through her face. Beloved seems to move from one "we" to another, because the next time "we" is used it describes a different union: "They are not crouching now, we are" (262). Before, Beloved used "We are not crouching," but now it seems as if she has made a complete separation and become a "we" with Sethe. Near the end of chapter three she has crossed over into a different journey: "no iron circle is around my neck no boats go on this water no men without skin my dead man is not floating here" (262). Wherever she is, it is away and completely separate from the Middle Passage. Beloved began her separation through "the man's" face and
now joins with Sethe in the same way: "Sethe's is the face that left me
Sethe sees me and I see the smile . . . she is smiling at me doing it
at last . . . now we can join" (263). Beloved now uses "Sethe" twice.
Beloved has now found her voice and is able to name, not describe her
mother. Because she has named her, Beloved also shows the power she
will have over Sethe in chapter four, whereas Denver, unmentioned and
unnamed in chapter three, remains separate from Beloved.

Immediately after the join is a new and improved Beloved in
chapter four. She has separated from the Middle Passage, using Sethe
as her strong bridge to make the crossover. Joining with Sethe seems to
join Beloved with her matrilineal heritage, for she shows signs of being
more complete; her fears in chapter three of "going in pieces" are gone.
The text is also more complete, containing no gaps (showing that Beloved
is not signified but has a voice of her own) and containing punctuated
sentences. The sentence structure, though fragmented as in Sethe's
chapter, is not stream of consciousness any longer: "I am Beloved and
she is mine. Sethe is the one that picked flowers, yellow flowers in the
place before the crouching. Took them away from their green leaves.
They are on the quilt now where we sleep" (264). The first sentence is the
same in chapter four as in chapter three, claiming Sethe. The second
sentence is not replicated, but makes sense of the second sentence in
chapter three: "I see her take flowers away from leaves" (259). Chapter four shows how the join with Sethe develops Beloved's voice—where in chapter three she was using simple nouns or descriptions, "flowers," "she," "leaves," "the woman," Beloved is now joining adjectives to nouns—the flowers are now yellow, the leaves have become green. Beloved's voice in chapter four also develops a sense of time and location: Sethe picked the yellow flowers in the place before the crouching. The "place" is no more clear in chapter four than in chapter three, but probably is where Beloved first emerged in the story as "A fully dressed woman walked out of the water," which is close to house 124: "It took her the whole of the next morning to lift herself from the ground and make her way through the woods past a giant temple of boxwood to the field and then the yard of the slate-gray house" (62). Beloved's place, in death, or other times of her life, has never left the parameters of her home. "The crouching" in chapter four's sentence is frequently used in chapter three, another description Beloved uses like she uses "the woman" for Sethe: "the crouching" is probably the cramped conditions of the Middle Passage.

Beloved is more specific in chapter four about time frame than location, because Sethe picked the flowers before the crouching—or before Beloved began to experience the Middle Passage. However chapter
four does not explain what the crouching is, only mentioning it once.

Chapter three describes in confusing details Beloved's separation from it and, in more confusing details, her joining with Sethe. Yet Beloved has a more coherent voice in chapter four because she does not bring the crouching into the text, but only clarifies details about the join with Sethe. Chapter three reads: "I am looking for the join I am loving my face so much my dark face is close to me I want to join . . . she knows I want to join she chews and she swallows me I am gone now I am her face . . . I want to be the two of us I want the join" (263). In contrast, chapter four reads:

Three times I lost her: once with the flowers because of the noisy clouds of smoke; once when she went into the sea instead of smiling at me; once under the bridge when I went in to join her and she came toward me but did not smile. She whispered to me, chewed me, and swam away. She smiles at me and it is my own face smiling. I will not lose her again. (265)

First it is clear the join has already happened. In chapter three Beloved is still "looking for the join" where in chapter four "when I went to join her" shows the past tense of the union. In chapter three Beloved wants "to be the two of us," but in chapter four she says that "I will not lose her again." Again, chapter four is showing the past tense of the union: that Beloved will not lose Sethe again implies that she currently has her. It is also clear that, now that Beloved has joined with Sethe and her
matrilineal heritage, she has attained a more coherent voice than what she demonstrates in chapter three. Beloved in chapter four says she lost Sethe "once under the bridge when I went in to join her and she came toward me but did not smile. She whispered to me, chewed me, and swam away." Though surreal, this makes more sense than chapter three's "she chews me and swallows me." Beloved may acquire a more coherent voice in chapter four because joining with Sethe is closer to joining with matriarchal heritage than with the heritage of the Middle Passage. However, Sethe is not enough heritage to fully empower Beloved's voice, and, since Beloved doesn't know anything about her other matrilineal heritage--Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother, or Sethe's mother's mother-- and since she is also separate from the racial community, her voice will still have a limit to its power.

While the first part of chapter four seems to summarize where Beloved and Sethe joined in chapter three, the last part of chapter four is broken up into five sections of dialogue. In the first section of dialogue, Beloved speaks with Sethe:

Where are the men without skin?  
Out there.  
Way off.  
Can they get in here?  
No. They tried that once, but I stopped them. They won't ever come back again. (265)
The conversation starts with Beloved and ends with Sethe. Notice that the last sentence, Sethe's, has a gap in the text. This is unlike Sethe's text in chapter one and reflects the Beloved's text in chapter three. A few lines later Beloved's sentence contains a similar gap: "If they put an iron circle around your neck I will bite it away" (265). It would make sense, since Beloved and Sethe have joined, that their text should also reflect their union. And chapter four shows that Beloved's text now is coherent like Sethe's, but it also shows that not all of Beloved's incoherence has been amended. In fact, Sethe's text in chapter four now shows Beloved's gaps that were not there for Sethe in chapter one. The gaps in the text are more noticeable than its coherent meaning and actually start to make the text look incoherent again: what seems to have happened is not a union at all but Sethe being overpowered by her oldest daughter. Beloved has possessed Sethe and dragged her down into the category of Wallace's "bodies that [have] been ignored or negated."

The next dialogue is between Beloved and Denver:

We played by the creek.
I was there in the water.
In the quiet time we played.
The clouds were noisy and in the way.
. . . I could only hear breathing.
The breathing is gone; only the teeth are left.
. . . Don't fall asleep when she braids your hair.
She is the laugh; I am the laughter.
. . . Daddy is coming for us.
A hot thing. (266)

Denver's text is consistent with her text in chapter two; it does not acquire any of the gaps that Sethe's text has, showing that Denver has not joined with Beloved. Notice that the dialogue is different from how Beloved speaks with Sethe. Beloved and Sethe ask each other questions, such as "Where are your earrings?", and the question always receives an answer: "They took them from me" (265). Beloved and Sethe act the part of long lost relatives catching up. But Beloved does not question Denver-she has no need to because she has no need for Denver. Denver and Beloved do exchange statements, but even these are different from Beloved's and Sethe's statements:

I was going to help you but the clouds were in the way.
There're no clouds here. (265)

The last sentence is Sethe's, and she reworks Beloved's "clouds" into her response. This example is explicit because each of the women use "clouds," but the responses that Beloved and Sethe give each other can also be implicit:

I will make you a round basket.
You're back. You're back. (265)

Though no words are repeated this time, Beloved and Sethe are still interacting in conversation. In contrast, Beloved and Denver seem to be talking in two separate directions:
Daddy is coming for us.
A hot thing. (266)

Denver is speaking to Beloved, including her in "us." Beloved might as well be talking to herself--"a hot thing" is no response to Denver. The only place Beloved does seem to be talking with Denver is after Denver mentions the creek--Beloved says "I was there in the water." But is this really Beloved reacting to Denver, or is Beloved repeating part of what she said in chapter three: "I am in the water and she is coming" (263)? It seems likely that Denver's presence is just being tolerated in chapter four and that Beloved is ignoring Denver's comments and just repeating, more clearly, what she said in chapter three: "I cannot lose her again my dead man was in the way like the noisy clouds . . . his teeth are down there where the blue is and the grass . . . in the night I hear chewing and swallowing and laughter it belongs to me she is the laugh I am the laugh . . . a hot thing" (262). In chapter four Beloved makes similar comments between Denver's comments: "The clouds were noisy and in the way," "The breathing is gone; only the teeth are left," "She chews and she swallows," "She is the laugh; I am the laughter," "A hot thing" (266). The similarities between the text in chapter four and chapter three show that Beloved is ignoring Denver's presence and practicing her new voice. An interesting difference in Beloved's text in
chapter four is that she is now the "laughter" and not the "laugher."

"Laughter" is appropriate because she has now joined with Sethe, the "laugh," and together they make a community—or rather a sub-community—of laughter. But "laugher" has more powerful connotations—the laugher is the one that produces and controls the laugh. Does Beloved becoming "the laughter" foreshadow the end of Beloved's power? Perhaps this is a small way that Morrison is demonstrating how dis-empowering a sub-community really is.

After Beloved and Denver's text, Denver's one-sided conversation with her older sister, all three women come together in chapter four:

Beloved
You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me (266)

The voices are easy to distinguish because they are still claiming each other. When all three women's voices become more difficult to discern in the text, Beloved's characteristics give her away:

You are my face; I am you. Why did you leave me
who am you?
I will never leave you again
Don't ever leave me again (267)

Beloved shows her second gap in chapter four, but this time Sethe's text remains complete. Beloved is also becoming incoherent again: "Why did you leave me who am you" sounds more like Beloved's fragmented
voice in chapter three. What is most odd, however, is that Beloved uses a comma to contract "do not" instead of an apostrophe. This may be another subtle way Morrison foreshadows Beloved’s loss of power, her separating: Beloved can’t effectively join her text as she can’t effectively join with Sethe. Also interesting is that Morrison is no longer punctuating the ends of each line, although she does occasionally punctuate the middle of the text, for instance the semi-colon between "face" and "you" or the period between "you" and "why." If this last portion of text in chapter four were to be read aloud, the effect of such enjambment would be the fastest sounding voices in the trio section. Morrison may be trying to reflect the desperation of the women’s voices, particularly at the end:

I waited for you
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine

The women’s voices are now indistinguishable and desperately possessing each other, as if they are running out of time, trying to assert one final act of power with their voices.

When Sethe says to Beloved in chapter one "when I tell you you mine, I also mean I’m yours," Beloved does not promise Sethe the same
thing, does not answer Sethe at all. In chapter three, where she does have a voice, Beloved only says about Sethe: "I am Beloved and she is mine," never giving herself to Sethe. Not surprisingly, after the trio section, Beloved has the join she wants with Sethe, taking Sethe for hers without giving herself in return: "Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur" (307). Sethe has always felt a parental authority over Beloved, always trusted in her voice to make things clear to her eldest daughter. But in the trio section Sethe could not make anything clear to her at all and, instead of the two joining equally, Beloved dominated Sethe. Now Sethe yields to Beloved "without a murmur," showing how Sethe no longer trusts or uses her own voice; thus Beloved's dominance intensifies after the trio section. Sethe shows signs of this dominance, that the natural order of authority has been reversed, for she is now acting like the "chastised child" and Beloved is the parent in charge.

But, as the parent, Beloved's demands are still the childish desires she had as the baby ghost--Sethe's complete attention: "But it was Beloved who made demands. Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire" (295). All
Sethe can give Beloved is more attention, and because of this "desire" Sethe neglects her job in town and is thus cut off completely from the racial community: "she took to going to work later and later each day until the predictable happened: Sawyer told her not to come back" (294). Sethe is too possessed by her daughter to find another job; she isn't thinking about the everyday decisions of running a household or about earning money to buy food. Sethe becomes obsessed with giving Beloved attention, with keeping her promise to Beloved of "I'm yours." Sethe is so completely Beloved's that she no longer pays attention to her own, personal needs: "Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed water on her face." Sethe no longer pays attention to her other daughter's needs; where she ignored Denver in chapter two, and Denver was tolerated in chapter four, Sethe now "cut[s] Denver out completely," making the women in house 124 a duo. And house 124, under Beloved's dominating power, is now the furthest it has ever been from hooks' idea that a home is a positive place for black female expression. It instead resembles the ranting and raving of mad women: "If the white people of Cincinnati had allowed Negroes into their lunatic asylum they could have found candidates in 124" (307).

But all the women in house 124 aren't mad. Fortunately for Denver, Beloved decided to ignore her in the trio section and Denver
remains independent from Beloved and Sethe's union, an observer to Beloved possessing her mother: "She imitated Sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh and used her body the same way down to the walk . . . it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who" (296). Denver sees that Beloved is consuming her mother, but, when she says that "The job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changes into protecting her mother from Beloved" (298), she is not only worried for Sethe. True, Denver is shamed "to see her mother serving a girl not much older than herself" (297) and is worried about how Sethe looks consumed with hunger and fatigue. And true, when Denver goes to Janey looking for work, she describes Beloved as "a cousin come to visit, who got sick too and bothered them both" (312), showing that Denver is beginning to find Beloved's presence harmful to herself as well as her mother. But Denver also decides to protect her mother because, if Sethe dies, then "what would Beloved do? Whatever was happening, it only worked with three--and not two" (298). Denver fears that Sethe's death would cause Beloved to leave her again. Thus while Denver is still ignored after the trio section, independent from Sethe and Beloved's join, she still shows some of the same possessive feelings toward Beloved she had in chapter two. Denver is still waiting for Beloved to include her.
Had Beloved decided to include Denver in the join, she may have stayed in house 124. But, because Beloved eventually excludes her, Denver decides that to protect her mother, herself, and the "three" in her home, she must get help from the racial community: "Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (298). Denver is trying to accomplish hooks' black feminist goal--to change the nature and direction of her speech, and Denver is also terrified: "out there were white people and how could you tell about them?" (299). To change successfully the nature and direction of her voice, to conquer her agoraphobia, Denver gathers strength from her matrilineal heritage. Hesitating on her porch, Denver thinks that there is no defense against the white world in the racial community, and then Baby Suggs offers her some advice: "Know it, and then go on out the yard" (300). Baby Suggs wants Denver to realize that there is no defense from white people, but the way to struggle through them is outside the yard of house 124, within the racial community. As Denver uses her matrilineal heritage to reach out to the racial community for the help she needs, there seems to be some black feminist purpose for the trio section: to keep one voice independent from the sub-community in order for that voice to reclaim the larger racial community, and for the traditional matriarchy in house
124, in effect Sethe's authority, to be put back into place. Of course, the racial community is not the help that Beloved needs. As soon as Denver begins to reach out, the racial community reaches out to help Denver with more than the job and food she asks for—Denver's voice re-establishes the bond that Sethe's silence broke. As Ella explains: "When [Sethe] got out of jail and made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone, Ella junked her and wouldn't give her the time of day. The daughter, however, appeared to have some sense after all. At least she had stepped out of the door, asked for the help she needed" (315). Unlike Beloved, the racial community can be as forgiving as it is spiteful, and its members make it their responsibility to give Denver the help that she really needs but does not ask for: eliminating Beloved from house 124. With Beloved gone, Denver continues to get stronger in the racial community. She takes on another job in town, she shows interest in young men, and she develops a strength to her own voice which asserts herself. When Paul D tries to offer Denver his opinion about Beloved, she strongly tells him: "I have my own" (327).

Denver has found an independence in depending upon others, but her mother does not seem to benefit immediately from the racial community's help. Sethe still is dependent, even in independence from Beloved, which still worries Denver and begins to worry Paul D. When he
comes back into house 124 he accuses Sethe of waiting around to die, describing her as no better off than when Beloved was with her: "Her eyes, fixed on the window, are so expressionless he is not sure she will know who he is" (333). Though Ella and the women have chased Beloved off, Sethe is still possessed by Beloved's memory. She is still the same woman that made the racial community have contempt for her, still making "no gesture toward anybody" and living "as though she were alone." Once again, Paul D steps into Sethe's life to change the way she lives. He tells her "I'm a take care of you, hear?" (334), just as he tried to do when the baby ghost and then Beloved fought for all of Sethe's attention. It seems as though Paul D still has to fight with the attention that Sethe gives those memories: "Sethe closes her eyes and presses her lips together. She is thinking: No. The place by the window is what I want" (334). Sethe still is not speaking, and when she finally does open her eyes to look at Paul D, it is her thoughts, not her voice that show how she recognizes him: "She looks at him . . . the thing in him, the blessedness, that has made him the kind of man who can walk in a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could. Cry and tell him things that they only told each other" (334). Morrison has Sethe's thoughts repeat Paul D's thoughts when he originally comes into house 124, after Sethe cries about her stolen milk:
"Not even trying he had become the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could" (21). While Paul D has known this about himself all along, Sethe only discovers it when she pays attention to him, not to the baby ghost, not to Beloved. Sethe discovers that it doesn't take a voice to make it clear to Paul D, that she doesn't need to exclude this man from her life when she can talk to him as easily as another woman. Sethe's look back at Paul D restores his manhood that Beloved took away, by helping him forget the time in his life when he was collared like a beast (335). This connection through thoughts, not voices, shows that Sethe will again be a part of the racial community, and that she will eventually find her voice again. Paul D decides that "He wants to put his story next to hers" (335), not over hers so that her voice is subservient, but beside hers, like Mohanty's braiding, a black feminist technique for telling a story: speakable thoughts spoken from the racial community.

In the beginning of the thesis I proposed that, in terms of community and voice, Beloved does reflect black feminism. However I have shown that these reflections are not immediate or prevalent in the text: Morrison complicates black feminism as she isolates Sethe, Denver, and Beloved from the racial community in the trio section, giving them a
highly complex and problematic voice—in effect, unspeakable thoughts unspoken. Only the last few pages of Beloved show that Sethe and Denver return to the community and find their voice, thus suggesting that Beloved is not a reflection of black feminism and perhaps reflects more of its absence. Madhu Dubey writes: "That black women were ideologically constituted as absent does not necessarily mean that their fiction will helplessly reflect this absence" (30). This passage seems to say two things, that black women's fiction is not limited to reflecting their absent, ideological self and that black women writers, whose fiction does reflect this absence, are not necessarily reflecting it helplessly. In relation to Morrison, Dubey's passage helps to show what makes Beloved a black feminist text: by reflecting the absences of community and voice, Morrison is able to show the effects that such absences can have upon black women. Thus absence is not used helplessly, but for the purpose of advocating black feminist themes.


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