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“LIKE-CURES-LIKE”: TRAUMA, INCOMPLETENESS, AND COMMUNITY IN MOBY DICK AND BELOVED

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"LIKE-CURES-LIKE": TRAUMA, INCOMPLETENESS, AND COMMUNITY IN *MOBY DICK* AND *BELOVED*

submitted by

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Table of Contents

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INTRODUCTION

"To ensure human survival everywhere in the world, females and males organize themselves into communities. Communities sustain life...there is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community."

- bell hooks, *all about love* (129)

Frequently, events occur which threaten human survival. Whether personal or communal, these experiences deconstruct, and eventually reconstruct, how individuals understand both themselves and the world around them. In such instances, community emerges as a crucial means of healing. One of the most recent and prominent threats to human survival has been the COVID-19 pandemic: the global outbreak of an infectious disease which proved one of the deadliest in history. In large part, my college career has been defined by this pandemic. During March of 2020, students were sent home as the virus began to spread, preventative measures were put into place, and the world changed forever. For the majority, work and school became virtual, and individuals were forced into lockdown. During this unprecedented time, when people confronted the harsh reality of a contagious disease and were displaced from their typical lives, many experienced a sense of loneliness, anxiety, or loss which greatly contributed to a deconstruction of the self. Community, though virtual, ultimately emerged as a means of support and a pathway towards healing.

In the Fall of 2020, Trinity College chose to re-open its campus. Though cooperating with guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and operating at a reduced capacity, the academic and social atmosphere of the school greatly differed from what I knew during my first year. The dining hall was only open for pre-packaged to-go meals, housing was reduced to one student per dorm room, testing measures were put into place, all social events

were canceled, and class shifted to be either hybrid, remote, or in-person at a reduced capacity. Additionally, students were not permitted to leave the "bubble" of the campus and the safety level oscillated between green, yellow, orange, and red based on the number of students who had COVID in any given week. The fear of the virus and the ongoing threat of another campus closure, which would again strip students of a source of community and routine, thus lent itself to an overwhelming sense of anxiety and a general state of depression on campus.

It was during this time that I took two classes which would greatly inform my interest in trauma literature and subsequently influence the topic of my thesis. The first was Literature of Trauma and Resilience with Professor Francisco Goldman in the Fall of 2020. In this class, which took place over Zoom, we examined novels and short stories which addressed personal and communal struggles across time periods, dealing with topics such as war, mental health, illness, slavery, genocide, loss, and sexual violence. Amidst a pandemic, and coming off of a summer largely defined by the Black Lives Matter Movement in light of the murders of George Flloyd and Breonna Taylor, the texts we engaged with felt eerily relevant. One such text was Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*

The second, in the spring semester, was Melville, taught by Professor Christopher Hager. This class, following social distancing requirements, took place in-person and involved a deep dive into the world of the *Pequod* in *Moby Dick,* where characters experience and confront their own traumas while enduring the life-threatening reality of whaling. Life aboard the *Pequod,* a microcosm of society in which individuals were confined to the ship and the community within it, felt strangely similar to the bounds of Trinity's campus—both socially and physically. Moreover, the constant threat of the infamous white whale mirrored a lingering fear of the virus,

which, in a time before the vaccine, impacted individuals in varying degrees—whether manifesting in just a flu or death.

Reflecting on my experiences in these classes, I came to understand the intersection of such course content with the ongoing pandemic as a catalyst for my greater interest in trauma and the incompleteness of self. Evidently, these courses presented trauma literature in a manner which represented the ongoing communal suffering of the world. Just as characters in these novels face their traumas and must understand their identities and purpose in the world in light of them, so too was I made to recognize the impact of the pandemic on me and those around me. Fascinated by these connections and wanting to understand how one heals from a sense of incompleteness after a traumatic experience, I decided to embark on literary research into these questions. Using character analysis in *Moby Dick* and *Beloved,* I aimed to understand trauma—both individual and communal—and discover the ways in which community, ultimately, impacts one's movement towards healing and confrontation with the self.

In *Moby Dick,* Captain Ahab and Pip, the *Pequod's* cabin boy, have undergone deeply traumatic experiences which have altered their sense of self and rendered them incomplete. Ahab, left with a peg leg after a nearly fatal encounter with the infamous white whale during a previous whaling journey, has taken to the sea once again with a taste for revenge. In the trauma of losing his leg, Ahab's identity as an able-bodied whaleman was entirely deconstructed and, in response, he embraces a monomaniac demeanor and disregards the well-being of his crew, engaging them in his devil chase. Pip, a young Black boy, is inherently othered in his role as the ship's cabin boy. Upon his traumatic near-death experience as a castaway, Pip recognizes his marginality and, in response, dissociates from himself. Although understood as maddened by his crew, Pip embodies a heightened selfhood no longer concerned with or defined by his

marginality, or innate incompleteness. Possessing "heaven's sense," Pip seems to have transcended himself and split from his burdened existence.[1] Having both an altered conscience and occupying a sense of madness, Ahab attempts to use Pip as a means of confronting his own incompleteness and healing his trauma. While there is hope in this coming together, the connection ultimately fails, suggesting the complexity of selfhood and trauma.

Beloved, similarly, is saturated with trauma and engages readers in a complex dissection of selfhood when it comes to slavery and its legacy. Central characters Sethe, Paul D, and Denver endure trauma which informs their everyday existence as they live as freed people at 124 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Sethe, who places great importance on her complicated maternal identity, was wholly dehumanized during her time enslaved at Sweet Home and, now free, avoids engaging in "rememory" —Morrison's name for recollection and memory of the past, often communal—through rooting herself in daily routine. Paul D, similarly dehumanized at Sweet Home, lives a life on the run and copes with his incompleteness by locking his memories away in his "tobacco tin" heart. Denver, Sethe's daughter born along the Underground Railroad, was born into her mother's trauma and endures a life of isolation at 124, which she copes with through further self-seclusion and a reliance on the ghost of her dead sister who haunts her existence. The arrival of Beloved, the incarnate ghost of Sethe's dead daughter, complicates each character's experience of selfhood as they are pushed to more deeply confront their traumas. However, in this novel, engagement with the surrounding community ultimately emerges as crucial and effective for trauma confrontation and an understanding of incompleteness.

Both of these texts can be categorized as trauma literature. Such nuanced characters and their disparate circumstances and identities are prime for analysis in light of incompleteness.

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[1] Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*. Edited by Hershel Parker. 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 2018), 308. All further references to this text will be denoted by in-text citations of the page numbers.

Furthermore, the ways in which each author employs community or another individual as a central means towards trauma confrontation and healing is useful for examining the effectiveness of communal relationships when it comes to one's search for a complete self.

Trauma and the Novel

Trauma is defined by Michelle Balaev as "a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standard by which one evaluates society."[2] These overwhelming events and emotional responses vary greatly. However, central to one's response to trauma is a disruption of the self. Whatever the experience, trauma leads individuals to explore their identities and confront their existence, often questioning: Why did this happen to me? Who am I? Where do I belong? What do I contribute to the world? As such, trauma often lends itself to a state of depression which, when not confronted, complicates and impacts one's everyday sense of being. Therefore, trauma induces a sense of incompleteness.

The novel is often employed as a means of reflecting on or communicating traumatic experiences. As Balaev states, the trauma novel can be understood as a work "that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels," a central feature of the text being "the transformation of self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world."[3] In such novels, the central characters often possess an incomplete sense of self which involves a perceived loss of worthiness and a complicated understanding of their innate humanity. The way they previously understood their identity—whether through relationships, physical ability, family, social status, race, or intelligence—has been altered by

[2] Michelle Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 2 (2008): 150. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029500.
[3] Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," 150

trauma, which contributes to a feeling of general insufficiency. When one feels incomplete, they no longer know who they are or what their purpose is, leading to a distorted perception of themselves and the world. The world therefore becomes an unwelcoming, broken place. Such a feeling of incompleteness can exist both physically and mentally—physically, as evident in Ahab's peg leg and Sethe's scars and loss of breastmilk; mentally, as shown in Pip's enlightened madness, Sethe and Paul D's rememory, and Denver's isolation. As each character's selfhood and the world around them is deconstructed, they enter into a state of disillusionment. And, as they work to reclaim their identities and heal, readers journey alongside them.

There are multiple approaches to examining trauma, both personal and communal, in the literary context. When discussing identity, the intergenerational transmission of trauma, which implies that traumatic experience is "intergenerationally transmitted based on shared social characteristics," is often referenced. Building upon this, a theory of transhistorical trauma emerges, which relies on the concept of trauma as "timeless, repetitious, and infectious…making a parallel causal relationship between the individual and the group, as well as between traumatic experiences and pathologic responses.[4]" Such a theory implies that mass trauma can be experienced by any individual who associates with a historical group due to shared attributes or experiences. Individual trauma, however, can also be passed to others who did not experience the event, due to biological and social similarities. Primarily, this can be seen through slavery, its hateful legacy, and the marginalization of othered individuals—as is evident in *Beloved* and is touched upon with Pip in *Moby Dick.* Ahab, however, seems to operate under trauma informed by personal, or individual, loss—his loss being the loss of his leg during his initial encounter with Moby Dick. Thus, there are many ways in which trauma is experienced and transmitted.

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[4] Ibid, 152

After discussing the experience of trauma, it is crucial to consider the confrontation of trauma and the consequential healing of the deconstructed self. In *Moby Dick,* Ahab addresses these processes when he tells Pip: "There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health" (383). Ahab's malady is his trauma and his incomplete self. Pip, having his own trauma, has similarly experienced a sense of incompleteness. Yet, through dissociation, Pip has transcended his incomplete self and ultimately embraced his enlightened madness. Ahab recognizes this in Pip and, desiring healing and hoping to overcome his own madness, turns to Pip as a means to do so. Yet, this connection ultimately proves complex and unfruitful, as will be explored in more depth in Chapter One. This concept of like-cures-like, presented through Ahab, is analogous to the pseudoscientific idea of homeopathic medicine. Founded by German physician Samuel Hahnemann in the late 18th century, homeopathic treatment supports the "notion that a disease can be cured by a substance that produces similar symptoms."[5] Essentially, this theory simplifies to Ahab's conception of like-cures-like.

While this application of like-cures-like fails for Ahab and Pip, it proves effective in *Beloved.* Like-cures-like, in the context of trauma, requires the existence of a community of individuals who share similar experiences. In *Beloved,* the central characters—who are impacted by intergenerational and transhistorical trauma—require the community of those similarly impacted to move toward healing. This is shown in Paul D's acceptance in Cincinnati, Denver's engagement with the community upon Sethe's downfall, the community of women who protect Sethe, and in Paul D and Sethe's relationship. Overall, while *Moby Dick* presents a framework for the potential like-cures-like healing, *Beloved*, building upon the communal aspect of slavery, proves the success of such theorized treatment.

[5] Peter Fisher. "What is homeopathy? An introduction." *Frontiers in Bioscience-Elite* 4, no. 5 (2012): 1669.

In my research on *Moby Dick,* the most generative and insightful sources I discovered discussed the novel in psychological terms—presenting the central characters as having a complicated inner self. John Halverson, for example, defines this broken self as one's shadow, "an intermediary between the conscious mind and the deep unconscious."[6] John T. Matteson similarly identifies great anxiety in each central character.[7] Effectively, such critics hint at a deconstructed self. Mark Elderman Boren goes so far as to define Ahab's quest for vengeance as cannibalistic, thus dehumanizing him.[8] Beyond this, Pip is largely discussed in terms of his otherness. Aside from discussions of Pip innate marginality, Brent Walter Cline describes him as mentally disabled— "wounded by the divine"—and discusses his madness alongside his otherness.[9] In short, many of *Moby Dick's* readers have emphasized the trauma and madness of characters such as Pip and Ahab. However, there has been less discussion of Ahab and Pip's relationship. Sharon Cameron notes that their relationship stems from incompleteness, wherein one needs another to feel whole.[10] I further Cameron's analysis by examining Ahab and Pip's trauma and subsequent relationship through the lens of the theory of like-cures-like. I aim to show how Ahab hopes for healing through connection with Pip, though a connection which ultimately fails.

Discussion of *Beloved* similarly focuses on the trauma of the central characters, which primarily results from slavery. Critics, such as Kristin Boureau, explicitly discuss the

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[6] John Halverson, "The Shadow in Moby-Dick," *American Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1963): 438. https://doi.org/10.2307/2711373.
[7] John T. Matteson, "The Little Lower Layer: Anxiety and the Courage to Be in Moby-Dick.," *The Harvard Theological Review* 81, no. 1 (1988): 97–116. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1509587
[8]Mark Edelman Boren, "What's Eating Ahab? The Logic of Ingestion and the Performance of Meaning in *Moby-Dick*," *Style* 34, no. 1 (2000): 1–24. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.34.1.1.
[9] Brent Walter Cline, "Tongueless: Representations of the Mentally Disabled in the Novel," *Dissertations.* (2010) 1-388.
[10] Sharon Cameron, *The Corporeal Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 1-357.

trauma-induced deconstruction of the self in *Beloved*.[11] Ralph Story emphasizes the complexity of enslaved people's familial love, arguing that Sethe's thick maternal love informs her identity.[12] Furthermore, characters' identities in the context of the dehumanization resulting from slavery is explored extensively by critics. Barbara Schapiro introduces the concept of psychic death, suggesting that traumatic moments wholly impair one's ability to understand their humanity.[13] Caroline Rody, along with many scholars, employs Morrison's concept of rememory to further describe the impact of slavery on Paul D and Sethe.[14] When it comes to Denver, much of the scholarship understands her as a central character who connects with the community in order to move toward healing. *Beloved* critics have thoroughly discussed the powers of community in soothing affected characters, but they often fail to trace incompleteness as the catalyst for such community engagement. I will expand upon this idea by analyzing Denver's trauma and defining her actions as wholly resulting from her incompleteness. For, it is Denver's incompleteness which compels her to engage with the community in order to seek completion. Her action, ultimately, enacts a like-cures-like relationship between the community and herself and Sethe.

In my thesis, I will be examining two distinct trauma novels: *Moby Dick* and *Beloved.* Both texts, though dealing with overtly disparate traumas, confront the same complex issues of the deconstructed self and, consequently, incompleteness. I will discuss how each author has engaged with trauma—whether individual or communal—and explore several characters' complicated selfhoods and methods of coping. Ultimately, this thesis argues that homeopathic

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[11]Kristin Boudreau, "Pain and the Unmaking of Self in Toni Morrison's 'Beloved,'" *Contemporary Literature* 36, no. 3 (1995): 447–65. https://doi.org/10.2307/1208829.
[12] Ralph D. Story,"SACRIFICE AND SURRENDER: SETHE IN TONI MORRISON'S 'BELOVED,'" *CLA Journal* 46, no. 1 (2002): 21–29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44325135.
[13] Barbara Schapiro, "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's 'Beloved,'" *Contemporary Literature* 32, no. 2 (1991): 194–210. https://doi.org/10.2307/1208361.
[14] Caroline Rody, "Toni Morrison's Beloved: History, 'Rememory,' and a 'Clamor for a Kiss,'" *American Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1995), 92-119. https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/7.1.92.

relationships, most evident in community, are crucial for moving towards healing, though not always successful.

In chapter one, I will focus on *Moby Dick,* specifically examining Captain Ahab and Pip. Analyzing their disparate roles and relations on the ship, I will interpret and present their perceived traumas and subsequent incompleteness. Finally, this chapter will evaluate their moment of coming together and examine the parameters of their potential like-cures-like relationship. In chapter two, I will dissect Morrison's *Beloved.* Focusing on Sethe, Paul D, and Denver, this chapter will explore each character's sense of self in light of their traumas. Specifically, I will examine their construction of identity after their trauma, evaluate their coping methods, discuss how Beloved's presence impacts healing, and, finally, prove that, similar to *Moby Dick*, a like-cures-like relationship in the form of community is ultimately necessary for movement towards healing.

CHAPTER ONE

The Terror of Self in *Moby Dick*: Ahab and Pip's Incompletion

When the average person thinks of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick,* one thing often comes to mind: a whale. The white whale—representing an obsession, or something difficult that one is pursuing—is salient even for those who have yet to indulge in the text. However, one would be remiss to simplify this literary giant as a matter of the physical whale and its arbitrary representations. Melville's novel, rather, is rich with greater philosophical explorations of identity, community, and what it means to be complete. Using whaling merely as the vehicle for explanation, Melville reveals and examines the incompleteness of identity which all of humanity struggles to confront—especially as it relates to traumatic experiences. Melville thus engages readers in their own journey of selfhood, placing them alongside Ishmael, the novel's narrator, who boards the *Pequod* after experiencing a "damp, drizzly November in [his] soul" (16). Through Captain Ahab and the ship's cabin boy, Pip—two distinctly othered characters who have been left disabled and with altered senses of identity from traumatic experiences —Melville skillfully explores both the physical and mental incompletion of self. In doing so, he goes beyond examining the outward complexities of life aboard a whaling ship. Instead, Melville addresses characters' incompleteness and attendant inner conflicts while evaluating the healing theory of like-cures-like for the deconstructed self.

Ahab, left with a peg leg after a failed attempt at killing the infamous white whale, compensates for his new disability by retreating into a shadow of himself and adopting a monomaniac demeanor. Pip, inherently othered because of his Blackness and his youth, fully dissociates from his physical self and comes to exist in a liminal, yet enlightened, space upon his

near-death experience as a castaway. Both Ahab and Pip enable Melville to indulge in "probing" at personality and identity as he embarks on a "descent to a hidden inner being."[15]

To truly know oneself—to confront our "hidden inner being"—is a daunting task. It is a task that, in living life and enduring all the disparate experiences that come with it, we are all inherently implicated in. Thus, my central question emerges: how does trauma and its effects, both physical and mental, push one to confront their selfhood and identity? Furthermore, how do individuals heal after traumatic experiences, and what does it mean to truly be "complete?" While definitions of completeness may be different for all people, it inherently includes a fuller understanding of one's value and worthiness. Though, societally, this notion is challenged as people have disparate identities and disabilities which, in their physical manifestation, influence how others perceive them to be complete, or not. Melville tackles this in *Moby Dick* as he acknowledges the complexity of this process and implies that, while no one can ever truly know themself, traumatic experiences often lead to a deconstruction of self which can lead to a greater understanding of self, primarily through like-cures-like relationships.

While this chapter seeks to investigate how one's identity is deconstructed and, consequently, reconstructed by means of traumatic experiences, paying specific attention to inherently othered characters, it goes beyond this. *Moby Dick* scholars generally agree that both Ahab and Pip have a complicated sense of self and are, ultimately, maddened by their circumstances. Yet, while this is true, their respective madness is more insightful and interconnected than it may initially seem. Through examining Ahab and Pip's unlikely relationship, I grapple with the idea that it is their respective physical and mental incompleteness which ultimately brings them together and is essential to each character's journey of self and

[15] Halverson, "The Shadow in Moby Dick," 436.

potential healing. In their common madness, engaging in a like-cures-like relationship, Ahab and Pip attempt to confront their incompleteness and terrors of self.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of Ahab's character by mapping the presentation of his identity through others, especially Peleg, Stubb, and Captain Boomer. I will establish Ahab's perceived otherness and introduce his insecurity surrounding his disability—being the catalyst for his burdened conscience and monomania. Continuing, I will introduce Pip and, similarly, discuss his construction of identity in light of the crew, ultimately moving towards an analysis of his moment of self transcendence in Chapter 93, "The Castaway." Finally, I will present both Ahab and Pip as they exist together, showing how Pip's "heavens sense" begins to break down Ahab's rigid exterior, though ultimately proving unsuccessful as a means of healing.

Society largely functions to benefit those who are capable and mentally stable individuals, and, when someone is not, their selfhood is compromised. Melville uses Ahab and Pip to question what it means to be complete and to explore the complex realities of individuals who are deemed incomplete by their communities. As such, Melville suggests that one's selfhood is greatly affected by others and the deconstructed self can only truly be reconstructed by means of a like-cures-like relationship. An understanding of Ahab and Pip's identities and how they exist before, during, and after enduring great trauma, is important for comprehending how individuals are shaped by their experiences and how one's complicated sense of self is made to be complete, or not, by means of engagement in like-cures-like relationships.

Ahab: "He ain't sick; but no, he isn't well either"

In *Moby Dick,* Ahab is a mystery that begs to be solved. Ahab's peg leg, constructed of whalebone and rendering him a "man thing,"[16] serves as a constant physical reminder of his trauma and of his perpetrator—Moby Dick—who complacently swims the sea, still hooked with

[16] Boren, "What's Eating Ahab?" 10.

his harpoon.[17] While being disabled is a commonality among whale-men, Ahab's response to his disability is what renders him more complex. Rather than accept his (relatively common) new status, Ahab reacts to his impairment with "enraged narcissism" and "rueful contempt."[18] In his dismemberment by the white whale, Ahab loses himself—literally and figuratively. For, in addition to losing his tangible leg, Ahab loses his sanity and enters into a state of monomania in which his utmost concern is revenge. Such monomania offers profound insight into Ahab's complicated inner self as it reflects his burdened conscience, which altogether haunts his existence.

Ahab's loss of self is largely informed by, and exacerbated by, those who regularly perceive him—especially his crew. Notably, Peleg, the retired captain of the *Pequod,* articulates Ahab's complex and mysterious identity when he explains to a curious Ishmael how "the sharp shooting pains of [Ahab's] bleeding stump" caused him to be "out of his mind for a spell…ever since he lost his leg last voyage by that accursed whale, he's been a kind of moody—desperate moody, and savage" (74). From Peleg's acute perspective, Ahab's intense trauma and pain in losing his limb has induced a loss of sanity and generated a state of savagery. To ease this perceived savagery and conceal his unstable inner self, Ahab's short-sighted resolution is isolation and self dissociation. Focusing only on his quest for revenge, Ahab dissociates from his reality and rejects his disabled, physical self. Laura Barret explains that Ahab attempts to "protect [himself] from the incompletion of [his] body" with a "Descartian split of mind and body;" but in rejecting his physical disability, Ahab "fall[s] into a mindfulness so total as to be

[17] Being hooked with the man-made harpoon, Moby Dick is similarly marked by his past altercation with Ahab. In the same way that Ahab—with a whale bone leg—is now a "man-thing," the white whale—with a harpoon fastened—can be understood as a "whale-thing."

[18] Hustis, Harriet. "'Universal Mixing' and Interpenetrating Standing: Disability and Community in Melville's *Moby-Dick*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 69, no. 1 (2014): 30. https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2014.69.1.26.

maddening."[19] Ahab struggles to grapple with his reality, and, trapped by his unsettled mind, enters into a visible state of madness. In succumbing to this maddened state and coping through focusing his attention on the pursuit of the white whale, Ahab fails to truly confront his trauma and his incomplete self.

Ahab's struggles to recognize his trauma and come to terms with his incompleteness are only made worse by his unaccepting crew. Despite Ahab's "arrogant solitude," in which he "rejects all sense of human brotherhood," there is a seemingly endless discourse—or rather gossip—surrounding Ahab, which constructs his identity.[20] Ahab's crew, in their language and action, repeatedly devalue Ahab and present contradictory representations of him. The aforementioned Peleg offers one such example of the general unease associated with Ahab. When Ishmael, prior to receiving his lay, inquires about Ahab's disposition, Peleg calls Ahab "grand, ungodly, [and] godlike" all in the same breath, explaining, "I don't know exactly what's the matter with him…a sort of sick and yet he don't look so. In fact, he ain't sick; but no, he isn't well either" (73). Peleg's discourse reveals that he is unsure of his decision to entrust Ahab with the *Pequod.* Ahab, trapped by his madness, is unwell, and Peleg is overtly conscious of this fact. Yet, Peleg refuses to fully believe Ahab's problematic nature as he continues in his ramblings to Ishmael, now defending Ahab: "I know Captain Ahab well…I know what he is—a good man—not a pious good man…but a swearing good man…there's a good deal more to him" (74). The repetition of "good" in Peleg's discourse represents half-witted attempts to convince himself, and Ishmael, of Ahab's reliability. Furthermore, referencing Ahab's wife and child ashore— "think of that, by that sweet girl that old man has a child" — Peleg seems content to conclude that "stricken, blasted, if he be, Ahab has his humanities!" (74). Ultimately, Peleg

[19]Laura Barret, "'[T]He Ungraspable Phantom of Life': Incompletion and Abjection in Moby-Dick and Housekeeping," *South Atlantic Review* 73, no. 3 (2008): 17. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27784793.
[20] Halverson, "The Shadow in Moby Dick," 441.

seems to excuse Ahab's mania and understand him as a victim to his circumstances, though still a capable captain. Departing from Peleg after being bombarded with these contradictory descriptions, Ishmael describes a "wild vagueness of painfulness concerning [Ahab]" in which he feels "sympathy…sorrow…[and] a strange awe…impatience at what seemed like mystery in him" (74). Ahab's introduction into the text through Ismael and Peleg therefore solidifies his complicated status and mysterious demeanor. His identity and apparent mania continue to gain depth as the *Pequod* takes to the sea and Ahab begins to assert his physical presence.

A few days after the *Pequod* casts off, Ahab emerges from his cabin more often to pace the deck. Doing so, his disability is put on display and is immediately understood as a key marker of his identity. Melville emphasizes this through descriptions of the silent steersmen who "habitually" watch Ahab's "cabin-scuttle" in which "the old man would emerge, gripping as the iron banister, to help his crippled way" (105). Ahab, in his first physical appearance on board, is immediately associated with his disability. Described as old and crippled, Ahab is devalued and presented as an oddity. His ascent, even, is framed as an engulfing show to which the steersmen regularly tune in, attentively watching Ahab's every labored move. Therefore, in Ahab's physical introduction into the text, Melville highlights his inability to functionally walk and differentiates him from the rest of the crew, emphasizing the otherness and incompleteness which has resulted from his trauma.

Stubb, Ahab's second mate, does not adopt the same silent watchfulness as the steersmen and is outwardly unaccepting of Ahab's disability. When emerging from below the deck "with a certain unassured, depreciating humourness," he suggests to Ahab that "if he was pleased to walk the planks…there might be some way of muffling the noise" (105). Vocalizing his annoyance at the noise from Ahab's peg leg, Stuff explicitly calls attention to Ahab's impairment and

incompleteness. As a result, Ahab defends himself vehemently—speaking for the first time. Angered, Ahab asks, "Am I a cannon-ball?" before proceeding to dehumanize Stubb and put him in his place, saying, "Down, dog, and kennel!" When Stubb, rendered speechless, finally responds and expresses his dislike with being called a dog, Ahab grits his teeth and "violently" moves away before calling out "then be called ten times a donkey, and a mule, and an ass, and begone, or I'll clear the world of thee!" (105). In response to being reduced to a material part of himself, Ahab similarly reduces Stubb. As Mark Edelman Boren explains, Ahab's peg leg renders him "part man, part trophy" and, in his discomfort with this reality, he "devours his crew" just as "his quest devours him."[21] Thus, Ahab devours Stubb as he conflates him with a donkey and calls out his blatant disrespect and lack of understanding. Ahab's anger, in this moment, exemplifies his monomania and demonstrates his growing insecurity surrounding his disability and his selfhood, at large.

In Stubb's soliloquy upon retreating, he grapples with Ahab's blatant hostility. Ultimately, he reduces their conflict to Ahab's lack of sleep and troubled mental state: "there's something on his mind…he's got what some folks ashore call a conscience" (106). Similar to Peleg, Stubb dismisses Ahab's manic behavior by blaming it on his busy and burdened mind. Yet, while Peleg views Ahab as a victim, Stubb reverses this narrative—understanding himself as victim to Ahab's conscience. Ahab's queer hostility sticks with Stubb even as he goes to bed that evening and, in his musings, convinces himself that Ahab physically assaulted him with a kick. Victimizing himself and exaggerating their altercation, Stubb remarks, "coming afoul of that man has a sort of turned me wrong side out" (106). Stubb unfairly vilifies Ahab and adopts a more intentional and hateful unease than Peleg. Stubb's reaction to Ahab's monomania therefore

[21]Boren, "What's Eating Ahab?", 10

exemplifies the effects of Ahab deconstructed self—being something that none of his crew can truly comprehend.

Similarly, upon departing from Stubb, Ahab is irritated. As Sharon Cameron explains, "the worst crime that could be committed against Ahab" would be "to inauthenticate him."[22] Ahab fears the reality of his disability and, in having it acknowledged by others, feels unauthenticated and reacts with hostility and anger. In an attempt to calm himself, Ahab removes himself from the crew and smokes a pipe. Yet, as he smokes, he quickly finds that "it no longer soothes;" he has "been unconsciously toiling, not pleasuring" and ultimately decides to throw the pipe overboard (107). In this seemingly inconsequential moment, Melville solidifies that Ahab is trapped by his obsessed conscience. His altercation with Stubb triggered him, and he is incapable of soothing himself—no longer finding pleasure or peace in simple and material matters such as smoking. Melville thus implies that Ahab will only be soothed once he proves his capability through killing Moby Dick. As such, Ahab begins to recognize the extent to which his trauma has changed him. John T. Matteson defines these feelings as anxiety and explains that Ahab's relationship with his disability reflects his potential "nonbeing," as he "symbolically straddles existence and nonexistence."[23] In being devalued by his crew, Ahab begins to see himself as less human. Just as his physical leg no longer exists, Ahab fears that the rest of him will also lose significance, rendering him more and more incomplete until he is, essentially, nonexistent. Ahab places an immense amount of his worth in his physical ability to captain the *Pequod,* and his crew's inability to accept and understand him leads to great mental and physical instability. As seen in his hostility toward Stubb, however, Ahab overcompensates for his inner anxieties and insecurities by aggressively asserting himself and his mission.

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[22] Cameron, *The Corporeal Self,* 28.
[23] Matteson, "The Little Lower Layer," 106.

Resolving to keep his distance from his crew, Ahab settles into his enraged solitude and avoids the task of truly confronting his disability. However, Captain Boomer, the similarly disabled captain of the *Samuel Enderby*, enables Ahab to briefly depart from his hateful disposition before, again, having his otherness put on display. Upon coincidentally sailing by the *Enderby* and discussing whaling matters, Ahab notices Boomer's ivory arm and abandons his stoicism to emote joy and excitement. Though primarily excited by the prospect of information on the whereabouts of the white whale, Ahab's joy is also born from encountering someone who has undergone a similar trauma. When Ahab sees Boomer's ivory arm, he "impetuously" tells his crew, "Man my boat!" and "in less than a minute" they were "alongside the stranger [the ship]" (322). Such excitement, coming from Ahab, is unfamiliar and almost childlike. The prospect of connecting with another "man-thing" therefore humanizes Ahab and allows him to engage with his more vulnerable self and let down his rigid exterior, though just for a moment.

However, Ahab is quickly humbled and reminded of his disability as he finds it nearly impossible to board the ship due to his ivory leg and the *Enderby's* lack of a specialized "mechanical contrivance." Ahab's disability is brought to the forefront and he finds himself "abjectly reduced to a clumsy landsman again; hopelessly eyeing the uncertain changeful heights he could hardly hope to attain." As a result of this "untoward circumstance," Ahab is "irritated or exasperated" and, in this vulnerable position, his self contempt is evident (322). This humiliation is further exacerbated as those aboard the *Enderby* initially fail to recognize that a "one-legged man must be too much of a cripple to use their sea banisters" and decide to use the cutting-tackle to hook Ahab, drag him up the side of the boat, and swing him onto the deck. This solution, while clever, dehumanizes Ahab, as he must use a tool created for whales. As such, Ahab is reduced to an animal. Pushed into this vulnerable position where his physical inability is visible,

Ahab must grapple with his disabled exterior and endure the unintentional presentation of his insecurity, further contributing to his deconstructed selfhood.

Once aboard the *Enderby*, Ahab and Boomer enthusiastically "shake bones" and, listening to Boomer's story about Moby Dick, Ahab returns to a state of childlike excitement, calling out "It was he, it was he!" as he repeatedly injects himself into Boomer's narrative (323). However, Ahab's excitement shifts as the connection he hoped for—one rooted in a like-cures-like relationship—is dispelled upon learning of Boomer's antithetical perspective towards Moby Dick and revenge. Telling his story, Boomer and Bunger, his surgeon, are generally good-humored about the incident—joking about "drinking hot rum toddies" together and the "club-hammer" attached to his ivory arm (323). Evidently, Boomer's incident with the white whale and subsequent confrontation of his trauma is entirely different from Ahab's. Though both traumatized and disabled by the same whale, their disabilities—a missing arm versus a missing leg—prove to be distinct, affording each of them disparate abilities and inabilities. Furthermore, when it comes to each character's mental state and understanding of self, their perspectives, similarly, differ. As Harriet Hustis explains, Boomer "perceives the interruption of his dismemberment as reflecting the contingencies of embodiment—it is simply one episode" in his experience of embodiment.[24] For Ahab, the traumatic loss of his leg remains all-consuming in his everyday existence. Ahab has allowed his embodiment to be defined by his peg leg and subsequent disability. Boomer, rather, successfully confronted the trauma of his lost limb and is able to draw a distinction between his past and present. This disparate mindset is emphasized as Boomer is presented as more logical towards Moby Dick: "there would be great glory in killing [Moby Dick], I know that; and there is a shipload of precious sperm in him, but, hark ye, he's best let alone" (325). Therefore, upon discovering that Ahab has taken to the seas

[24] Hustis, "Universal Mixing' and Interpenetrating Standing," 46.

again in order to get revenge on the white whale, Boomer and his crew dismiss him as insane, with Bunger exclaiming, "This man's blood—bring the thermometer!—it's at the boiling point! —his pulse makes these planks beat!" (325). Ahab, disappointed by their lack of understanding and a failed like-cures-like relationship, is deeply irritated and, returning to a quiet and rigid state, leaves the *Enderby*.

Ahab's stoic departure from the *Enderby* reiterates his otherness and establishes that his monomaniac mindset is surprising and unaccepted within the larger whaling community. Thus, Ahab's otherness persists beyond the *Pequod*. Failing to confront his trauma and deconstructed self through a like-cures-like relationship with Boomer, Ahab remains trapped in his maddened conscience. Despite having an outwardly similar disability, Boomer fails to understand Ahab's complicated mentality and, as a result, both Ahab's complex interior and disabled exterior, are further devalued. As such, Ahab further declines into his incompleteness and his feared state of nonexistence, which only exacerbates his need to prove himself through his vengeful quest.

Pip: "The most insignificant of the *Pequod's* crew"

As we have seen, Ahab's understanding of self is largely informed by his trauma and impacted by his crew's perception of him. To cope, he isolates himself and adopts a monomaniac demeanor. Now, turning to Pip, we see a similarly deconstructed self caused by trauma and the crew's marginalization of him. Unlike Ahab, we encounter Pip before, during, and after his near-death experience as a castaway. From this, we can trace the deconstruction of his identity which manifests in overt self dissociation and an embrace of enlightened madness. Such self transcendence, as Ahab sees it, can be understood as a means of confronting trauma and achieving a sense of completeness. However, as will be presented in this section, this

completeness is complicated because Pip comes to exist within a liminal space in which his selfhood is dependent on his madness—a madness that proves crucial for connection with Ahab.

While Pip never becomes physically disabled, his trauma induces a major shift in his mental ability and reflects symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As Brent Walter Cline explains, Pip "is readily understood in two forms: pre- and post-disabling," with his disability being his shifted mentality.[25] This shifted mentality and perceived disability are, largely, the result of Pip's forced confrontation of self and the divine during his castaway experience. In his pre-disabled form, Pip is primarily othered and understood as incomplete through his marginalized identity—being Black and of low status—and is, therefore, deemed insignificant. Yet, in his post-disabled form, Pip's otherness is primarily a product of his heightened insight and strange demeanor, no longer associated with his marginality. Pip's identity, therefore, is actively complicated as he progresses from being an innocent, young Black boy to a wholly symbolic figure who dissociates from his physical self. As a result of this perceived self-transcendence, Pip is employed by Ahab as a means for healing.

Just as Ahab is initially understood through his crew's perceptions of him, Pip's introduction in Chapter 40, "Midnight, Forecastle," similarly hinges on how others perceive him. As a mere cabin boy, a clear distinction of status exists between Pip and the remainder of the crew. Constantly reduced to his race and his duties, Pip endures intentional dehumanization. For, when the crew demands music and Pip cannot find his tambourine, they order him to use his physical body to entertain. Addressing the "*sulky and sleepy"* Pip, the French sailor demands, "[b]eat thy belly, then, and wag thy ears!" (140). Furthermore, when Pip eventually does find his tambourine and, playing rather aggressively, the jinglers begin to fall off and the music is compromised, the Chinese Sailor orders, "Rattle thy teeth, then, and pound away; make a pagoda

[25] Cline, "Tongueless" 135.

of thyself" (140). Pip, completely at the disposal of the crew, is reduced to a physical entity and a source of entertainment. In reference to Pip's song and dance, Sterling Stuckey explains that Melville exemplifies how "African culture reaches beyond the Black community to dazzle even those not particularly friendly towards Blacks…the entire crew of the ship is made aware of the music and dance."[26] The music and dancing which Pip provides is certainly enjoyed by the crew. Yet, a dark shadow of minstrelsy lurks as such enjoyment, paired with the crew's demands and dehumanizing remarks, reflect the metaphorical consumption of Pip and his Blackness. Sterling Stuckey elaborates on this, explaining how Melville uses associations of gloom and jolliness, typical to minstrelsy, to "elucidate the divide with the majority of the crewmen on one side and a minority on the other, as the minority is cruelly reminded."[27] Therefore, in the crew's harmful actions which exploit Pip's culture, his otherness is exacerbated and he comes to recognize his marginalized identity. In this position, Pip thus internalizes his low status and resultant incompleteness, serving only as a spectacle and a resource to his crew.

Similar to Ahab's introduction in the novel, Pip rarely speaks. Although the structure of this chapter—a dramatic script—allows for a variety of characters, such as the *Pequod's* harpooners and the diverse set of sailors to speak, Pip, for the most part, is absent from this dialogue. Aside from brief, anxiety-ridden responses pertaining to his lost tambourine, Pip only truly speaks at the culmination of the chapter in reaction to an oncoming squall. Distressed, Pip calls out, "Oh, thou big white God aloft there somewhere in yon darkness, have mercy on this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that have no bowels to feel fear!" (141). Through referencing his youth and race, Pip establishes that he is conscious of his subordinate status. Furthermore, Pip's fear is racialized. Referring to his bowels, Pip establishes them as

[26] Sterling Stuckey, *African Culture and Melville's Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 32.
[27] Stuckey, *African Culture,* 90.

connected to the ability to feel fear. Growing up as a Black boy in America, one can assume that Pip has a heightened understanding of fear. For, in the mid-1800s, when the novel is set, slavery and racism persisted across the nation and influenced how marginalized individuals, specifically Black people, were treated. In suggesting the crew's lack of bowels, Pip differentiates himself and asks for protection from their hostility. Additionally, he implies that embodying such bowls and being able to feel fear renders him more complete than the crew—although a completeness born from fear and marginalization. As such, in his experience as a cabin boy and through his interactions with the crew, Pip is working to construct his identity which, as discussed, is primarily established by his innate otherness.

Pip continues to gain importance in this moment as, ironically conscious of color, he astutely draws a connection between the white squall and Moby Dick, calling out "White squalls? white whale, shirr! Shirr!...it makes me jingle all over like my tambourine" (141). Effectively, Pip foreshadows the impending doom of the *Pequod* and yearns to warn the crew. Comparing Pip to his tambourine, Melville suggests that Pip's actions—jingling like his tambourine—go beyond simply exemplifying his fear. Rather, this jingling implies his inability to effectively communicate with the crew. Jingling, Pip mirrors the moments when he was ordered to use his physical body to entertain: "beat thy belly…way thy ears…and rattle thy teeth" (141). Pip, thus, attempts to share his insightful connection the only way he knows how—by making himself a minstrel-like spectacle and source of entertainment. Yet, Pip's metaphorical jingling is no longer heard or recognized by the now dispersed crew and Pip's subordinate status and helplessness are put on display. Nevertheless, from Pip's insight–foreshadowing the *Pequod's* doom—he establishes that he is not simply a source of entertainment, hinting at his heightened sense and introducing his complex identity. Being both a

dehumanized Black cabin boy as well as a significant, enlightened individual, Pip exists between two ends of a fascinating spectrum. Such existence is only further complicated upon Pip's central experience of trauma—being abandoned at sea.

In Chapter 93, "The Castaway," Melville presents Pip's trauma and consequential mental shift, explaining how "a most significant event befell the most insignificant of the *Pequod's* crew" (305). Pip's reintroduction into the novel emphasizes his marginal status and offers a contrast for his impending shift in identity. Directly addressing the readers, Melville writes, "Poor Pip! ye have heard him before; ye must remember his tambourine on that dramatic midnight, so gloomy-jolly" (305). Calling Pip poor and again marking his identity with his tambourine, Melville reiterates Pip's subordination. In the same moment, Melville also shifts to establish Pip's so-called brightness, though a racialized brightness: Pip was "at bottom very bright, with that pleasant, genial, jolly brightness peculiar to his tribe" (305). While an association with brightness—often representing intelligence or joy—is typically positive, it seems to serve as a means of othering in Pip's case. Melville implies that Pip is capable of achieving brightness *despite* being Black. Cline explains that "even Pip's intelligence, which distinguishes him from his white counterpart, is understood through Pip's Blackness."[28] Language—such as tribe, genial, and jolly—exemplifies this as such terms are presented as describing the Black community and, additionally, signify the specter of minstrelsy. Thus, Pip is again reduced to his racial identity as he is incapable of being perceived as a bright individual apart from his Blackness.

Pip's brightness gains significance during his castaway experience when he transcends himself through dissociation from his marginality. Abandoned at sea, Pip is forced into a state of overwhelming solitude which alters his existence and leads to a case of enlightened madness

[28] Cline, "Tongueless," 136

from which he never returns. When Stubb's after-oarsman sprains his hand and is incapable of tending to a whale chase, Pip replaces him and, consequently, has three distinct moments in the whale boat and endures two near-death experiences. As one might expect from a young child, Pip "evinced much nervousness" when lowering for the first time. Nonetheless, this does not initially concern Stubb who "exhort[s] him to cherish his courageousness" (306). Upon the second lowering, however, Stubb's supportive disposition shifts when Pip leaps from the whale boat and becomes entangled in the slack whale line—sparking a moment of intense trauma. "Remorselessly dragged" by the line which "had taken several turns around his chest and neck," Pip, choking, begins to drown. Yet, despite Pip's "blue, choked face" which "plainly looked," Stubb and the crew, engrossed in the pursuit of the hooked whale, resist cutting Pip free and allow him to suffer (306). Being dragged by the whale line, this moment is reminiscent of a lynching. The whale is analogous to the complexities of slavery and racism in America, and the action of remorselessly dragging Pip serves to emphasize the power which enslavers held over Black people. Pip, simply a small Black boy, committed no crime. Rather, it is his apparent insignificance—resulting from his race—which places him in a state of muted helplessness and leads to his persecution. Thus, Stubb and his crew are placed at the crux of a moral dilemma: they must decide if they want to prioritize saving Pip—"the most insignificant of [their] crew"—or continue pursuing the profitable whale. In Stubb and his crew's initial decision to continue chasing the hooked whale, their imbalance of priority and lack of morals is revealed. This imbalance is further established when Pip, who is eventually reluctantly saved, is "assailed by yells and excretions from the crew" and Stubb "curse[s] Pip officially," warning "stick to the boat, Pip, or by the Lord, I won't pick you up if you jump; mind that. We can't afford to lose another whale by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in

Alabama" (307). Using the analogy of a slave auction in the South, Stubb adopts a severe tone and, effectively, tells Pip that he is worthless. As Pip's Blackness is wholly called out in a derogatory way, he is directly othered and called to recognize his inherent subordination and incompleteness as it is defined by his race.

Upon lowering for the third time, Pip jumps from the whale boat again and is left behind, leading to his dramatic transcendence of self. With Stubb's "inexorable back" turned on him, Pip is abandoned at sea and forced into an "intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity" (307). Sharon Cameron explains how this solitude turns into a "castigation of self" from which Pip cannot return, one that "drives speech out almost as if at that moment it threatened to intercede between mind and the unrelieved consciousness of its isolation."[29] This self-examination which Pip is forced into is too much for him to endure as, through confronting himself, Pip becomes aware of his hopeless reality. Not only is he conscious of his present abandonment, but he grows conscious of his entire existence—one where, because of his unchangeable identity, he is rejected, othered, demeaned, and, ultimately, forgotten and left behind. Recognizing his complicated selfhood, and simultaneously encountering the "strange shapes of the unwarped primal world," Pip is entirely "consumed" (308).[30] Overwhelmed by this state, Pip realizes the terrors of his selfhood, and his resolution is to disown himself. The sea retains his "finite body," but Pip ultimately succeeds in "[drowning] the infinite of his soul" (308). Doing so, Pip rejects the aspects of himself—primarily his race, age, and status—which have rendered him incomplete in the eyes of others. Therefore, two disparate Pips emerge: the "cowardly Pip" who drowned at sea and the "enlightened" Pip who, when coincidentally saved, "returns to the deck an idiot," though an idiot who has gained "heaven's sense" (308).

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[29] Cameron, *The Corporeal Self,* 26.
[30] Cline, "Tongueless," 144.

Pip, with the "infinite force of eternity thrashing within [his] finite body," comes to be understood as maddened.[31] Defining madness in the mid-1800s, Robert Spear explained that "manifestations of madness are so directly and indisputably connected with physical causes," and that a person's identity becomes "so lost sight of, or confounded with another person, thing or quality, that he cannot perform ordinary matters, or discourse rationally, or distinguish between what he is or what he is not."[32] In disowning his marginalized self, Pip loses sight of his intersectional identity and enters into a state of madness. Cameron notes that Pip's intense realization of his broken selfhood "stabbed [him] to silence," which is reflected in the fact that Pip's voice is entirely absent from the telling of his trauma.[33] Pip, rejecting his apparently incomplete self, no longer knows who he is and, as a result, loses his mind and, temporarily, his speech. However, Pip's emergent nonsensical language and peculiar demeanor in ensuing chapters prove to further exemplify his maddened state.

In "The Doubloon," just six chapters after Melville details Pip's abandonment, we hear Pip speak for the first time, and his language is jarring. Joining the crew in examining the doubloon coin which Ahab had earlier nailed to the ship's mast as an incentive, Pip says "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look" (321). This unusual grammatical exclamation is radical, coming from the uneducated Pip. Jimmy Packman explains how Pip comes to embody the "strange shapes of the depths" that he witnessed as he transitions from "speaking along the linear syntagmatic chain to speaking along the paradigmatic chain." Unlike the syntagmatic—"the successive chain in which language is uttered"—the paradigmatic is "a type of word association that is outside the context of discourse as it refers to words having something

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[31] Christopher Freeburg, "Pip and the Sounds of Blackness in Moby Dick," In *The New Melville Studies*, by ed. Cody Marrs, 47. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2019.
[32] Robert Spear, *An Essay on Madness: Containing the Outlines of a New Theory* (Toronto: The National Library of Medicine, 1844), 4.
[33] Cameron, *The Corporeal Self,* 26.

in common…associated together in the memory."[34] Pip's language, here, reflects the beginnings of this shift and garners the attention of the crew. Upon hearing Pip speak, they call, "Stand away again and hear him. Hark!" (321). Rather than simply disregard Pip as they have previously done, the crew is infatuated with his abilities and grants him the opportunity to actually speak. Their sudden interest in Pip suggests that his identity is no longer wholly defined by his race. Rather, the crew begins to recognize Pip's "heaven's sense" and, as a result, they shift their perception and begin to define Pip by both his madness and enlightenment.

One of Pip's most insightful, though nonsensical, claims after his trauma-induced transformation is the comparison of the doubloon to a navel—the center of a person's abdomen which marks where the umbilical cord was attached in the womb. Giving the coin a bodily status, Pip states, "here's the ship's navel, this doubloon here, and they [the crew] are all on fire to unscrew it. But, unscrew our navel, and what's the consequence? Then again, if it stays here, that is ugly, too, for when aught's nailed onto the mast it's a sign that things grow desperate" (321). In this statement, Pip implies that to unscrew the doubloon would have the same consequences as if one were to unscrew their bodily navel. Cameron explains, "to unscrew one's navel is to perish, to be severed from the body of the nourishing world; not to do so is to perish also, never to cut oneself to the hardness of separate identity."[35] Thus, Pip suggests that the doubloon bears many salient functions. Primarily, the doubloon holds the physical ship, and the community aboard it, together. Screwed down by Ahab into the mast, the doubloon also acts as a key component of the ship's infrastructure. Additionally, if understood as an incentive, the coin also provides the entire crew with a, perhaps greed-motivated, common goal that is disparate from Ahab's monomaniac plight. Finally, being a physical coin, the doubloon represents the materiality of the world,

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[34]Jimmy Packman, "Pip's Oceanic Voice: Speech and the Sea in Moby-Dick," *The Modern Language Review* 112, no. 3 (2017): 572. https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.112.3.0567.
[35] Cameron, *The Corporeal Self,* 25

especially on land, and reminds the crew of how money drives society and that, overall, they are whaling in pursuit of a profit.

While Pip's calling attention to the doubloon as a navel suggests these representations and offers insight into the crew's disposition, perhaps the most significant representation of the coin lies in its connection to the physical body. For, in this distinct metaphor, the doubloon is analogous to Ahab's peg leg. Ahab is completed by a material object which, if removed, would render him physically incompetent and incapable of functionally walking. Similarly, the ship is completed by the doubloon, which, if unscrewed, would theoretically lead to a state of desperation and cause the ship, and its community, to fall apart. As Cameron explains, in scrutinizing the doubloon, "Pip vacillates between a consideration of the crew's fate and intersecting questions about the unscrewing of his own fate."[36] Evidently, Pip's fate has already been unscrewed during his confrontation of self as a castaway, and his resulting mental shift is something he is continuously working to comprehend. As such, Pip is now a symbolic figure who foreshadows the fate of the crew, shown in his explanation of the unscrewing of the navel which points towards the *Pequod's* impending doom. While the crew might now be listening more intently to Pip, they are still incapable of fully comprehending his insight and fail to recognize their doomed fate. Through Pip's language surrounding the doubloon, he thus establishes his heightened state of mind and introduces the crew to his altered self more explicitly. As such, he is no longer simply defined by his marginality, but rather by his enlightened madness—representative of the transcendence of his incomplete self.

Ahab and Pip: "There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady"

In Pip's post-disabled, maddened state—understood as having a somewhat more complete self—he interests Ahab. Existing on opposing ends of the whaling hierarchy—Ahab as

[36]Cameron, *The Corporeal Self,* 23

captain and Pip as cabin boy—their intense intersection is, at first, unexpected. However, their comparable trauma, both having been victim to the sea, and subsequent mental states lead each character to intimate familiarity with the terror of self, rendering them suitable for connection. While Pip's terror lies in the realization of his marginality, Ahab's stems from his physical incompleteness and resultant fear of insignificance and nonexistence. Freeburg furthers this idea as he identifies Ahab's and Pip's connection to "revolve around the moral challenges that spring from the violent pangs of isolation."[37] Both Ahab and Pip have experienced a sense of forced, or chosen, isolation as a result of their otherness which has exacerbated their incompleteness and terror of self. It is this isolation and resultant deconstructed self, shown through a comparable madness, which initially spark Ahab's interest in connection. Beyond this, however, Ahab also detects Pip's shifted identity and state of mind post-trauma, and understands this shift to be representative of transcendence and healing. Thus, in instigating a connection, Ahab strives to achieve a similar transcendence. Relying on the concept of like-cures-like, Ahab aims to use their common experiences of otherness and trauma, in addition to Pip's enlightened mind, as the key for his own self realization and desired escape from his burdened conscience. Similarly, Pip accepts such a relationship and desires to help Ahab, exemplifying, in part, his own hope for connection and further healing. Yet, as will be shown in my analysis of the novel's final moments, Ahab ultimately rejects the solace which Pip, and eventually Starbuck, aim to provide.

Ahab and Pip first interact in Chapter 125: "The Log and the Line.," when Ahab is trying to fix the line and Pip, in his enlightened stupor, appears on deck. Ahab asks, "come to help, eh, Pip?" and, taken aback, Pip responds, "Pip? Whom ye call Pip?...Pip's missing. Let's see now if ye haven't fished him up here…I guess he's holding on. Jerk him, Tahiti!...we haul in no cowards here. Captain Ahab! Sir, sir! Here's Pip, trying to get on board again" (375). Pip's convoluted

[37] Freeburg, "Pip and the Sounds of Blackness in Moby Dick," 43.

language—referring to the drowned Pip as a wholly separate and cowardly individual, and consequently speaking of himself in the third person—exemplifies his shifted mind and apparent madness. Furthermore, Pip's anxious tone establishes his fear of his drowned self, who is supposedly still trying to get onboard. Pip fears being reunited with his marginalized self, and the simple act of being called by his name triggers a sense of anxiety surrounding his identity and aids in revealing his shifted self more explicitly. Rather than consider Pip insane, Ahab recognizes Pip's madness as enlightened—referring to him as "that holiness"—and questions, "who art thou, boy? I see not my reflection in the vacant pupils of thy eyes. Oh God! That man should be a thing for immortal souls to sieve through!" (376). Through Pip's demeanor, language, and physical features, Ahab is able to perceive Pip's complicated relationship with incompleteness and identity and recognize the enlightened madness which it has led to. Consequently, Ahab's rigid demeanor begins to shift. Similar to the way Ahab briefly let his guard down when he encountered the disabled Boomer, Ahab hopes for connection with the disabled Pip. Yet, rather than a physical disability which draws them together, their prospective connection is born from common otherness and trauma, which has deconstructed their identities.

This connection comes to fruition when Ahab insists that his cabin should become Pip's home. With Pip, Ahab feels a sense of completion that he yearns to protect, which is implied in his desire to keep Pip's physical self safe and secure. Taking Pip's hand, he says: "rivet these two hands together; the black one with the white, for I will not let this go…I feel prouder leading thee by thy black hand, than though I grasped an emperor's" (376). Calling for their hands to be riveted together, Ahab makes it clear that he accepts Pip's otherness and feels a need to be physically connected to him. Pip elicits a similar longing. In Chapter 129, "The Cabin," when Ahab begins to leave for the deck, the stage directions state: "*Pip catches him by the hand to*

follow" (383).[38] Furthermore, when Ahab rejects Pip and tells him to "abide below" Pip responds, "no! Ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your one lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye" (383). Pip longs to complete Ahab and serve as his missing limb. As Cline explains, Pip "offers Ahab a path towards transcendence" but only if Ahab is willing to "accept [Pip's] presence."[39] Therefore, Ahab is placed in a unique position—one similar to Stubb's while Pip was tangled in the whale line. Ahab must decide between Pip—representing companionship and acceptance—or Moby Dick—representing pride and hateful revenge. Ultimately, Ahab chooses the latter.

With Pip, Ahab begins to experience an awakening of his consciousness which, ultimately, makes him uncomfortable and leads to his shift in demeanor towards Pip. Cameron explains that Pip's "strange murmurings are akin to the workings of an unconscious mind, a capitulation…to the heartless devastations of the world."[40] Pip, through his enlightened discourse and strange demeanor, forces Ahab into an examination of self similar to the one he experienced during his own abandonment. In trying to understand his trauma and work towards healing, Ahab becomes overwhelmed, distressed, and angered. As a result, their relationship becomes complex, and Ahab separates himself from Pip. While Ahab had initially sought out this relationship with the aim of connection and self-transcendence, he seems to have lost sight of this goal—no longer knowing what he desires from Pip, or if he even wants his insanity to be healed. Notably, when Pip tries to follow him on deck, Ahab expresses this sentiment: "The hour is coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health" (383). Ahab acknowledges that Pip's common malady is curing him through

[38] This chapter, similar to "Midnight, Forecastle," is also written like a dramatic script.
[39] Cline, "Tongueless," 160.
[40] Cameron, *The Corporeal Self,* 28.

a like-cures-like relationship. However, as he begins to discover the complicated reality of his selfhood in this healing process, Ahab rejects Pip's solace and ultimately returns to his prideful insanity. Thus, Ahab implies that his insanity, and killing Moby Dick, is what he understands as the crucial component to his reconstruction of self. Doing so, Ahab regresses in his healing process and comes to the conclusion that his malady is, in actuality, the epitome of his health and a complete self.

Ahab's rejection of Pip suggests his rejection of healing. On Pip awakening of Ahab's consciousness, Cameron notes that "Ahab knows Pip's words because he knows Pip's thoughts, and it is just these thoughts that he is at such pains to drive out of his mind…[Pip] is a reminder of [Ahab's] incompleteness."[41] Because Pip, from Ahab's perspective, was able to transcend his incompleteness and Ahab struggles to do so, Ahab begins to envy Pip and speak to him with aggression. Departing from Pip, Ahab tells him, "sit here in my own screwed chair; another screw to it…Weep so, and I will murder thee!" (383). In calling for Pip to be screwed to his chair, Ahab invokes Pip as a metaphor for the doubloon—keeping him below as a prize or incentive, of sorts. Pip, therefore, also comes to represent the navel which, if unscrewed, would lead to desperation. If representing the navel in a literal sense, Pip could be understood as an umbilical cord which serves to nourish Ahab and push him toward transcendence. Yet, as discussed, Ahab rejects this connection and shows this by, again, conflating Pip with his marginalized identity: "a bigot in the fadeless fidelity of man…and a black! And crazy!" (383). Ahab, therefore, attempts to remind Pip of his innate incompleteness, again reflecting his anger that Pip has achieved transcendence while he has not. Turning away, Ahab tells Pip "God forever bless thee; and if it come to that,—God forever save thee, let what will befall," and seems to accept the impending doom of the *Pequod* (384). Leaving Pip to prepare for his death, Ahab

[41] Cameron, *The Corporeal Self,* 28.

accepts his demise and settles into his malady, now understood to be a crucial aspect of his selfhood and critical component of his perceived completion.

However, Pip's efforts to convince Ahab that he does not need to hunt Moby Dick are not entirely wasted. In Chapter 132, "The Symphony," Ahab experiences a brief moment of grief and regret. Standing on the deck, Ahab, described as "tied up and twisted; gnarled and knotted with wrinkles; haggardly firm and unyielding," is the antithesis of the "steel-blue day" with "transparently pure and soft" air (389). Frustrated and confused, with Pip's musings still on his mind, Ahab laments to the nearest member of his crew: the rational Starbuck. Doing so, he begins to mirror Pip's nonsensical language and refers to himself in the third person: "aye! What a forty years' fool–fool, old fool—Ahab has been! Why this strife of the chase? Why weary…how the richer or better Ahab is now?" (389). Ahab begins to confront himself in the manner that Pip had implored him to do and, in the process, comes to understand his life as one that has not fully been lived, especially in relation to his absence from his wife and child. To console himself, Ahab demands of Starbuck, "Close! Stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze at sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God" (389). Ahab, finally, is attempting to give into human connection and, doing so, questions his quest for Moby Dick and examines his identity. He states, "what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing it is…that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, crowding, and jamming myself on all the time…Is it Ahab, Ahab?" (390). Here, Ahab is recognizing that it is not the white whale that is implicating him in this chase. Rather, it is his own uneasy consciousness, exacerbated by his physical incompleteness. Using the third person to question himself, Ahab is revealing that, like Pip, there are two of him: the monomaniac Ahab who must kill Moby Dick, and the grief-ridden Ahab who longs for human connection and inner peace. Essentially, in

considering everything he has lost in his life as a whaler, Ahab realizes that simply killing Moby Dick would not compensate for all of his regrets. Therefore, Ahab begins to transcend his manic state. Yet, he fails to fully do so as, later that night, when "snuffing up the sea air," Ahab declares, "a whale [Moby Dick] must be near" and, consequently, gives in to his insanity (391).

The whale chase, as expected, is intense and pushes Ahab, and other members of the crew, to their limits both physically and mentally. Significantly, Ahab encounters many struggles with his peg leg. When it breaks for the second time during the second day of the whale chase, the rational Starbuck with whom Ahab previously connected, attempts to reason with Ahab. Imploring him to abandon his hunt, Starbuck states, "Two days chased; twice stove to splinters; thy very leg once more snatched from under thee…all good angels mobbing thee with warnings…impiety and blasphemy to hunt [Moby Dick] more!" (390). Ahab, however, is now fully engaged in his mania and is impossible to reason with. In response to Starbuck, he rejects their prior connection and explains, "in this matter of the whale…Ahab is forever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed" (401). In this response, Ahab is accepting his manic self and actively choosing his unyielding quest. Despite his repeated loss of his limb, Ahab no longer cares to be accepted by others, to transcend himself, or to appear capable. He is entirely consumed by his doomed mission and allows it to function as the central marker of his identity.

Ahab's immutable commitment to Moby Dick's downfall heightens his madness and leads to his own downfall. In a final effort to harpoon the whale, Ahab succeeds in fastening to him. However, he also fastens himself: "the flying turn caught him round the neck…he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone" (409). Significantly, the moment of Ahab's death mirrors Pip's figurative lynching during his second lowering with Stubb. As such, the

"magical, sometimes horrible whale-line" gains immense meaning (217). Of the whale-line, Melville writes:

> As the seemingly harmless rifle holds the fatal powder, and the ball, and the explosion: so the graceful repose of the line, as it silently serpentines about the oarsman before being brought into actual play—this is a thing which carries more of true terror than any other aspect of this dangerous affair. But why say more? All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in a swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, and ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in a whaleboat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side (219).

Whale-lines, as they exist, seem harmless and unimportant. In reality, they possess terror. This is evident in Pip's figurative lynching and in Ahab's climactic death—both by the whale-line. As Melville explains, however, whale-lines do not solely possess terror in the context of whaling. Rather, all men are cursed with the terror of metaphorical whale-lines, whether they know it or not. We are all "enveloped" in whale-lines, as they hang "round [our] necks," ready, at any moment, to be "caught in a swift, sudden turn of death" —an experience of trauma, in whatever way it manifests. It is when this happens, when one's whale-line is caught, that human survival is threatened and the self is deconstructed. In presenting a communal experience of the whale-line, Melville suggests that individuals do not have to confront their deconstructed selves in isolation. When it comes to the threat of incompleteness, the feeling is universal—equally known both by whalers and those cozied up before an evening fire. Thus, Melville establishes a framework for like-cures-like relationships which includes "all men."

Ahab, in his prideful insanity, ultimately rejects the inherently communal nature of like-cures-like. In Ahab's internalization of his crew's perceptions of him and in his encounter with Boomer, he fails to recognize that they too have whale-lines hung around their necks, perhaps some of them tightened. Ahab fails to realize that the general community possesses the

same threat of incompleteness which he aims to transcend. Thus, Melville implies that, if Ahab were to depart from his monomania and engage with his crew more, he may have successfully encountered a like-cures-like relationship which could lead to his trauma confrontation and self reconstruction. Ahab's death reflects this failure.

It is Pip, however, who has a visible experience of trauma and a notable reaction to it, which Ahab determines as comparable to his own. Pip welcomes this connection and acknowledges Ahab's pursuit of a like-cures-like relationship. Yet, this relationship fails when Ahab ultimately determines that his experience is deeply individual, and opts to lean into his monomania as a means of completeness. However, Ahab's moment of potential connection with Starbuck proves that the whale-line is a shared experience and that healing is possible through emergence and connection with community, at large, not just with those whose traumatic experiences are explicit.

In his death, Ahab, fastened to Moby Dick, becomes the leviathan. Such attachment further signals Ahab's rejection of the common human experience of incompleteness—whether having experienced great trauma, or not. Perhaps, Ahab was never destined to become complete through a like-cures-like relationship. In contrast, Pip's selfhood is not only realized through a metaphorical rejection of what makes him incomplete and othered, but in his recognition of the common experience of incompleteness and trauma. This recognition is evident in his increased engagement with the crew—first shown when he discusses the doubloon. For this reason, Pip survives his whale line, understanding its universality. Ahab, however, dies by the whale line as he rejects his community and opts for isolation and a monomaniac mindset. As such, the death of the entire crew of the *Pequod*, aside from Ishmael, is the ultimate consequence of Ahab's rejection of self and community.

CHAPTER TWO

Incompleteness by Enslavement in *Beloved*

Though disparate in her craft and occupying a wholly different landscape of time and content, Toni Morrison's portrayal of identity and self in *Beloved* mirrors the overt themes of incompleteness as presented in *Moby Dick*. Furthermore, the novel relies on a like-cure-like framework for healing which, unlike in *Moby Dick,* proves successful for trauma confrontation and self reconstruction. In *Beloved,* a novel telling the story of formerly enslaved individuals who must confront their traumas, issues of identity as it relates to the past and a dehumanized selfhood saturate the entire novel. Not narrated chronologically, Morrison presents *Beloved* through a series of flashbacks, memories, and present action which enable her to effectively communicate the trauma and hardships common to those enslaved, like Sethe—the novel's central character, an formerly enslaved woman who possesses extraordinary maternal love for her children. In examining Sethe's experience of selfhood—alongside Paul D, a fellow formerly enslaved person, and Denver, Sethe's surviving daughter—suffering emerges as a key aspect to understanding each character's incompleteness. As Kristin Boureau explains, suffering "makes one a great deal less than real…[it] *unmakes* the self and calls violent attention to the practice of making and unmaking selves."[42] In *Beloved,* Sethe and Paul D's physical and mental suffering at the hands of their enslaver leads to an intense deconstruction of identity which haunts them, still, after achieving freedom. Denver, born into her mother's trauma and a world fractured by slavery, suffers an isolated existence which constitutes her own incompleteness. By exploring how these characters confront, or fail to confront, their traumas, Morrison skillfully examines the physical and mental incompletion of self. Doing so, she presents the horrors of slavery and emphasizes a

[42] Boureau, "Pain and the Unmaking of Self," 452.

collective experience, thus implying that community is crucial for healing in a like-cures-like framework.

First and foremost, slavery can be understood as the central means of the deconstruction of identity and self in *Beloved.* Slavery, the ownership of individuals—typically Black people—for the sake of labor, has plagued America since its onset. In the 1870s, the time period of the novel, slavery was abolished, but Sethe and her family continued to live with the impact of their enslavement. This is shown through the repeated rememory of characters as they engage with the trauma of their time at Sweet Home, the plantation in Kentucky where they were enslaved. As such, the novel is distinctly set in two different times: the present being after slavery at 124 Bluestone Road in Cincinnati, and the past being during slavery and set at Sweet Home and along the Underground Railroad in the 1850s. Sethe, along with the Sweet Home men, employ the Underground Railroad to escape from the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky to freedom in Cincinnati, and the risky journey proves extremely difficult, and even fatal, for some. Sethe, however, ultimately succeeds and it is in her complex livelihood at 124 Bluestone Road—her mother in law's, Baby Suggs' house—where readers are introduced to Sethe and begin to learn of her trauma.

Central to understanding Sethe, Paul D, and Denver's experiences of incompleteness is the concept of the "Veil." W.E.B Du Bois, renowned Black scholar and activist, presents the Veil as having "two worlds," and individuals within the Veil—Black people— experience a "half-awakened double consciousness."[43] Essentially, the Veil represents an invisible barrier which prohibits true understanding and equality between Black and white people. Established in 1903, DuBois's concept is likely one that Morrison referred to when writing *Beloved* in the late 1980s. For, each of Morrison's characters exist within the Veil, which complicates their selfhood

[43] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola: Dover Publication, 1994), v.

and ability to confront their trauma. They occupy a unique perspective as, within the veil, each character experiences a sense of double-consciousness and is uncertain of their humanity. Discussing this complex existence between two worlds, Barabara Schapiro explains, "[*Beloved*] reveals how the condition of enslavement in the external world, particularly the denial of one's status of a human subject, has deep repercussions in the individual's internal world…The self will still be trapped in an inner world that prevents a genuine experience of freedom."[44] Enslavement has informed each character's complex existence and created a veil not only between them and their outer world, but also within themselves as internalized ideas of dehumanization have led each character to feel less than whole. Such trapping extends beyond those who have a lived experience of slavery. Racism and slavery's legacy, persisting through transhistorical and intergenerational trauma, leads Denver to find the world a "puzzling thing."[45] In essence, the Veil informs each character's external and internal existence, constituting a sense of incompleteness which each character struggles to confront.

This chapter seeks to explore the connection between slavery and incompleteness, specifically focusing on trauma and characters' ability, or inability, to cope with it. *Beloved* critics generally agree that Morrison's characters possess complex identities wholly impacted by their enslavement and, once free, struggle to confront their traumas and realize their selfhood as one that is influenced by their past, not defined by it. Through examining Sethe, Paul D, and Denver's experiences of trauma and understanding its connection to their identity, I attempt to grapple with their complicated selfhood and aim to prove that community and like-cures-like

[44] Schapiro, "The Bonds of Love," 194.
[45] Du Bois explains that individuals with a dim recollection of slavery—as Denver might have—"found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little,and yet it ridiculed their offering" (41). Denver, in her isolated state, is uncertain of the world surrounding her, only really knowing of it from stories shared by her mother and grandmother. She fears the ridicule Du Bois speaks of and, as a result, could be understood as having "sank into listless indifference" in her acceptance of her isolation. That is, until she matures and decides to take action to enter her community and confront her trauma, sparking healing not only for herself, but for Sethe as well.

relationships are ultimately necessary for healing and transcendence of incompleteness. By seeking out support from the community, characters move towards healing and begin to understand themselves as complete individuals.

Thus, I will begin this chapter with an analysis of Sethe's identity as it is informed by her motherhood. Doing so, I will present the complicated concept of thick familial love—which Sethe embodies in her maternal acts. Continuing, this chapter will examine Sethe and Paul D's relationship to present Morrison's key concept of rememory and, furthermore, discuss each character's psychic death in which they entirely lose comprehension of humanity and self. Additionally, I will present Denver and discuss her experience of trauma and subsequent coping methods, ultimately arguing that her action within the community is crucial to the novel's resolution. Finally, I will dissect each character's relationship with Beloved and present community as the central catalyst for healing and confrontation of trauma.

Slavery is the ultimate source of incompleteness in *Beloved.* Morrison uses Sethe, Paul D, and Denver to explore such incompleteness and examine the complexity of healing through confrontation of trauma and engagement with others. Doing so, Morrison suggests that selfhood is deeply impacted by trauma and, in turn, a complete understanding of self is reliant on community and a willingness to explore relationships that may be understood through the like-cures-like framework as presented in *Moby Dick*. Ultimately, an understanding of Morrison's central characters and their experiences of selfhood is important for comprehending how slavery greatly impacted, and still impacts, one's sense of completeness.

Sethe's Thick Maternal Love: "To love that much was dangerous"

In *Beloved,* motherhood is paramount and acts as the fundamental way Sethe retains her humanity and realizes her identity. One of the most disturbing impacts of slavery was the

breaking up of enslaved families for the benefit and profit of enslavers. As Ralph Story explains, familial love was complex: "slaves could not love fully because the object of their love might be sold, brutalized, or murdered tomorrow."[46] Growing up in slavery, Sethe knows the experience of familial incompleteness long before she has her own children. Of her childhood, Sethe "remembered only song or dance. Not even her own mother" who had to be "pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child."[47] Sethe, incapable of recognizing her own mother because of her subjection to intense and constant labor, has always had a complicated perception of familiar love. At Sweet Home, under the ownership of Mr. Garner, a rather benevolent master, Sethe is able to wed Halle, a fellow slave, and bear four children with him—three of whom she gives birth to at Sweet Home. Upon having children, and especially after the arrival of the vehemently racist schoolteacher, Sethe struggles to confront the reality of being an enslaved mother. Although Baby Suggs, her mother in law, warns against loving too deeply, Sethe develops a powerful maternal love for her children. As such, in her maternal sacrifices and dangerous commitment to her children, Sethe defies Baby Suggs and the construct of weak love which Story describes. Ultimately, through her children—who are at constant risk of being sold, mistreated, or taken away—Sethe gains identity and purpose.

Sethe's intense maternal love is involuntarily strengthened when Mr. Garner dies and schoolteacher becomes the new master of Sweet Home. A deeply hateful and racist man, schoolteacher views those enslaved at Sweet Home simply as vehicles of labor and constantly watches them, beats them, whips them, and distrusts them. Doing so, he physically and mentally violates them and strips them of their humanity and individuality. Specifically, schoolteacher

[46] Story, "Sacrifice and Surrender," 26.
[47] Toni Morrison. *Beloved.* (New York: Vintage Books. 2004.), 37. All further references to this text will be denoted by in-text citations of the page numbers.

dehumanizes Sethe when he uses her as an example in his lesson plan, telling his pupils to "put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right" (228). To schoolteacher and his students, Sethe is an animal. Overhearing this lesson and learning the meaning of the word "characteristic," Sethe is deeply upset. She refuses to let schoolteacher "dirty" her children—"the part of her that was clean"—and will not let her children's characteristics be listed "on the animal side of the paper" as hers were (295). Therefore, with her own personhood devalued and her children's well-being explicitly threatened, Sethe puts her powerful maternal love into action and decides to join the Sweet Home men in planning and executing their escape. Packing her three children in a wagon, Sethe sends them off on the Underground Railroad to Cincinnati, planning to meet them at a later date when she will begin her own journey. Through this dangerous act, motivated by her fierce maternal love and the threat of an incomplete selfhood for her offspring, Sethe puts both her and her children's lives at risk. Ever-conscious of the degrading impact of slavery and the threat of familial incompletion, Sethe longs for her children to grow up in a community where they are recognized as human and are unaware of their "animal" characteristics.

Sethe's powerful maternal identity is further established through her relationship with her breast milk—a central symbol of motherhood which is representative of a woman's ability to sustain her children. As such, Sethe is devastated and angered when, after already sending her children away, schoolteacher's nephews steal her milk and violate her in a barn at Sweet Home. Lois Lyles explains how "this suckling of Sethe by her enemies is a direct assault on her life-giving, nurturing, maternal role…a violation of her womanhood and her most cherished private self."[48] With her innate motherhood and womanhood violated, Sethe feels a sense of

[48] Lois Lyles, ""Let My Daughter Go: the Jewish Mother and the Black Mother in Novels about Catastrophe and Bondage," Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of jewish Studies 17, no. 2, (1999). 102-109. (106).

bodily and mental incompletion; upon telling on the nephews, Sethe is whipped. Eventually scarring over, this wound forms a "chokecherry tree" on Sethe's back, acting as a permanent reminder of her ever threatened maternal identity (18). Just as Ahab's peg leg exists to remind him of his trauma with the white whale, Sethe carries the bodily burden of this massive scar to signify her trauma and endangered motherhood.

While this scar represents the complicated familial love inherent to slavery, Sethe's milk is the utmost physical representation of her powerful love as, being a slave, it is the only thing which Sethe herself can physically provide for her children. As such, Sethe's milk and its life-sustaining quality proves a central factor in inspiring her journey to freedom. Having sent her youngest daughter to Cincinnati without the sustenance of breast milk, Sethe is motivated to escape and reunite with her: "All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me…The milk would be there, and I would be there with it" (19). Ultimately, Sethe provides. Escaping alone, not knowing what happened to the other Sweet Home men, Sethe embarks on her exhausting and risky journey along the Underground Railroad, giving birth to her youngest daughter, Denver, along the way. Motivated by her thick maternal love, Sethe refuses to give up on herself and provides for her children. As a mother, Sethe understands her life to hold astounding purpose, which she strives to live up to in her selfless, dangerous acts. Although threatened by schoolteacher's hateful gaze and inhumane actions, Sethe's identity as a mother proves to be what motivates her to survive.

Sethe's most profound act of maternal love takes place a mere twenty-eight days after arriving at 124 Bluestone Road in Cincinnati—Baby Suggs's house. The morning after having a community feast at 124, Sethe's liberty is once again threatened as schoolteacher shows up, hoping to reclaim her and her children by means of the Fugitive Slave Act. Upon recognizing

schoolteacher's hat, Sethe "collected every bit of life she had made," took them to the woodshed, and "dragged them through the veil…outside this place where they would be safe" (192). Sethe, blinded by her protective maternal love, intends to kill her children in order to spare them from having to live a life in slavery. However, by the time Stamp Paid intercepts her and schoolteacher enters the shed, Sethe had only succeeded in slitting the throat of her "crawling-already" baby girl, and maiming the other three—Howard, Bulgar, and Denver (178). Schoolteacher, seeing "what happen[s] when you overbeat creatures God had given you the responsibility of" ultimately determines "the whole lot [is] lost" (176). Although her actions astonish schoolteacher, Baby Suggs, and the community at large, Sethe feels a sense of relief, knowing that, at the very least, she saved her children from a life of enslavement, which, in her opinion, is not a life at all. Lyles further discusses this, explaining that Sethe's "thick mother love is a shield against a slave system directed by white men; thus, her self-sacrificing devotion is the stance of a warrior."[49] Therefore, as is evident in the intense sacrificial action which Sethe takes in order to protect her children from a life of dehumanization and a troubled identity, Sethe's maternal love is dangerously powerful and consequently informs her identity.

The trauma of Sethe's actions continues to affect her present days as her dead daughter—referred to as the "baby ghost"—haunts 124 and the surrounding community ostracizes Sethe and her family—viewing them as others. This baby ghost, understood as "spiteful," eventually scares off Sethe's sons; her presence, as well as the community ostracization, also contributes to Baby Suggs's decline and eventual death (3). As such, Denver and Sethe are the only ones who remain at 124, and they are comforted by the spirit's presence, accepting the baby ghost into their family. Yet, these circumstances also prevent them from living normal lives. Aside from working her simple and routine job of making bread, Sethe

[49] Lyles, "Let My Daughter Go," 103.

mostly stays home and allows her world to exist within the constraints of 124. Denver, similarly, never leaves the yard and, growing up in these confines, barely knows of a life beyond 124. In this way, Sethe and Denver are simultaneously understood as "victims" of the baby ghost and its spite as it aims to ensure that Sethe is forever connected to her trauma and, consequently, reliant on the baby ghost to feel a sense of inner completeness (3). However, the arrival of Paul D, a formerly enslaved Sweet Home man, complicates this lifestyle as his presence threatens the baby ghost and he begins to lead Sethe towards a state of healing and completeness that is independent of the ghost baby's presence, and relies on a like-cures-like connection.

Sethe and Paul D's Psychic Death: "Some things you forget. Other things you never do"

Paul D, like Sethe, has a complicated sense of self and, as a result of his trauma, understands himself to be incomplete. Enslaved at Sweet Home, both Paul D and Sethe are continually dehumanized and experience what Barbara Schaprio calls the psychic death: "the denial of one's being as a human subject." To come to understand one's lack of humanity is, as Scharpiro explains, "the worst atrocity" of slavery.[50] Although they experience this psychic death in disparate moments, Sethe and Paul D have a unique understanding of one another which enables them to immediately connect and easily engage in difficult, but important, rememory. Rememory, a term coined by Morrison, sits at the core of the novel. Caroline Rody describes the concept as "postulat[ing] the interconnectedness of minds, past and present…neatly conjoin[ing] the novel's supernatural vision with its aspiration to communal epic." As such, rememory involves usings one's "imaginative power to realize a latent, abiding connection to the past," and it is a difficult process.[51] Engaging in rememory, especially for the formerly enslaved, requires confronting portions of their complex trauma and positioning their past within a greater picture

[50] Schapiro, "The Bonds of Love," 195.
[51] Rody, "Toni Morrison's *Beloved,"* 101.

of dark societal hate. Thus, for Sethe and Paul D, the action of rememory is emotional and traumatic.

When Paul D arrives at 124, he immediately connects with Sethe and they take comfort in one another. Through sharing stories and updating one another on their lives since escaping, they engage in rememory. Sethe, who mentions having her milk stolen and enduring severe whipping, accepts Paul D when he embraces her and begins to take off her clothes, exposing the chokecherry tree scar on her back. Rooted in the physical moment and connected to Paul D—with whom she shares a similar trauma— she begins to let go. She ponders, "[m]aybe this one time [I] could stop dead still in the middle of cooking a meal–not even leave the stove–and feel the hurt [my] back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was [here] to catch [me] if [I] sank?" (21). Paul D challenges Sethe's resistance to engage with her past and confront her complex selfhood as his presence allows her to sink, ever so slightly, into her damaged consciousness and feel. Yet, this moment of relief is soon broken. As Paul D holds the weight of Sethe's breasts and examines the dead skin on her back, the baby ghost makes the house tremble. Causing the floorboards to shake, the baby ghost aims to prevent Sethe from further connecting with Paul D and ensure that she is reminded of her trauma and ever conscious of the harm she inflicted. In addition, Paul D is reminded of his own trauma as the trembling of the floors resembles his trembling body during his time in a chain-gang in Alfred, Georgia. This association is too much to bear, and, consequently, enrages Paul D. Angered at the baby ghost for its disruption of this moment and its emphasis of their traumas, Paul D screams at the house and violently whips a table around until the spirit is finally displaced. However, this displacement is brief. Soon after, Beloved, the physical manifestation of Sethe's dead daughter, appears at 124 and, once again, works to disrupt the developing family

dynamics between Sethe, Paul D, and Denver, remind each of their traumas, and complicate their lives. In all of this, rememory remains constant, difficult, and heightened— especially between Sethe and Paul D.

As the novel progresses, Morrison uses rememory to reveal distinct and impactful moments of identity loss, and suggests moments of psychic death for both Sethe and Paul D. Discussing their escape and the other Sweet Home men—"one crazy, one sold, one missing, one burnt" —they begin to talk about the "one missing," Halle (86). Unintentionally, Paul D informs Sethe that Halle was hiding away in the loft of the barn while she was being raped by schoolteacher's nephews. Shocked that her own husband witnessed her defilement and "let [schoolteacher's nephews] keep on breathing air," Sethe is flooded with difficult rememory. She is infuriated and confused by Halle's lack of action, but is reminded by Paul D of the complex life they live—that "a man ain't a god-damn ax," and witnessing her rape "messed [Halle] up…broke him like a twig" (81). Watching his wife be raped and get the milk sucked from her by grown men can be interpreted as Halle's own moment of psychic death. His lack of action and subsequent demeanor shift—sitting blankly "by the churn…butter all over his face"—implies a compromised, and broken, sense of self and contextualizes his absence, now known as the "missing one" (82).

Coming to terms with this rememory, reimagining her own moment of psychic death, Sethe breaks all over again. Already haunted by painful memories that challenge her perception of her humanity, she cannot handle more. She explains, "I am full…of two boys with mossy teeth, one suckling on my breast and the other holding me down, their book teacher watching and writing up…God damn it, I can't go back and add more. Add my husband to it, watching" (83). Sethe's womanhood and identity were already stripped away as she endured this psychic death,

and knowing that Halle was also watching and did not act disgusts and breaks her further. Thus, as she reimagines this traumatic moment, she is debilitated: "it left me no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day" (83). Sethe, with this new information, is wholly preoccupied with the past and must come to terms with her incompleteness all over again and with new perspective.

Paul D also shares one of his most difficult moments of rememory—being tortured with the iron bit. While he endured this cruel torture known to "put a wildness where there wasn't any," walking out of the barn and seeing the Sweet Home roosters roam about prompted Paul D's psychic death and made his lack of humanity explicit (83). With the roosters roaming and perched in the pines, looking at him, Paul D realizes that they possessed more freedom than he ever would. Specifically, he references Mister, the misfit rooster he helped hatch: "Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be or stay who I was…schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (86). Just as Mr. Garner and schoolteacher had defined Paul D's identity through enslavement, Mister's gaze similarly constructs Paul D's sense of self—enabling him to realize that, being enslaved, he possessed less humanity than a farm animal. As Boureau explains, in watching the roosters "Paul D discovers his own contrasting enslavement and arrives at a definition of himself imposed by his internalization of the rooster's gaze."[52] Through the roosters—who evidently possess the same power as schoolteacher and Mr. Garner to watch Paul D and subsequently define his selfhood— Paul D overtly realizes his identity, or lack thereof. This moment of coming to terms with his innate dehumanization mirrors Sethe's discovery of her animalistic quality when she overhears schoolteacher and his pupils listing "her animal [characteristics] on the right" during a lesson. Both Paul D and Sethe, therefore, are confronted

[52] Boureau, "Pain and the Unmaking of Self," 461.

with moments in which their incompleteness, as perceived by others, is put on display and more fully realized.

When Sethe overhears schoolteacher and is raped, and when Paul D endures the iron bit and recognizes the freedom of the roosters, they each experience a psychic death which informs the remainder of their livelihood and overtly contributes to their sense of incompleteness and loss of identity. As such, their common experience allows them to support one another and engage in rememory in a unique way. Understanding the gravity of the painful memories which Paul D shared, Sethe stops Paul D and comforts him by resting her fingers on his knee, knowing that "saying more [memories] might push them both to a place they couldn't get back from" (86). Both Sethe and Paul D employ specific methods to cope with their trauma and to avoid confronting these emotional memories and their incomplete selfhood. Sethe's placement of her fingers on Paul D's knee, "rubbing…pressing the work cloth and the stony curves that made up his knee," is reminiscent of her coping method. Sethe grounds herself in the present through daily routine—working her job at the restaurant, repeatedly kneading bread dough. Reflecting on this, she notes early mornings in the restaurant kitchen: "Nothing better than [working dough] to start the day's serious work of beating back the past" (86). Paul D, dealing with his Sweet Home trauma in addition to his experiences on the run and as a prisoner, copes with his trauma by placing his memories away in a metaphorical rusted-over tobacco tin, "buried in his chest where a red heart used to be" (86). As this tobacco tin serves as a substitute for what once was a heart, Morrison implies that Paul D rejects feeling altogether and, rather, buries his past and his emotions, trying to appear strong when, in reality, he struggles. Both Sethe and Paul D are debilitated by the rememory of their trauma and, as a result, choose to avoid it.

Denver's Ostracization: "The loneliness wore her out"

Denver's world is stricken with trauma and, growing up at 124, she struggles to confront it and make sense of her past. As a result of Sethe's actions, Denver is ostracized from the community, and this forced isolation impacts her entire existence. Denver is not only a victim to the baby ghost but also a victim to Sethe's past and the inhumane system of slavery, suffering from intergenerational and transhistorical trauma. Having spent none of her life at Sweet Home, Denver occupies a unique position. She learns of her past entirely from those around her—Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D, or, later on, members of the community— and her present is wholly confined to the property of 124. As such, this liminal space of 124 contributes to an incomplete comprehension of herself and the world beyond the yard. Moreover, the arrival of Beloved pushes Denver further into a state of ostracization and confusion as she oscillates between deep love for the ghost and intense jealousy for possession of Sethe. Thus, as she grows up, and especially with the arrival of Paul D and Beloved, Denver pieces together portions of her life and comes to better comprehend her familial trauma. Such knowledge and growth empower Denver and enable her to have a more complete understanding of herself and her purpose as she, ultimately, turns to her community for healing.

Denver first recognizes her otherness when she begins attending school and one of her classmates, Nelson Lord, plainly asks about Sethe and her violent act, prompting Denver to question Sethe. Consequently, Denver learns the truth about her dead sister and is deeply traumatized by the knowledge of her mother's act, causing her sense of hearing to be compromised: "[Denver] could not hear Sethe's answer, nor Baby Suggs's words, nor anything at all thereafter…for two years she heard nothing at all" (121). In response to the difficult truth of Sethe's actions, Denver is shocked and goes deaf—experiencing a version of psychic death.

Rather than confront this trauma and try to understand Sethe's motives—a nearly impossible task for a child—Denver chooses not to hear, does not return to school, and further settles into her ostracization. Denver's loneliness comes to define her identity, and it is only "the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs"—the arrival of her companion—which turns her hearing back on. While the ghost baby's actions—moving from harmless "sighs and accidents" to "more pointed and deliberate abuse"—cause Howard and Bulgar to leave and, furthermore, contributes to Baby Suggs's death, Denver endures the presence and finds comfort and fulfillment in such company (122).

Denver, like Sethe, is victim to 124 and its spite. Growing up with such spite—manifested in shattered mirrors, handprints in cakes, the sounds of a baby crawling up the steps, the rattling of the kitchen, and more—Denver, perpetually lonely, is comforted by the presence. In her ostracization from the outside world, Denver primarily relies on Sethe for comfort and connection. Yet, when her mother "looks away"—as she does upon the arrival of Paul D—Denver "long[s], downright *long[s],* for a sign of spite from the baby ghost" (15). When Sethe is incapable of tending to Denver, she turns to the baby ghost, allowing it to fill the void of community and connection in her life. Thus, Denver has an affinity for the baby ghost. Describing it as "rebuked. Lonely and rebuked," Denver projects her own emotion and draws a parallel between herself and the spirit. As such, the baby ghost and its spite are a crucial element of Denver's world within 124.

However, Denver also recognizes the incompleteness of her life and selfhood as she lives in isolation and lacks genuine human connection beyond her relationship with Sethe. Just as Paul D's arrival complicates Sethe's life, Denver's identity and livelihood is similarly challenged. Witnessing Paul D's connection to Sethe amidst discussions of Sweet Home and the past, Denver

begins to feel excluded and lonely. In response, she begins to cry and express her discontent, exclaiming, "I can't no more…I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by" (17). Paul D's presence has led Denver to more fully realize her loneliness and her expression of childlike emotion surprises Sethe and Paul D. When Paul D. questions the outcry, Sethe places blame on the spiteful house. Denver, however, passionately defies such accusations, saying, "It's not! It's not the house. It's us [Sethe and Denver]! And it's you [Paul D.]!" (17). Frustrated with her present reality, Denver feels the effects of her mother's past. For, Denver begins to more fully understand that the house's spite is not the sole reason for her ostracism. Rather, it is the house's inhabitants—Sethe, herself, and now Paul D—and their actions which perpetuate such disconnection with the community. This intense moment leads Paul D, who is still unaware of Sethe's violent maternal act, to understand Denver as "half out of her mind" (18). Denver's isolation and complex existence in light of her trauma therefore contribute to a state of frustrated madness which she is, initially, incapable of overcoming. When Paul D dramatically rids the house of the ghost and retreats upstairs with Sethe, Denver's existence is further troubled as she is forced even further into a state of exclusion. In solitude, Denver goes to the porch and "slowly, methodically, [and] miserably" eats her biscuits and jelly (23). The only company Denver had known has gone and she is forced to come to terms with a new reality—one which excludes the ghost baby and includes Paul D, a crucial character who averts her mother's sought-after gaze.

Denver's loneliness and search for contentment and companionship is further evident in her coping method of self-seclusion. In the boxwood behind her house, Denver has a bower which she regularly goes to in order to retreat into her own world—where she is able to have "excitement…all for herself" (34). In this place, momentarily leaving behind the complex reality

informed by her mother and a baby ghost, Denver finds refuge and immense comfort. She is able to simply be with herself, "closed off from the hurt of the hurt world" (35). In the bower, Denver hides from the reality of her life and hides from the ever-threatening hurt world. Morrison writes how, in this place, "Denver's imagination produced its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. *Wore her out.* Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish" (35). Though alone in this bower, Denver does not feel lonely. Engaging with this space in the curious manner a child should, Denver occupies the space completely, and it serves as somewhere she can let go and just be. While the house and the presence of the baby ghost acts as a constant reminder of her otherness and ostracization, in the boxwood Denver feels free. She is protected from her complicated reality and, in this space—"first a playroom…then a refuge…[then] the point"—Denver experiences a sense of self and completeness unfamiliar to her in other spaces. Yet, this coping mechanism ultimately proves ineffective. Although this space is an outlet for Denver, it is still a place of total isolation and reflects Denver's avoidance of her traumas. However, Denver's process of healing proves somewhat more complex than characters as Paul D. and Sethe. Denver, born into her trauma and isolated at 124, has no one to turn to with a truly shared experience. As such, Denver occupies a unique position which proves crucial for connecting with the community and, ultimately, saving Sethe and inspiring healing.

Beloved's Effect: "Like a familiar, she hovered"

Sethe, Paul D, and Denver each experience a sense of incompleteness from their respective traumas and employ specific methods to cope. Sethe allows motherhood to inform her identity and turns to daily routine to dissociate from her past. Paul D chooses not to feel and, constantly on the run, buries his memories in a tobacco tin where his heart used to be. Denver

retreats into isolation, escaping to the boxwood where she can simply be with herself and experience a microcosm of the world. In the end, all of these methods prove unsuccessful as they fail to truly inform or heal each character's incomplete selfhood. Beloved's presence, however, offers a forced confrontation of their respective traumas which, ultimately, proves detrimental and malicious. Yet, it is through their problematic relationships with Beloved that each character realizes their need for community and external support. As such, through Paul D's departure and Denver's action, community emerges as the central means for saving Sethe and informs the support and healing of each character's complicated selfhood and incompleteness.

Beloved's presence leads Paul D to feel physically restless in the house as he moves from room to room. Never able to sleep in one spot, "he realized the movement was involuntary" (136). Such movement is reminiscent of Paul D's past, having lived the majority of his life displaced as a convict on the run. In this way, Beloved implicitly communicates that Paul D is not welcome and, reminding him of his trauma, aggressively pushes him to confront it. Beloved's intrusive nature towards Paul D and his trauma is further established as she seduces him and breaks open his tobacco tin: "when he reached the inside part of her he was saying, 'Red heart. Red heart,' over and over again" (138). Through having sex with Beloved, Paul D inexplicably feels the immense emotion he works to bury. Schapiro explains that Paul D is "deeply affected by Beloved's irrational power" as she takes advantage of a mutual hunger "to be touched, recognized, [and] known in one's inner being or essential self."[53] Beloved, therefore, capitalizes on Paul D's hunger for connection and self realization by seducing him and offering him insincere relief. From this act, while Paul D does feel some sense of hope and worthiness as he begins to examine the contents of his tobacco tin, he ultimately feels guilt and struggles to understand his relationship with Sethe. Their relationship is further damaged when Paul D learns

[53] Schapiro, "The Bonds of Love," 204.

of Sethe's crime of infanticide and, shocked, leaves 124 and Sethe behind. Paul D's act of abandoning Sethe, despite recently deciding that "they were a family somehow," is comparable to Halle's perceived betrayal upon seeing Sethe's rape (155). In this sense, learning about Sethe's crime broke Paul D in the same way Halle broke as he watched Sethe's defilement. Thus, as this distance grows, hope for Sethe and Paul D's healing through likeness begins to wane. However, as will be discussed, the community ultimately provides for Paul D and is crucial to instigating his reconnection with Sethe towards the novel's conclusion.

After leaving 124, still in shock from learning the truth about Sethe, Paul D again begins to lose his sense of self. Once again displaced, Paul D turns to drinking and attempts to make a home for himself in a church cellar. However, Stamp Paid—a formerly enslaved man now living in Cincinnati and helping along the Underground Railroad, and the man who had revealed Sethe's truth to Paul D—ultimately welcomes Paul D into the community. After apologizing to Paul D for making him aware of Sethe's act, Stamp tells him, "pick any house...where colored live...in all of Cincinnati...and you welcome to stay there...You welcome anywhere you want to be. My house is your house too...You ain't got to sleep in no cellar and I apologize for each and every night you did" (272). Explicitly, Stamp Paid tells Paul D that he, along with all his trauma, is welcomed and accepted in their community. Such a gesture defies Paul D's displacement as he now has a place to call home and a community of individuals, many with similar experiences as his, to support him. Therefore, Paul D's acceptance into the community signifies his movement towards healing and engagement in a like-cures-like relationship, which will ultimately prove significant for his journey back to Sethe.

While Denver also ends up employing the community for healing and completeness, she first endures a complicated relationship with Beloved. Scarred by her isolated existence, Denver

develops an unhealthy attachment to Beloved as, analogous to her need for Sethe's gaze, Denver craves to be seen by Beloved. Yet, obsessed with Sethe, Beloved barely looks at Denver and "when she did, Denver could tell that her own face was just the place those eyes stopped while the mind behind it walked on" (140). Nevertheless, Denver yearns for Beloved's gaze and gains a sense of completeness from it as the act of looking and being seen keeps the "before-beloved hunger that drove her into the boxwood…for just a taste of life…at bay" (141). In Beloved's presence, Denver moves beyond her coping mechanism of escaping to the boxwood. Feeling satiated by Beloved, Denver becomes a "strategist" and constantly tries to keep her by her side (142). As Jennifer Fitzgerald explains, this satisfaction of Denver's "emotional hunger" leads her to "transfer her dependence from Sethe to Beloved…Denver's sense of self depends on Beloved."[54] Comparable to Paul D's reliance on Beloved to begin recognizing his red heart, Denver develops a similarly problematic attachment to Beloved. This is most emphasized when, in the cold house retrieving a jug of cider, Denver loses sight of Beloved and experiences a panic attack. Helplessly searching for Beloved in the darkness, Denver "is crying because she has no self…she can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing…she doesn't move to open the door because there is no world out there" (145). Denver's disillusion of self highlights her lack of identity and suggests that her reliance on Beloved for self and completeness is detrimental. Yet, it is not until Paul D's departure and the consequential shift of intensity in Sethe and Beloved's relationship that Denver recognizes Beloved's artificial gaze. Thus, realizing Beloved and Sethe's unhealthy relationship, Denver is determined to seek external support and discover her selfhood apart from 124 and Beloved.

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[54] Jennifer FitzGerald, "Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in *Beloved,*" *Modern Fiction Studies* 39, no. 3&4 (1993). 676.

Like-cures-like as Community: "Loving faces before her"

Upon Paul D's departure, the energy of 124 and the relationships within it shift entirely. Completely giving herself to Beloved, Sethe is ultimately fired from her job—her source of daily routine and coping—and stays home all the time to do everything she can to ensure Beloved remains happy despite an increasingly defiant, persistent, and exclusionary demeanor. Sethe, therefore, begins to conflate her entire identity with Beloved, and fails to recognize her selfhood apart from their relationship. As a result, Sethe becomes "locked in a love that wore everybody out" (295). Entirely submissive to Beloved, "[Sethe] 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" (295). Although Sethe believes herself to be complete with Beloved's presence, in reality, Beloved drains Sethe. For, Beloved's malice forces Sethe to constantly recall her trauma and her violent act of maternal love.

Such a relationship directly impacts Denver who is forced into a state of further isolation. This ostracization, paired with insatiable hunger and an acute awareness of Sethe's waning health, ultimately prompts Denver to leave 124 in search of help. As FitzGerald explains, "Denver faces a crisis of survival, which requires her to grow up into adult responsibilities."[55] Denver must quickly mature and step into a maternal role. However, growing up isolated and learning of a hateful world—""There [is] no defense…there's more of us [black people] they drowned than there is all of them ever lived from the start of time…This ain't a battle it's a rout"—makes this departure a daunting task (287). Denver struggles to transcend the veil of her world and, consequently, relies on support from her deceased grandmother. Hearing the voice of Baby Suggs, Denver is reminded of the painful sacrifices of her ancestors and is asked, "is that

[55] FitzGerald, "Selfhood and Community," 676.

why you can't walk the steps? My Jesus my" (288). Listening to the turmoil of her family, Denver recognizes their thick love and realizes the importance of her present task.

Cautious and anxious upon leaving the porch of 124, Denver initially keeps to herself. Yet, her fears quickly wane as she discovers the kindness of the community. Greeted by two Black men, Denver is "braced and heartened by the easy encounter" and begins to "deliberately" interact with her surroundings (289). As such, Denver's increasing confidence marks a pivotal transition. Her conversation with her former school teacher Lady Jones, a mixed race woman with an overwhelming "affection for the unpicked children of Cincinnati," is particularly impactful (292). When Denver approaches Lady Jones and explains her situation, she simply responds "oh baby," thus "inaugurat[ing] [Denver] into the world as a woman…that sweet thorny place made up of perhaps scraps containing the handwritten notes of others" (292). Lady Jones validates Denver's struggle, supports her, and invites her into their community. In this world of women, though sweet and thorny, Denver is accepted and understood. Jesser notes that "Denver sets into motion a process that brings sustenance to 124" and, in her reintegration, Denver uncovers a "network of generosity."[56] Particularly impactful in this network is Nelson Lord—the same classmate who asked Denver about Sethe when she was attending school. Smiling, Nelson tells Denver, "Take care of yourself" and, rather than "block up her ears," his words "open up her mind" as she begins to understand the concept of "having a self to look out for and preserve" (297). Thus, Denver comes to recognize her selfhood and understand her identity by means of her community. No longer a child vying for her mother's gaze, Denver is now a member of a strong community of women, and is empowered to work towards healing for herself and her family.

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[56]Nancy Jesser, "Violence, Home, and Community in Toni Morrison's Beloved," *African American Review* 33, no. 2 (1999): 325–45. https://doi.org/10.2307/2901282. 340.

Back at 124, the women are supported by the community as members leave food and gifts to sustain them. However, while Denver's life within this community improves, life within 124 continues to decline. Described as "candidates" for the "lunatic asylum," Sethe and Beloved "arrived at a doomsday truce designed by the devil" (294). In a dangerous cycle, Beloved aims to make Sethe "make up for the handsaw," prompting a wholly one sided relationship in which Sethe sacrifices her entire selfhood and existence to ensure Beloved does not hurt herself and leave her again (295). Denver, watching this strained relationship digress, begins to worry more deeply. Attentive to Sethe's intense suffering, Denver also begins to realize the complexity of Sethe's thick love.

Sethe, ultimately, understands every part of her—her mind, body, and soul—to be dirtied by her trauma and her past. She thus has a compromised selfhood, wholly inflicted upon her by enslavers. While she cannot undo her past, Sethe takes comfort in knowing that she did everything she could to prevent her children from having the same experience of dehumanization—therefore retaining some sense of identity through motherhood. Beloved, victim to Sethe's powerful love, fails to comprehend this. Sethe, weak and helpless, is frightened that Beloved will leave without ever understanding.

> Leave before Sethe could make her realize that—far worse—was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self or anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up (295).

The cruelty of slavery has informed Sethe's entire existence and rendered her incapable of comprehending her innate value as a human being. However, she understands her children to be clean—her "beautiful, magical best thing"—and refuses to allow a hateful world to dirty them (296). Denver understands this and, subsequently, challenges Sethe's perception of herself as

contaminated and unworthy of leading a happy life. For, in her unique position—born into Sethe's trauma and never experiencing slavery first hand—Denver sees her mother as clean, and human. To Denver, Sethe is simply her mother and, understanding her thick love to a greater degree, she is motivated to save her from Beloved's vengeance. In order to achieve this, community is crucial.

As Denver more fully leans into her maternal role, she decides to find work in order to better support Sethe. Back in the community, Denver obtains a job with Mr. Bodwin, a white abolitionist who's central belief is that "human life is holy, all of it," and he plans to come by 124 and pick Denver up (296). Hearing that a white man will be coming to 124, the community of women gather to support and protect Denver and prevent Sethe from making a fatal mistake. Morrison describes this beautiful and crucial moment: "[They] brought what they could and what they believed would work…thirty women made up that company and walked slowly, slowly towards 124…they grouped, murmuring and whispering" (303). These women, gathered, aim to rid Sethe of Beloved and support Denver. Of this gathering of women, Jesser explains that Denver's act of community engagement marked that "the boundary established on the day Sethe hurled the world out can be re-negotiated."[57] Therefore, Denver's actions and maturity hold immense power for healing and reintegration into the community—being the central reason for this gathering. Sethe, regarding the womens' faces as loving, recalls the community feast before her violent act and feels comforted by their presence. However, upon hearing Mr. Bodwin's cart and seeing his distinct hat, Sethe snaps out of this love and starts to fly, thinking, "He is coming into [my] yard and he is coming for [my] best thing…no. No no. Nonono…The ice pick is not in her hand; it is her hand" (309). Sethe aims to kill. However, the community of women save her from making this grave mistake. Running at Sethe as she runs from Beloved and towards Mr.

[57] Jesser, "Violence, Home, and Community," 340.

Bodwin, the women intersect her and "make a hill. A hill of Black people, falling" (309). In this act, the act of piling up their physical bodies to make up for Sethe's incompleteness, the women stop Sethe from hurting Mr. Bodwin and, consequently, signify that she is a part of their community. At the same time, Beloved is expelled from 124—"disappeared, some say. Exploded right before their eyes" (310). This moment—the women protecting Sethe, supporting Denver, and expelling Beloved—therefore serves as the ultimate example of community and is key for each character's subsequent journey of healing through a like-cures-like framework.

Denver, in particular, emerges from these events with a new purpose and outlook. A short while after the incident, Paul D runs into Denver walking home from work and notes how she appeared "steady in the eyes," looking "more like Halle than ever before…her smile no longer the sneer he remembered, had welcome in it and strong traces of Sethe's mouth" (313). In this interaction, Paul D learns that Denver has truly taken initiative as she works multiple jobs and is being taught by Miss Bodwin, hoping to attend Oberlin College. Denver has excelled through confronting her trauma and engaging more deeply with her community. However, such improvement is not the case with Sethe, who has only further deteriorated. In conversation with Paul D, Denver explains that Sethe is "not a bit alright," confessing, "I think I've lost my mother" (314). Denver has begun to live a somewhat detached life from Sethe. Though Denver understands Sethe's thick love and the community has helped free Sethe of Beloved's malice, Sethe still struggles. For, Sethe's trauma and the loss of Beloved are overwhelming, and she requires further attention and support.

Sethe's dirtied self perception and incomplete identity are so intense that even with Denver's understanding and community support, she still struggles to confront and transcend her trauma. Terry Paul Caesar explains how "even after Beloved is gone, through the efforts of

another daughter [Denver], Sethe's refusal to forgive herself persists, and haunts her" (119). What Sethe seems to require, therefore, is a like-cures-like relationship—the same as Ahab imagined he could achieve with Pip, but ultimately failed to do so. This is where Paul D, the one person who has an extremely similar lived experience to Sethe, comes in. After hearing about Sethe's situation, Paul D returns to 124 and realizes the overwhelming weight of Sethe's trauma as he finds her lying in Baby's Suggs' bed, preparing to die. When Sethe sees Paul D, she begins to cry and tells him that her "best thing [Beloved]" is gone (321). In response, Paul D is overcome with love for Sethe, the woman he knew at Sweet Home, and squeezes her hand, saying, "We got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow…You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (322). Paul D expresses that he understands Sethe's suffering and wants to love and support her—to help her heal. To do so, he aims to push Sethe to realize that her identity is not dependent on her children, her motherhood, or her thick love. In essence, he reminds Sethe that he accepts her despite her past and recognizes her humanity apart from her trauma. Thus, Paul D implies that he wants to journey alongside Sethe and wash away her guilt, helping her realize her present purpose and identity. Wanting to "put his story next to hers," Paul D indicates that they are alike and recognizes that there is hope for healing in their connection for, "only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that" (322). Therefore, Morrison concludes her novel with a sense of hope that, engaging in a mutual like-cures-like relationship, Paul D and Sethe can fully confront their trauma and that Sethe, refocusing her thick love, will discover her selfhood and completeness in the present day as one that is influenced by the past, not debilitated by it.

CONCLUSION

As established in Chapter One, all of humanity "live[s] enveloped in whale-lines" which, "halter[ed] round our necks" can be "caught" at any moment (219). This whale-line is representative of trauma, and the terror of the line is, in essence, a fear of incompleteness caused by traumatic events' deconstruction of identity. As such, those impacted by trauma have a complicated understanding of the world and their role in it. Both Melville and Morrison tackle this reality through their central characters in *Moby Dick* and *Beloved,* and offer insight on the process of healing. While Melville establishes a framework for like-cures-like relationships, Morrison proves its effectiveness. As discussed, central to the success of this theory is community and, more generally, empathy.

When undergoing traumatic experiences, especially ones deemed personal, individuals tend to feel alone and, sometimes, misunderstood. This is shown in Ahab's isolation and rejection of others and in Pip's dissociation of his marginalized self. Further, this can be seen in Denver's self-seclusion, Paul D constant avoidance of his memories, and Sethe's isolation and reliance on the baby ghost and Beloved as a means of healing. As Melville and Morrison aim to prove, what each character ultimately requires is communal support. However, as established in Melville's presentation of the whale-line's universality, such communities are larger than one may initially perceive.

Ahab's central failure, and the cause of the *Pequod'*s doom, is his inability to recognize the community around him and subsequently confront his incompleteness. For, although not everyone in his immediate community has lost a limb or had a castaway experience, the community aboard the *Pequod* is connected through their mutual engagement with the life-threatening reality of whaling—they all have a similar metaphorical whale-line hanging

round their necks. Had Ahab recognized this community, he and his crew may have met a happier fate.

In *Beloved,* Denver and Paul D only heal and confront their complicated selves as they begin to interact with their community and, ultimately, bring the community to Sethe for her own healing process. This community, while not entirely composed of people with the same experiences as Sethe, Paul D, and Denver, is largely made up of Black people and, thus, its inhabitants can be understood to have the same transhistorical trauma and collectively live within the DuBoisian Veil. These traits enable them to have similar whale-lines hanging round their necks as well. However, in the world of *Beloved*, such whale-lines are bodily and visible—they are the characters' race.[58] Therefore, the incompleteness of self for Morrison's characters is informed by race and enslavement—a trauma that leads to intense self deconstruction—which is a key difference between the novels that informs the disparate experiences and journeys to self. Community, in *Beloved*, proves successful as a means of a like-cures-like relationship as Denver, in particular, reclaims her incompleteness and uses it to motivate her connection in the community.

So, what is completeness and can one ever truly achieve it? Completeness of self, in the end, seems arbitrary. Everyone feels, or at least feels the threat of, incompleteness in some sense. Trauma is what exacerbates this incompleteness and leads to the need for the reconstruction of self. As Melville and Morrison seem to suggest, therefore, the apparently complete self is only truly possible with others, and that other(s) is most commonly found in community. Returning to my introduction, I would like to revisit the relevant quote from renowned author bell hooks: "To

[58] Pip, however, also shares a similar racial makeup as the characters in *Beloved.* The visibility of his race certainly contributed to his experience of marginalization and trauma and he, too, can be understood as living within the Veil and experiencing transhistorical trauma. For the purpose of this conclusion, centering around Ahab's failure to engage with the community, the majority of Pip's analysis in light of his race exists within Chapter One.

ensure human survival everywhere in the world, females and males organize themselves into communities. Communities sustain life...there is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community."[59] Human survival is reliant on community. Healing of trauma, therefore, is commonly found in communities derived from likeness. Melville and Morrison, in their complex novels which address self, identity, and incompleteness, prove hook's theory of intersection between human survival and community. Moreso, they further this concept through presenting an understanding that, ultimately, all people suffer from the threat of incompleteness—the threat of the whale-line's terror. Thus, we must turn to one another, create community, and engage in like-cures-like relationships in order to achieve a sense of self, though retaining the knowledge that completeness as it relates to selfhood may not exist, afterall. Rather, completeness seems to only exist in community.

[59] bell hooks, *all about love,* 129.

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