# A “Special Kind of Double”: Sisterhood, Selfhood, Mermaids, and the Bonds of Trauma and Love

by

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**Introduction**

Toni Morrison states that a sister can be seen as someone who is both ourselves and very much not ourselves— "a special kind of double. In this project, I examine two Toni Morrison novels *A Mercy* and *Beloved*, to understand the dynamics of black sisterhood. In Morrison's novels trauma is depicted as psychological and physical violence, isolation, and through forms of oppression. In both *A Mercy* and *Beloved*, sisterhood creates important modes of survival that did not exist for these characters before. The "sisters" of Toni Morrison's novel use their bond to save themselves.

I came to this project by reading Morrison's works and reflecting on the role of sister-friends in my own life. How do black women find ways to support each other across difficult, impossible circumstances? What roles did these women have to play for themselves and for others? These questions sparked my exploration of trauma and how survival is enabled through black sisterhood in fictional narrative and theory. For the first fifteen pages of the project, I examine *A Mercy*, a novel published by Morrison in 2008, and "The Site of Memory," a speech, also by Morrison, published in 1983, to understand how Morrison defines "emotional memory" or bonds created between characters in her novels. In the second half of the essay, I study Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* published in 1987. Morrison's essay helps me think about both of these novels in new ways. In the essay, "The Site of Memory," Morrison states that emotional memory is as essential as nerves and skin. She uses water as a metaphor to describe these emotional bonds.

Morrison's water and fluid metaphors fascinated me. Whether it is water, mother's milk, or blood, Morrison uses these symbols to help us think about the emotional bonds women form between each other. Water, blood, and milk, is a lot like nerves and skin, and is essential to

women's emotional bonds. We need nerves and skin to keep the germs out and to function properly in the same way we need sisterhood and family bonds to survive and develop maturity. These bonds define how women survive and how they protect themselves and each other.

In Toni Morrison's novel, *A Mercy,* I studied a character known only by the name of "Sorrow." She is given this name by others because she is perceived negatively. As a young black teen trying to survive in 1600's colonial Virginia, Sorrow is a vulnerable and outcast character. Sorrow survives a shipwreck, rape, abuse, and childbirth.

By examining *A Mercy* and the essay titled "The Site of Memory" I discovered that Sorrow forms deep emotional bonds in unexpected ways. Because she has no support or friends, she creates an emotional bond with a character she names "Twin", Twin is a self-created imaginary force that rescues Sorrow and guides her through life. In the novel, we learn that Twin can be seen as her imagined sister and as a range of other roles as well including: a kind of mother figure, the result of a possible dissociative identity disorder, and surprisingly, even as a mermaid. In one scene in the novel, Twin suddenly and magically appears during a shipwreck and acts to help Sorrow get to shore safely.

What I know now that I did not know at the beginning of my research was the role that mermaids play in different legends. Across different cultures, mermaids are aquatic creatures that symbolize renewal: Since mermaids are tied to a water element, they embody the revitalization that water brings. They are known to be protectors of the sea and can be seen as sisters. Water is what bonds these sisters together and the memory of their time on the water connects Sorrow's trauma and abandonment to the experiences of those who went through the Middle Passage during slavery. For these groups the loss of family and the erasure of those essential bonds is a foundational trauma. Morrison uses water and the ships in *A Mercy* as important tropes to

connect Sorrow to the Middle Passage. In each case, survivors had to rely on unexpected coping mechanisms and they did not have the freedoms or protections others had. For Sorrow, creating a new dissociative being is essential. The formation of new bonds through skin, nerves, and water allows Sorrow to create a bond with her imagined sister Twin to help her overcome her trauma and reclaim small parts of her agency.

In "The Site of Memory" Morrison is thinking carefully about water and memory together. She states, "You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact, it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was" (119). Sorrow's healing uses this symbolism too. Without a mother or family or even her birth name, Sorrow must remember who she was to survive. To do that she creates Twin while under the ship's hammock. Twin's creation symbolizes protection and shelter from trauma, separation, abandonment, and isolation. Their sisterhood or friendship creates an intimacy that is a shield against the horrors of losing one's family and working on a plantation where people call you degrading names.

Another thing I learned during this research was that the discovery of water and emotional memory, a metaphor of rebirth and baptism, is present across both novels. In both *A Mercy* and *Beloved* the young women in these novels have character arcs that include water, milk, and blood as major turning points in the novel. In *Beloved*, when Denver confronts her back-from-the-dead sister, she realizes that blood and milk binds them. On page 242 for example, Denver states "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk." The milk and blood imagery represents healing and nourishment. By using the

imagery of milk and blood Morrison illustrates communion between Denver and her sister Beloved. Morrison needs the reader to understand the level of intimacy that occurs once Denver drinks Beloved blood while she is being nursed by her mother Sethe. This quote is the center of Morrison's novel, *Beloved* because the communion that happens between Denver and Beloved is what allows Denver to recognize that their current relationship to their mother stems from a source of trauma but began from a source of nourishment. This is what gives Denver the courage to break unhealthy bonds and to find strength in herself. In my research, I argue that Morrison depicts intimacy between sisters as a tool of survival and development. In Beloved intimacy goes beyond blood relations and loving each other just because, rather it fulfills how characters come to define their own agency.

In each of the novels, both real and imagined sisters find strength in these bonds and are able to re-examine their own worth as a result. Baptism and rebirth are themes that helped me shape my argument on how the sisters defend and define themselves on their own terms. In the novels, sisterhood is like a kind of baptism, it brings you closer to a sense of the sacred, just as sisterhood teaches maturity and survival.

In this interview on "Her Life and Career with Bill Moyers," Toni Morrison talks about her representations of love and how mother-hunger is often found in children 18 and younger and the damage that comes with it as it creates an unhealthy relationship between the women and young people involved. Being hungry for love can become obsessive or traumatizing if that person is not aware of it. It can also act as a healing tool for others. To support her statement, Morrison uses an example of the black professional men that came to talk to children. These men came to create a bond they were not aware they would need or be looking for:

> I love those black professional men that went to the playground every lunch hour in the Chicago south side to talk to those children not to be authoritarian but just to get to know them without the bureaucracy, without the agency to simply become the agency that takes us beyond blood…But the children I call children when they are under 18 are hungry for that love, a love that is very fierce, powerful, and even distorted because of the duress they work under is so overwhelming"( Toni Morrison interview on her Life and Career (1990).

This quote emphasizes Morrison's representation of love. Morrison speaks with Bill Moyers about professional black men going to the playground to speak with children so they can get a sense of importance, love, and security. Morrison believed children under 18 were hungry for love so powerful and fierce that it can lead to unhealthy behaviors. Both the children and the men benefit from these relationships, but without them people will seek out love in healthy ways. This belief highlights how hungry Beloved was for her mother's love. Beloved's desperation for love and her mother's desperation to fulfill it, create a toxic environment. It makes her mother physically and emotionally sick to her stomach. As much as Denver wants to keep her word to protect Beloved, she realizes she has to detach from her to heal and survive the traumatic ordeals of 124. At the conclusion of Beloved, Denver is able to do the impossible to save her mother and herself.

**Chapter 1: Trauma and Negative Representations of the Self in *A Mercy &' Beloved***

Toni Morrison's novel, *A Mercy* presents the reader with a character who is known only as Sorrow for most of the novel. Before we get into the chapter that is narrated by Morrison presents us with chapters in the voice of characters such as Lina, a trusted maternal servant on

the Vaark's plantation, Jacob Vaark, the owner of the plantation and the owner of Lina, Florens, and Sorrow, and his wife Rebekka.

During Jacob Vaark's and Lina's chapter, the novel presents a dilemma. The novel presents various negative descriptions of the character "Sorrow" all told by various characters. These are the only representations of Sorrow in these sections. Although we do not hear from Sorrow early in the novel, these negative descriptions will be challenged later. Morrison leaves us to think carefully of the misconceptions about who Sorrow is and her role on the Vaark plantation.

Without Sorrow's perspective, we are forced to trust and believe what Lina, Rebekka, and Jacob have said about Sorrow. Morrison incorporates different "voices" of the characters throughout the novel. Throughout Jacob Vaark's section he describes that he "rescued" Sorrow. For example, we see this when we read, "the curly-haired goose girl, they called Sorrow. And the acquisition of both could be seen as rescue"(40). Morrison challenges the reader here. Vaark presents himself as Sorrow's savior but instead of purchasing her freedom, he purchases her for his benefit.

During Lina's chapter, we also find a similar bias against Sorrow. In Lina's sections we find that although she expresses maternal instincts with Florens, Lina is biased against Sorrow. Although both are children, Lina refuses to care for Sorrow, and chooses only to care for Florens. This bias cannot be trusted. If we think carefully about these scenes, maternal figures typically do not withhold care when a child is in need. Yet we see that this is the case for Lina. Morrison uses these contradictions to show how characters isolate "Sorrow." Without family or friends, she has little to no hope of surviving. From Jacob, Rebekka, and Lina's chapters we are told consistently that Sorrow is useless to the plantation. It is not until page 137 that readers get to hear Sorrow's voice and read her backstory. To truly understand Sorrow and her survival, I

re-read Sorrow's chapter for clues about her re-telling of events from her perspective. Her chapter is a revision of the stories Lina, Rebekka, and Jacob tell about Sorrow's character. My rereading shows their bias and shows how Sorrow redefines herself against those misrepresentations.

**Misrepresentations of Sorrow**

Before Sorrow's chapter Morrison uses characters like Jacob Vaark and Lina to narrate most of the information we have about Sorrow.

In Lina's chapter, we find out that Lina thinks Sorrow is "stupid" (*A Mercy*,51) an "easy harvest" (*A Mercy* 52) "a vixen-eyed with black teeth" (*A Mercy* 59). In other places she is "a daft girl who kept running off getting lost, who knew nothing and worked less, a strange melancholy girl" (*A Mercy* 60). Florens also thinks Sorrow is "strange" (*A Mercy* 9). In Lina's section we read, "to Mistress Sorrow was useless…she was bad luck in the flesh. Red hair, black teeth, recurring neck boils" (*A Mercy* 63). She is described as a "Natural curse" (*A Mercy* 65); as "Corruption" (A Mercy 70) and as "Incorrigible" (*A Mercy* 72). It is important to note that these misrepresentations are connected to Sorrow's social status as an enslaved black woman. Her blackness marks her as "cursed" and "stupid." As a young black woman, she is perceived as "easy harvest." By using these descriptions, readers assume Sorrow is unintelligent and incapable, all because she is the darkest woman on the farm. Everyone believes she is strange, sexually available, and incapable of redemption. Sorrow is also assumed to be sorrowful and deserving of abuse. She is never perceived as vulnerable, traumatized, or in need of care. When Lina and Rebekka say that Sorrow is useless it is only because they disregarded her feelings based on her appearance rather than her experience.

In Lina's chapter, we continue to see Sorrow being treated as an incompetent person who is cursed. But in reality, she is just a young girl going through a traumatic experience. She is not

"herself" during this period. In fact, she is desperate to survive. During this time of danger, Sorrow creates a "twin" sister. It is Twin, Sorrow's imagined sister that takes Sorrow's place and refuses to do the work forced upon her at the plantation. We see this earlier in Lina's chapter when Morrison writes that Sorrow/Twin "knew nothing and worked less" ( *A Mercy* 60). In other places, Sorrow is "more unreliable… wandering off to talk to grass and grapevines"(*A Mercy* 66). This scene is important because it shows that Sorrow was not just wandering off to talk to herself, she was talking to Twin. Wandering is something Sorrow does often because it connects her bonds with Twin. Though it annoys Lina, Sorrow is no longer as defenseless now that she has Twin to accompany her. Lina does not consider that Sorrow may not be able to do forced labor due to her traumatic experiences despite the fact that she knows Sorrow is a child who has had multiple pregnancies.

**Failed Family Bonds**

Jacob Vaark is Sorrow's enslaver, and during his chapter, we find out that he meets and buys Sorrow from the Sawyers, after Sawyer and his wife find her half-dead along the shore. Vaark thinks he knows what it feels like to feel ashamed and unwanted. He uses this rationale to support his decision to purchase Sorrow. In Vaark's perspective, he justifies that the Sawyers didn't want to keep Sorrow so purchasing Sorrow is a form of a rescue from Vaark's perspective. We see this when Morrison writes:

> "Inheriting land softened the chagrin of being both misborn and disowned. Yet he continued. feel a disturbing pulse of pity for orphans and strays remembering well their and his own sad teeming in the markets, lanes, alleyways, and ports of every region he traveled. Once before he found it hard to refuse when called on to rescue an unmoored, unwanted child. A decade ago now, a sawyer asked him to take off his hands a sullen, curly-headed girl he had found half dead on a

> riverbank. Jacob agreed to do it, provided the sawyer forgive the cost of the lumber he was buying"(A Mercy 38).

In this scene, narrated by Jacob Vaark, Sorrow's new owner, he believes he empathizes with Sorrow being an orphan and unwanted yet this also comes off as insincere. He takes "pity" on the unfortunate people because he was once unfortunate, and understanding that familiar feeling compels him to take on Sorrow. Morrison uses Vaark to show the contradiction of this behavior. He believes that inheriting land softens the embarrassment of being orphaned yet he "saves" Sorrow from the Sawyers. But he is not rescuing her or doing her a favor, he is in fact doing himself a favor by purchasing her in exchange for the lumber he was buying. Morrison wants the reader to pay attention to the details and here we see that Vaark uses Sorrow at his expense to make himself feel good. He uses a myth of rescue or saviorism to claim control over a young person for profit. Under this relationship of power, he can act as caregiver, father figure, and abuser. If he cared about her he would have bought her freedom instead of enslaving her. It is important to know why Sorrow is described as sullen, which is a person who is bad-tempered or gloomy. For a girl who has lost the only home she knows and is quickly discarded after she is taken care of should be more than sullen. She is a lost child getting handed over to another stranger after enduring multiple traumatic experiences that include rape, kidnapping, and forced work. Sorrow is passed around and overlooked. Even though Vaark describes knowing what it feels like to be unwanted, Sorrow's character is even more vulnerable than he is.

Lina is another character who represents a distorted familiar bond with Sorrow. Lina is a trusted maternal figure on Jacob Varrk's farm. Her leadership and maternal instinct are important to the survival of everyone on the farm. Her leadership instincts and maternal skills are revealed when she comes across Florens, another girl Vaark "rescued" from another owner by the name of Ortega. Immediately Lina is maternally drawn to young Florens. Conversely, the same is not true

for young Sorrow. We see the discrepancy between Lina's maternal relationship with the two young girls when Morrison writes, " Lina had fallen in love with her right away, as soon as she saw her shivering in the snow. A frightened, long-necked child who did not speak for weeks… she wanted to protect her, keep her away from the corruption so natural to someone like Sorrow"(*A Mercy* 70). From this scene, we see Lina's biased perspective of Sorrow. Lina was in awe of Florens from the first time she saw her and from then she wanted to protect her in a way a mother would for her child. This scene raises the question: how can you have maternal instincts for vulnerable children and go on to reject a child like Sorrow? Lina evidently believes Sorrow is deceitful and even being in the same room with her brings shame. Lina does not want Florens to be associated with the depraved state that Sorrow has.

Prior to being on the Vaark plantation we also see how Vaark fails at truly protecting Sorrow when he decides to exchange her for the timber he was buying instead of buying her freedom. If he really wanted to save Sorrow he would have brought her freedom instead of buying her for his own benefits. Lina also fails at creating familiar bonds with Sorrow when her maternal instincts are questioned by her biases about Sorrow being cursed or deceitful. Her maternal instincts should have gone against her biased perspective because Sorrow was just a child like Florens. In the article, "Toni Morrison's Disrupted Girls and Their Disruptive Girlhoods: '*The Bluest Eye*' and '*A Mercy*"' scholar Susmita Roye focuses on A Mercy to talk about disruptive girlhood and how Morrison uses her writing to challenge misleading beliefs about young black women. In *A Mercy*, Roye argues that Morrison challenged stereotypes around female figures. She writes, "[Morrison] challenged and attempted to refute such predominant …misleading beliefs. A world in whose eyes black females like herself were insignificant to the extent of being "invisible" shaped her identity as a reader" (Roye, 215). This is significant to my argument because Morrison purposefully shapes a world of fiction that will

reflect the challenges black girls must endure to have their stories heard and valued. Often black girlhood is shaped by other people's misleading beliefs or myths about them.

Morrison shows the problem of misrepresentation and the limited solutions for girls like Sorrow to survive their trauma. Sorrow created Twin because she needed to survive these misleading beliefs. So, she creates a sister, friend, and a mother to help her mature and develop into a better person for the sake of her daughter and to be able to survive life after Twin.

**Saving Herself: Sorrow & Twin as Sisters in Communion**

Sorrow's age is not mentioned explicitly in her chapter, but when Jacob Vaark purchased Sorrow, she was 11 years old. She relies on Twin to get through her trauma to become a mature young woman. At the time of this tragedy, Sorrow seems to be very young and she finds herself alone after the shipwreck. With no food and no family to help her she eats the sweetener she finds on the deck. Morrison writes, "After searching for survivors and food, fingering split molasses from the deck straight into her mouth" ( A Mercy 138 ). Failing to find food and any survivors, Sorrow's only source of food was the sweetener she happens to find along the deck. This is significant to acknowledging Sorrow's trauma because it emphasizes her innocence and her struggle to survive after the shipwreck. We must see here how Sorrow is forced to nourish herself. She has no parent or guardian or family to do this for her. She is completely alone. This is one of the many scenes that led up to Sorrow's creation of Twin—her survival method. During this storm Sorrow and Twin are under the hammock because it moves in the same motion as the vessel, so that anyone using the hammock is not at risk of being thrown or injured during the rough seas. This scene is important because this is when Twin arrives. Sorrow is alone and afraid of the strong winds that could throw her overboard so she hides under the hammock and Twin appears and from there she is guided by Twin's strength and love.

Morrison includes this in Sorrow's chapter to show that as a young person, she suffered a great ordeal and was forced to rely solely on herself. This shipwreck is traumatic for Sorrow because she loses the only "home" she knows and all the people she loves. The ship also symbolizes the Middle Passage journey that the enslaved Africans had to undergo after being kidnapped and forced to make a long dangerous journey. Sorrow's trauma symbolizes this because she goes from being on the ship with a place she believes is home to losing everything she has ever known and being then purchased to work on a "farm." As a result, Sorrow creates a fantastic part of herself to survive. At first, her survival is solely relying on Twin to help her grow in ways that a mother or more powerful figure would. Sorrow creates the mother she needs in Twin to do just that. At the same time, we also see that the relationship between Twin and Sorrow becomes more and more unhealthy.

The events take so much out of Sorrow that she relies on Twin in an unhealthy manner. We see this when Morrison writes, "With no one to talk to she relied on Twin more and more. With her, Sorrow never wanted for friendship or conversation" (A Mercy 146). This quote shows that Sorrow had no one to talk to and having Twin around made the loneliness bearable. Twin brought Sorrow comfort because she is all she's ever had since the shipwreck. At the same time, this comfort becomes disconcerting when it hinders Sorrow from being able to form friendships and connections on the farm that could help her become an independent person. Though Twin's presence has helped Sorrow through the trauma she has endured, it also shelters Sorrow from having enough confidence to go out and be more present or coherent with her peers. This kind of codependency Sorrow has with Twin is proven to be unhealthy for her later in this chapter because Sorrow develops a hunger for the maternal instinct she sees in Twin.

Like Morrison's other characters, "mother hunger" is an important theme in how characters form bonds and survival strategies. Mother hunger is a phrase that Morrison uses to

define an unhealthy representation of love. She believes that all her characters are hungry for love and if they are not protected, nurtured, and guided through their youth they develop unstable relationships with loved ones. I could not imagine being the only survivor of a life-threatening accident. Not only was Sorrow the sole survivor, but she was also there for many nights alone. Her only hope of getting through this was Twin. By including the creation of "Twin" Morrison shows the intimacy between sisters as a tool of survival and development.

In Sorrow's chapter, Morrison reveals how the misrepresentations of Sorrow are rooted in stigmatized beliefs about her skin color and her status. More importantly, it is in this chapter that we see how Sorrow creates the survival tools that she needs despite the forms of bias and erasure that have dominated her life. Sorrow creates a bond that will ensure her survival thus replacing the failed and distorted bonds that others have tried to impose on her.

One central revelation in this chapter is the untrustworthiness of characters who have previously defined Sorrow as "cursed" like Lina and Jacob Vaark. In this chapter it is revealed that Lina kills Sorrow's child. Morrison does this to show that Lina is an unreliable narrator:

> Mistress delivered a fat boy who cheered everybody up—for six months anyway… Although Sorrow thought she saw her newborn yawn, Lina wrapped it in a piece of sacking and set it a-sail in the widest part of the stream… Sorrow wept, but Twin told her not to. "I am always with you," she said. That was some consolation, but it took years for Sorrow's steady thoughts of her baby breathing water under Lina's palm to recede. With no one to talk to, she relied on Twin more and more. With her, Sorrow never wanted friendship or conversation(145-146).

In this passage, the Mistress' baby boy dies shortly after Sorrow's childbirth. "Mistress delivered a fat boy who cheered everybody up—for six months anyway." Morrison uses the dash because

she wants us to pause and carefully process what has happened. She wants us to know that a presumably healthy baby has died after six months. Lina assures us that the only cause must be because of Sorrow. This is a retelling of when Lina tells Mistress in the previous chapter that Sorrow is the reason her children keep dying. Lina believes Sorrow is cursed and may be the reason why Mistress' child died. It is out of revenge or protection that because of this biased perspective that she drowns Sorrow's baby. In one crucial passage we read, "Although Sorrow thought she saw her newborn yawn, Lina wrapped it in a piece of sacking and set it a-sail in the widest part of the stream." Lina's trusted role as a leader is so highly regarded that Sorrow questions her own eyes when she recalls the scene. Though she believes she saw her baby yawn she trusted that Lina was telling the truth. Although Lina points to Sorrow as cursed, the only cursed person this scene reveals is Lina. The act of violence she commits towards Sorrow and the baby is malicious. Not once did she consider that the child was worth living, nor did she consider Sorrow's well-being.

In moments of immense trauma and isolation, Sorrow wonders how she will survive. Sorrow worries that she will again be left alone however, it is in these moments that Twin assures her that she is a part of her. Morrison writes, "Sorrow wept, but Twin told her not to. "I am always with you," she said. That was some consolation." Twin's assurance brought Sorrow some comfort. Knowing the grief would have been too much for Sorrow, Twin tells her that she will be right there. Whenever it gets to be too much for her, Twin will be there to step in for protection or defense as needed.

Sorrow's character craves companionship and Twin plays a significant role in providing what failed bonds Vaark and Lina could not. Though Twin's presence is better than the isolation of being alone and maligned, the thought of her baby's last breath haunts Sorrow. "It took years for Sorrow's steady thoughts of her baby breathing water under Lina's palm to recede." She

never questioned Lina but part of her felt that her baby was alive. Whether the baby was stillborn or breathing, going through anything like this is horrifying for any mother to experience. This event took so much out of Sorrow that she relied on Twin in an unhealthy manner when Morrison writes, “With no one to talk to she relied on Twin more and more. With her, Sorrow never wanted for friendship or conversation.” This quote shows that Sorrow had no one to talk to and having Twin around made the loneliness bearable. Twin brought Sorrow comfort because she is all she’s ever had since the shipwreck. This comfortability becomes concerning when it hinders Sorrow from being able to form friendships and connections on the farm that could help her become an independent person. Though Twin’s presence has helped Sorrow through the trauma she has endured. It also shelters Sorrow from not having enough confidence to go out and be more present or coherent with her peers. This kind of codependency Sorrow has with Twin is proven to be unhealthy for her later in this chapter.

Sorrow’s chapter reveals that she was neither useless nor cursed. Her chapter reveals that she was not incapable; but was prioritizing Twin, her only companion. After she was traumatized by the shipwreck she responded only to her conversations with Twin and did not prioritize anything or anyone else. In the novel, Lina and Rebekka talk negatively about her from afar. Given that Sorrow is a young teen, alone and traumatized, it is reasonable to assume that she perhaps needed protection or nurturing. If Lina and Rebekka would have talked with her and treated her with kindness maybe Sorrow would have spoken, but no one asked her how she was feeling. They took one look at her and cast her out with no attempt to ask Sorrow what happened. Morrison shows in her altering chapters that Sorrow was not cursed; she was processing her horrible experience of the shipwreck. Sorrow is misjudged by her appearance. When she is going through this traumatic experience the last thing she is worried about is how her teeth or hair looks. Her appearance was a sign that she has not been herself for a long time. While she has

been processing everything, Twin is there. Throughout the biased opinions expressed in Lina and Rebekka's chapters Sorrow has not been present to understand what is going on nor has she had her chapter in which she is allowed to defend herself. We know from comments like "she is useless" (*A Mercy* 63) "a sullen curly-headed girl"(*A Mercy* 38) and "bad luck in the flesh"(*A Mercy* 63). that Lina, Rebekka, and Jacob are biased towards her but during Will and Scully's chapter we learn at least one alternative view.

**Alternative Perspectives of Twin**

During Will and Scully's chapter, we find out that Sorrow is more than the trauma she has faced when Morrison writes " to dismiss Sorrow as "the odd one" ignored her quick and knowing sense of her position. Her privacy protected her; her easy coupling a present to herself"(*A Mercy* 178). From Will and Scully's perspective, they believe that dismissing Sorrow as "the odd one" ignores her and the knowing position she is currently in. The privacy that protected her and was present to her was Twin. Whenever she is talking to Twin she wanders to talk to the grass and grapevines as Lina expresses during her chapter. Going through trauma it may be easier to detach from reality and Morrison wants us to see that in Sorrow during her chapter, when she writes, " having two names was convenient since Twin couldn't be seen by anyone else"(*A Mercy* 137). Here it is evident from Sorrow's chapter that Twin is a character who becomes a resource for Sorrow. Morrison shows that although they have two different names it is the same person. Twin appears whenever Sorrow needs a break from life, especially given the intensive work of being a purchased slave on a plantation ("farm"). After the shipwreck Sorrow loses the one place she called home and she feels lost and abandoned. She is then sold to Jacob Vaark and given the name "Sorrow" when Morrison writes, "don't mind her name," said the sawyer. "You can name her anything you want." My wife calls her Sorrow because she was abandoned"(*A Mercy* 142). Sorrow's chapter tells us how Sawyer''s wife calls

her Sorrow because of the abandonment she has faced after the shipwreck. This abandonment allowed her to mentally detach from her true self to someone she calls Twin, a version of her unhealed self. This perspective serves as a self-survival mechanism that occurs after a traumatic experience that left Sorrow detached from her reality until she felt capable of confronting reality. One way to read Twin's presence is to interpret their bond as a sisterhood. Some may assume that Sorrow's conjuring of Twin is explained by a dissociative identity disorder perspective.

Dissociative identity disorder is a disorder characterized by the presence of two or more distinct personality states. Dissociative identity disorder, previously called multiple personality disorder, is usually a reaction to trauma as a way to help a person avoid bad memories. This viewpoint is expressed during Sorrow's chapter when Morrison writes, "Preferable, of course, was when Twin called from the mill door or whispered up close into her ear. Then she would quit any chore and follow her identical self"(*A Mercy* 137). In this scenario Sorrow is her boss. Instead of doing what others tell her to do, she does what Twin tells her to do. Twin's presence brings her more than comfort; it gives her confidence and power to defy authority.

**Chapter 2: Water, Blood, &' Milk in Toni Morrison's Beloved and A Mercy**

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* presents the reader with a character named Denver, the sister of Beloved. After being killed as a child by her mother, Beloved returns in the novel as a young woman who seeks new care from her mother and sister. Although she is a young woman, Beloved acts childlike. Milk plays a role in this dynamic because it is used to nurture children. Morrison also uses blood to signify their trauma (the trauma of Beloved's death) and to signify their sisterhood.

The full realization of these bonds occurs in the middle of the novel at the riverbank. Denver and Beloved share an intimate bond in their sisterhood that allows Denver to develop and

mature over the course of the novel. When Denver and Beloved are playing together we begin to see how Denver steps in to reassure Beloved that she is safe with her. Morrison writes:

> We played by the creek. I was there in the water. In the quiet time, we played… She said you wouldn't hurt me. She hurt me. I will protect you. I want her face. Don't love her too much. I am loving her too much. Watch out for her; she can give you dreams… She is the laugh; I am laughter"(*Beloved* 255).

This quote is written as a dialogue between Denver and Beloved, and it highlights how Denver feels the hunger and need to protect Beloved from their mother Sethe's trauma. This is an intimate moment for them. As they sit silently in the water, they comfort each other with a sense of security. At the time Denver believed the one that needed to be protected from her mother's love was Beloved. But over the course of the novel, this changes when Beloved says that she already loves Sethe too much. This is Denver's cue that Beloved may be dangerous. For example, Beloved observes everything about Sethe including her laughter and it appears to be casually alarming. At first, Denver did not see it as alarming because she really believed that as long as she protects Beloved she would not have to worry about Sethe. At this moment, Beloved's motherhunger seems harmless but because Beloved appears childlike. The love of children often appears innocently even though sometimes it seems overbearing. Of course, Beloved wants to feel connected to Sethe despite the traumatic act because that is her mother and every child wants to love and be loved by their parents. But Beloved's hunger proves to be dangerous.

Being deprived of love can cause overindulgence in the things that make you feel loved and can result in a dangerous toxic relationship. We see this danger in Beloved's relationship with Sethe. Beloved seeks Sethe's love and Sethe is eager to fulfill it. In one scene, Beloved says she wants Sethe's face. She says this because she wants to consume Sethe. She does not want to

feel this way purposely, it is because she doesn't know how to express her fixation or love for Sethe. As a result it sounds more creepy than intimate. Being around Sethe is not enough. She wants to feel and be more connected to her so she wants to look just like her and to be her. I agree that this love is unhealthy, but Beloved's motherhunger comes from her traumatic death. Trauma produces scars that can be dangerous. Morrison argues that if you are not taught to love or be loved it will only spiral and become insufferable. Beloved was not taught a healthy love and so as the novel progresses she begins to physically and emotionally drain Sethe.

Beloved and Sethe play together and as they spend more time together we slowly begin to see Sethe lose sight of her own reality when Morrison writes:

> She took to going to work later and later each day until the predictable happened: Sawyer told her not to come back. And instead of looking for another job, Sethe played all the harder with Beloved, who never got enough of anything: lullabies , new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk…She cut Denver completely out. Even the song that she used to sing to Denver she sang for Beloved(282).

Here is where we see Sethe drift from her responsibilities in order to fulfill Beloved's desires. She cuts her daughter Denver out of her life momentarily to make up for Beloved, the daughter she let go of. Beloved's hunger for love has Sethe feeling so guilty for abandoning her that she begins to cut ties with things most important to her. The hungrier Beloved became the weakier Sethe is. Maintaining a job is a big priority especially when you do not have anyone to help and you have children to take care of, so for Sethe to let go of her job like it was nothing is very alarming. Beloved's greed was literally sucking the life out of Sethe to the point where she could care less about her daughter Denver and her financial responsibilities. Sethe is not purposefully trying to replace Denver; she just felt ashamed about what she did to Beloved that she would

have done anything to make it up to her. Knowing this means Sethe would go to great lengths to please Beloved and this made Beloved even more greedy. Enough will never be enough for someone like Beloved because she has been deprived of love for so long.

Once Denver is cut out of their games, she's able to detach herself from their love triangle and observe it from a different perspective. This is evident when Morrison writes:

> When it became clear that they were only interested in each other, Denver began to drift from the play, but she watched it, alert for any sign that Beloved was in danger…But it was Beloved who made demands.Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her she invented desire" (283).

In this scene, Denver is able to see that Sethe and Beloved were only there for eachother. For a while, they were mentally and emotionally feeding on each other and when Sethe ran out of things to do to feed Beloved's hunger Beloved "invented desire" hoping that Sethe can continue to fulfill her hunger. There were no boundaries in their relationship, as long as Beloved was being loved as she desired nothing else mattered. This reminds us of Morrison's quote about the function of children who desire love. She believes that children under 18 are especially vulnerable and hungry for that love. Though Beloved is considered a young adult she never gets to experience that kind of love which keeps her longing for it more in hopes she can have a bond with her mother. When you are hungry for a love you cannot have, you begin to gravitate to it in an unhealthy manner. Beloved's hunger of love from her mother spirals because it has a traumatic past.

In the novel, blood and milk symbolize the connection of sisterhood. Biological sisters, Denver and Beloved are connected by their mother's blood and milk. They are nourished by milk and by their family's bloodline. At the same time, blood also has a darker connotation. Blood also signifies the death of Beloved when Sethe takes her life. Later in the novel when Denver is

able to taste the blood and milk of Beloved, this gives her enough maturity and confidence to step in and protect her mother, Sethe. Morrison writes, “then Sethe spit up something she had not eaten and it rocked Denver like a gunshot. The Job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved”(286). In this quote, Denver is bearing witness to Sethe becoming limp and sick to her stomach after being physically worn out by Beloved’s hunger for love. In this scene Sethe is nearly dying to fulfill Beloved’s hunger. It is expressed in such a serious manner to get the reader to understand why a child being deprived of love and yearning for it can be mentally draining. Denver watches over her mother and sister at a distance, observing them after being cut out of Beloved and Sethe’s activities. This gives her time to focus on supporting herself in order to be ready and mature enough to care for her mother in the way she did for Beloved.

Morrison uses Denver’s chapter to show us how important healthy family bonds are. When toxic or traumatic bonds are left in place, we do not know how to be receptive to love or love in a healthy manner. Morrison uses her novels to depict this because she wanted us to understand and acknowledge why it is important that we detach from things that are unhealthy for us, including mothers and sisters. Detaching from the people we want to love us the most can be hard but in the end it is worth it. Though Denver was protected by Beloved’s blood she too could have still been sucked in by Beloved’s hunger. In this case, what Denver learns from that sisterhood gives her the confidence to care for others. She is able to detach from Beloved and Sethe to see their family dynamic from a different perspective that allowed her to mature and survive the 124. If Denver did not detach herself from Beloved and Sethe’s love triangle, she would have been blindsided from helping the one that needs it the most. She would not have been able to save herself or her mother. As I will show in the next section, Sethe’s milk and Beloved’s blood serving as nourishment and healing gave both Denver and Beloved communion

and brought Sethe peace when Morrison writes, “Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother’s milk”(242). This communion displays a level of intimacy as a tool of protection for Denver to develop and mature. Her development and maturity helped her to survive the ordeals of 124.

In Morrison’s novels, this intimacy is presented in and through the presence of water, blood and milk. For Morrison, these liquids symbolize the essential bonds formed or shared between sisters or loved ones. It provides a connection for characters to survive obstacles in the face of abuse, erasure, or traumatic forgetting. In “The Site of Memory” Morrison writes that water creates the bond for “emotional memory.” Emotional memory (similar to rememory in *Beloved*) is when individuals re-experience the emotions created by an event. This access to memory is something that Morrison believes is an important tool for people who experience trauma. In the case of abuse—whether personal or systematic—where people have their experiences erased or misrepresented, memory provides an important function. Memory in the novels can inspire remembering where an event occurred or which journey characters took. Morrison describes these memories as a “flooding.” It is  the rush of imagination that comes afterward. In both of the novels there are moments when the sisters are connected through their experience of being in or near water or when mothers connect with children through water and milk.

If we return to *A Mercy* we see water appears there as well. As I have described earlier, Morrison’s use of the ship and water metaphors in *A Mercy* connects Sorrow’s character to the Middle Passage and the experiences of the enslaved on ships. It also explains the parts of her trauma that are not revealed in the novel. For example, it is in the water that Sorrow and Twin find each other. The trauma from the shipwreck and surviving being on water alone together binds the “sisters” and allows them to forge the strength to survive their trauma to grow. In those

moments Twin is like a sister and a mother to Sorrow. This is shown when Morrison writes "on occasion, she had secret company other than Twin, but not better than Twin, who was her safety, her entertainment, her guide" (*A Mercy* 141). This quote shows that no matter the company Sorrow had, no one could cater to her needs like Twin. Twin was everything to her, a sister, a mother, a friend. Anything Sorrow needed Twin was there whether it was to protect her, to amuse her, or to inform and educate her about being a mother and what is needed to get through life. This bond and growth are necessary for Sorrow's survival but it comes at a cost. Sorrow's reliance upon Twin forces her to remain isolated. Sorrow must learn independence from Twin so she can engage her own needs and build community with others. Learning independence from Twin will help her speak up for herself, handle small or large tasks on the farm, and do what it takes to be a mother once she gives birth to her daughter.

**Chapter 3: Mermaids & the Middle**

As I have discussed previously, in "The Site of Memory," Morrison describes emotional memory as a water trope. She writes that water "is an emotional memory—what the nerves and skin as well as how it appeared—"(119). Morrison wants the reader to pay attention to water as a symbol of the bonds between sisters, mothers, and memory. She believes it is like remembering the nerve and the skin. Although we take it for granted, we must remember our nerves and skin because our skin is the body's largest organ, made of water, protein, fats, and minerals. Your skin protects your body from germs and regulates body temperature. Nerves in the skin help you feel sensations like hot and cold. We need sisterhood and family bonds to survive and develop maturity in the same way we need our skin and nerves to protect us from germs and keep us alive and properly functioning. These bonds are as essential to us as water or skin. For example, in *A Mercy*, water memory together with nerves and skin is what describes the bond Sorrow and Twin have. Even though they share the same face and skin, they have different names they have

different emotions and nerves that allow Sorrow to know when Twin is mentally and emotionally present without physically being seen or heard. Morrison introduces Twin as an identical being to clarify the detachment Sorrow has had to create to survive after the traumatic shipwreck. Water is a central part of this bond.

Apart from this, Twin also provides an emotional memory for Sorrow because after the shipwreck Twin appears, we see an example of Morrison describes earlier as flooding. Twin literally appears in water. She is an imagined sister and this is the same language Morrison uses to describe flooding. Twin can be read as a "rush of imagination" and a necessity to continue on. One major scene where water, sisterhood, and survival are shown in the novel is in the scene where Sorrow is called to explain how she survived the shipwreck. Morrison writes,

> … where do you live? On the ship. Yes, but not always. Always. Where is your family? Shoulders lifted. Who else was on the ship? Gulls. What people, girl? Shrug. Who was the captain? Shrug. Well, how did you get to land? Mermaids, I mean whales" (A Mercy 140).

The shipwreck was created to rescue Sorrow from the only place she knew as "home." Mermaids are one of the important forms of Twin. Mermaids are aquatic creatures. Mermaids are associated with perilous events such as floods and shipwrecks. Sorrow cannot explain how she survived the shipwreck because Twin was present in the form of a mermaid and knew the only way Sorrow could survive was to be a mermaid to get to the shore. Twin being seen as a mermaid is what Morrison says "Flooding" is all about. As the shipwreck and floods happen, Twin and her mermaid abilities are created by Sorrow in order to survive. This is why Twin urges Sorrow not to speak when Sawyer's wife asks her questions. Sorrow was not present during the shipwreck so she cannot account for the events that occurred.

The fantastic creation of Twin, a mermaid, is how Sorrow explains how she arrived on shore and survived the shipwreck. This is important because the fact that Twin appears after the

flooding is not a coincidence. Morrison writes this because she wants the reader to remember the water metaphor to make sense of Sorrow's chapter and how and why Twin is created. Unlike before, Sorrow will be able to manage anything that comes her way. It will help her prepare for her pregnancy and delivery because surviving childbirth is one of the hardest things a woman has to face. With blood streaming into the water while giving birth to her Babygirl she is reborn in her way. Her rebirth could not have happened without Twin. She needed some distance from herself to remember who she was and who she could be with the family she created despite the one she lost.

In other places in *A Mercy*, water is metaphorically used as a symbol for emotional memory because the characters must remember their trauma to heal. Like being in a storm at sea, characters struggle to develop strategies for survival and memory. For example, Sorrow only begins to heal from her trauma and loneliness when she gives birth by the river. Suddenly Twin is nowhere to be found. Morrison writes:

> Forbidden to enter the village, she had no choice. Twin was absent, strangely silent or hostile when Sorrow tried to discuss what to do, and where to go. She took a knife and a blanket to the riverbank when the first pain hit. She stayed there, alone, screeching when she had to, sleeping in between until the next brute tear of body and breath. Hours, minutes, days—Sorrow could not tell how much time passed. Kneeling in water as Sorrow pushed, they pulled, eased, and turned the tiny form stuck between her legs. Blood and more swirled down to the river attracting young cod. When the baby, a girl, whimpered (156).

In this scene, the river is essential for the successful birth of her daughter. Just like in Beloved, both water and blood are present in the scenes of major character development and where new bonds are formed. Here is where Morrison uses water to reveal the bond between Sorrow and

Twin to get the reader to understand the healing process Sorrow goes through that allows Twin to finally leave her side. At first, Sorrow believes that Twin is upset because the baby is coming and she will no longer have all of her attention, but deep down Sorrow knows she needs to do this on her own. Giving birth without Twin by her side is one of the hardest things she endures since the shipwreck and this process gives her the confidence to be an independent person.

It is not a coincidence that Morrison has Sorrow give birth by the water, she wants the reader to pay attention to the fact that Sorrow walks to the riverbank to give birth. She could have gone anywhere but being by the water will give her the strength she needs to push her baby girl out. Water is an emotional memory and resource here because it is about remembering and finding strength in who we were and who we have grown to be. For Sorrow, this emotional memory also becomes an account of the ritual of water births of women, who have come before her. They have used the water to give birth and become mothers even in dangerous lonely situations. By returning to the water for the first time since Twin formed Sorrow is forced to again be her mother. It is her tool to survive the difficulty of childbirth once Twin leaves her. If water is an emotional memory, then even without Twin she can rely on the knowledge that women before her have given birth at sea and in rivers. Her birthing process mixes water and blood to produce new life. Her new connection with her child comes from these emotional and fluid bonds. As this mixing occurs it goes into the water and it prepares us to discuss the milk and blood Morrison uses for the communion for Denver and Beloved in *Beloved* which I will explore in this next section. Using blood and water as a trope in Sorrow's chapter will give us a better understanding of the growth that happens in these moments for Sorrow as she begins to step into motherhood. She needed the willpower to not only build up the courage to detach from Twin but to also realize that she can do anything she puts her mind to. She is not defined by the

name that Sir and Mistress give her ("Sorrow") but has her new name. Her new name for herself is "Complete."

**Chapter 4: The Intimacy of Sisterhood**

The intimacy of sisterhood is needed for growth and survival. In both novels, characters experience trauma and must find the tools to find their way to completeness. However, their vulnerability and their sisterhood is what allows these women to lean on each other. As "sisters" women find ways to nurture themselves. We can be a safety net for one another like we have seen in *A Mercy* with Sorrow and Twin and in *Beloved*.

On page 242 of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* , Denver states "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk"(242). The role of milk and blood imagery represents healing and nourishment. By using the imagery of milk and blood Morrison illustrates communion between Denver and her sister Beloved. Morrison needs the reader to understand the level of intimacy that occurs once Denver drinks Beloved blood while she is being nursed by her mother Sethe. This quote is the center of Morrison's novel, *Beloved* because the communion that happens between Denver and Beloved is what allows Denver to mature in her own way. Morrison depicts intimacy between sisters as a tool of survival and development.

In another scholarly essay titled, "The Continual Search for Sisterhood: Narcissism, Projection, and Intersubjective Disruptions in Toni Morrison's Sula and Feminist Communities," scholar Cassandra Fetters uses the complexities of Nel and Sula's feminine relations and the subsequent damage done to their relationship because of the various factors of racism, society, and mother hunger. Fetters uses Morrison's Nobel Lecture to further support how the differences between Nel and Sula allowed them to form a sisterhood in search of a companion as well as

themselves. They are each longing for a connection, for a friend, but more than that, someone with whom they could fully identify. Fetters writes

> This idea of understanding "other languages, other views, other narratives" dominates Morrison's work, and has resonance for feminism and our discussions of difference. However, simply understanding "others" is not enough, and sometimes differences and powerful cultural influences combine to make real and transformational relationships between women complicated at best, impossible at worst. Although the women represented in Morrison's novels work to find ways to bond together and establish transformative friendships despite difference and the oppressions surrounding them, their attempts are often futile, or, significantly, not realized until death" (29).

This quote emphasizes the importance of sisterhood and the detachment that must eventually occur between the women to grow into themselves. Like Fetters says sometimes the women don't realize the damage their relationship causes until it is too late. This same damage occurs in A Mercy with Sorrow when she develops a dissociative personality called Twin. Twin may not have been real or healthy for Sorrow, but Sorrow needed to detach from her reality to redefine herself after her traumatic experience to become a better person and a mother to her child.

In *A Mercy*, Sorrow gains power and strength from Twin. Their relationship is just as important as a relationship with two female friends because even though Sorrow imagined Twin, she survived because of her. In the article, "'Sisters Separated for Much Too Long': Women's Friendship and Power in Toni Morrison's 'Recitatif.'" Susana Morris uses women's friendship to showcase the power and strength that comes with it. She uses Toni Morrison's "The Art of Fiction" to highlight the importance of women's friendships. Morrison believed that a woman

friend was considered a secondary relationship and a man and woman were considered a primary one. Although it is a secondary or can be seen as one it is very important to have a female companion outside of primary relationships because the strength and power that comes with it allows the women involved to grow. This growth is seen during Sorrow's chapter when she talks about giving birth by the water. Twin leaves Sorrow to be present giving birth to her daughter because she is strong enough to depend on herself. Not only did she find strength in Twin, but her ancestors helped her once the blood seeped into the water. Mothers before Sorrow helping her with her childbirth highlights the importance of sisterhood and female companions.

In another scholarly article, writer Michele Mock examines *Beloved* to focus on the maternal love that comes from breastfeeding. Mock believes breastfeeding is essential to the mother-child bond. Mock writes,

> Morrison stresses breast-feeding as essential to the natural unity of the mother-child bond…I know to nurse a child is to join in a sacred state of communion with that child… Breastfeeding is the ultimate expression of maternal love; it is a concrete and viable product of that love. It is an abstract made material. an expression of love, milk is symbolized as mother's love… The child greedily and hungrily feasts upon the nursing mother, much as Beloved threatens to devour Sethe" (Mock 118).

Morrison wants us to understand the significance of breastfeeding for both the child and the mother. The breastfeeding of Denver creates a bond between her and Beloved that strengthens her. It is more than the bond between Sethe and Denver because Denver was also drinking the blood of Beloved at this time. The milk and blood concept serves as a communion between these sisters that creates their bond in the same way it would for the mother-child bond Mock is

referring to. I use this to also describe the mother hunger that spirals in *Beloved* conclusion. Because Denver had the milk and blood, she was able to develop self-survival and maturity that allowed her to protect not only herself but save Sethe and 124 from Beloved and her mother-hunger.

Denver is described as "charmed" (247). By tasting both milk and blood, this gives Denver an advantage to be more aware of the unhealthy environment that increasingly develops around her at 124. On page 247 of the novel, Denver begins to open up more about her connection to blood and milk. She feels that she was charmed in a way that saved her from the harm she may have endured if she did not taste the blood of Beloved. Tasting her sister's blood gives her a sense of protection, fear, and empowerment. The blood protected her from Beloved's hunger for love and is the thing that protected Denver from her mother Sethe when Sethe felt she had to kill her children to protect them from the slave catchers. Denver knew her mother loved her but "she feared that the thing that made it alright to kill her sister would come back to kill her too." Drinking Beloved's blood empowered her because taking care of Beloved gave her the courage and stability to take care of herself.

Morrison's use of blood imagery shows that the bond Denver shares with Beloved is sacred and must be acknowledged as such. There is an act of communion between the sisters that allows them to exchange intimate thoughts and feelings with one another. On page 139 of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, we are able to recognize their level of intimacy when Morrison writes, "luckily for Denver, looking was food enough to last… It was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested , uncritical eyes of the other. Having her lips, nose, chin, caressed as they might be if she were a moss rose a gardener paused to admire" (139). In this scene, Denver being looked at is fulfilling to her appetite that she didn't even know was

desirable. Beloved's intimate thoughts make Denver feel warm inside. She admires her features and imperfections with grace like it was a masterpiece. This moment is sacred because Beloved assures Denver that she is admirable. Denver really cares about Beloved and what she thinks and knowing that Beloved sees her in this way makes her feel loved. You can love someone and not feel loved by them and in this moment, we can see that Denver feels loved by Beloved. Beloved opens that part of Denver up so she can acknowledge how worthy she is. I believe the difference between being seen is emphasized so that Denver can understand that she is not invisible. She is important and capable of surviving the things that happen at 124.

Blood imagery also symbolizes sacrifice. In Sethe's attempt to save her children, Denver was spared and Beloved was the sacrifice. To make sure the same thing does not happen to her, Denver keeps her love at a distance because she fears Beloved's intense hunger for love and knows it can be all consuming. We see this when Morrison writes:

> it would never hurt me. I just had to watch out for it because it was a greedy ghost and needed a lot of love, which was only natural, considering. And I do. Love her. I do. She played with me and always came to be with me whenever I needed her. She's mine, Beloved. She's mine(247).

This quote emphasizes Denver's awareness of Beloved's hunger being troubled/troubling and their sister bond. Beloved is so hungry for love it can be harmful to anyone she wants to be loved by. I believe that Denver being able to taste Beloved's blood continues to protect her from falling victim to Beloved's greed. She trusts that the blood of Beloved will keep her safe. This reassurance gives her a reason to also empathize with Beloved and treat her with maternal affection and care. She believes that anyone deprived of love like Beloved would react the same because they are not used to loving and being loved, so it comes off as a selfish act rather than a

selfless act. In the scene quoted above, the empathy she has for Beloved is very intimate as shown when she says “I do” twice so that the reader can understand that Denver sees their bond as sacred and not simply about competition.

**Conclusion:**

Studying sisterhood has much more significance to black womanhood and survival than I originally imagined. Emotional bonds between women are not just secondary relationships. These bonds—whether familial, friendly or romantic are, not secondary to romantic relationships with men. In fact, in Morrison’s novel the relationship between two women is depicted as just as if not more important. These women defend each other, and in doing so, learn to protect and care for themselves.

In the essay, “The Return Of The Sister: Sisterhood and Black Female Subjectivity,” Yu, Su-lin uses the concept of going from the Oedipal triangle to the pre-Oedipal triangle to understand the dynamic of feminine relations and sisterhood. In her essay, she argues that we should pay attention to the neglect that occurs in family drama amongst mothers and daughters, and sisters when she writes,

> “The dominant focus on the pre-Oedipal relationship between mother and daughter and it's crucial influence on women's identity formation has also neglected the frequent occurrence of female siblings in contemporary women's literature. While the pre-Oedipal narrative and the underlying search for maternal origin become an important pattern in fiction, this exclusive focus on female development in the pre-Oedipal stage elides questions about the important position of siblings in the family drama. The dominant views of the role of sister in the feminist family also suggest some degree to which the sister relationship

has always been a "suppressed" subplot in the most psychoanalytic readings of fictional portraits of the family romance”(407).

This is where Yu Su-lin explains the dominant focus of Oedipal relations and how it can become an unhealthy dynamic for families who suppress the nature of their relationship rather than using it as a power source. These sisterhood and mother-daughter relationships can become hectic however, these bonds are what help them grow through their own troubling experiences.

Lastly, I will be turning to two short stories that use similar themes of blood, milk, water, and sisterhood. I believe these stories are in the tradition of Morrison’s sisterhoods. The short story collection follows the same name Milk, Blood, Heat and is authored by Dantiel Moniz. In the short story, “Milk, Blood, Heat,” Dantiel W. Moniz explores the kindred relationship between best friends Kiera and Ava. Their relationship is similar to the sisterhood that Denver and Beloved experience. The story uses blood and milk as communion. Ava, the main character, gets her first period after Kiera, her best friend, dies. It is shown deep down Ava feels the period blood symbolizes the presence of Kiera. In this scene, “she gets her period in the bathtub three days after they put Kiera in the ground. The blood is dark, more than just blood, solid red shapes bobbing on water. A low pain thrums through Ava’s stomach and the small of her back, but it doesn’t mean anything now. There’s no one to compare with. The whole thrill of it was to stand face-to-face with Kiera and feel, for a moment, that they were the same”(17). Ava experiences maturity through her sisterhood with Kiera. She would be lost in the world without a connection to Kiera and the blood symbolizes the strength of their connection even after death much like Beloved and Denver’s relationship beyond the grave. Moniz shows the intimacy of these two sisters when she writes,

> "Kiera was the only person who'd ever really seen her. She recognized something in Ava's face, something kindred to herself, and came to name it. (I feel like I'm drowning.) Who would know her now? Not her mother, whom Ava stayed silent with because if she didn't, she knew she'd scream, the howling erupting—an unstoppable, vibrant poison…Could she be like Kiera? Open her mouth and let water and blood pour in?" (142).

Ava's belief in Kiera helps her survive even after her death. Both water and blood in this scene symbolizes their intimacy and at the end of the story, Ava can finally show her development. On page 19 of the short story Moniz allows Ava to revisit the past of what would've been Kiera's fourteen birthday years later on Ava's wedding day when Moniz writes,

> "This is the image Ava returns to on her wedding night and many others: walking toward Kiera's mother; standing in front of the woman and placing a hand on her shoulder; how her mother's whole body seemed concave, as if consuming itself. She'll think of the way she opened the woman's robe and pressed her body into hers, their skin suctioning together where it touched, forming a seal. How she stayed there, silent, as time collapsed around them, wondering if Kiera's mother could feel her daughter's blood pumping hard in her veins—a howling, creating heat"(19).

This scene is significant to the intimacy of sisterhood because of the strong connection Ava still has with Kiera even years after she dies. Moniz values the bond of sisterhood and this is why she maintains their connection even after death. In fact those bonds can be continually renewed through new blood, sweat and new tears. Through this Ava and Kiera are always bonded to each other. We see this earlier in the story when Ava believed that she was bonded to Kiera after

sharing their blood and milk together. Ava wondered if Kiera's mother could feel her daughter's blood inside Ava. "How she stayed there, silent, as time collapsed around them, wondering if Kiera's mother could feel her daughter's blood pumping hard in her veins—a howling, creating "heat"(19). This signified their entire relationship because even in death Kiera will still live through Ava.

In another short story from the same collection, titled "Outside the Raft" Tweet and Shayla are cousins bonded by blood and have that same type of bond as Ava and Kiera. Only they could understand each other and their reasons. We see this when Moniz writes, " Tweet and I didn't need to leave the yard; our possibilities were endless in that small house. We spoke a secret language, and we always understood each other" (21). The bond between Tweet and Shayla seems familiar to Kiera and Ava. Both groups of "sisters" bond over intense feelings and curiosities. They wonder about religion, love, and death together.Blood relatives or not they are bonded like sisters or like best friends.

After a tragic event while swimming threatens both of the girl's lives, Shayla reflects on how she survived. Despite her commitment to her sister-friend, at the end Shayla feels guilty for only trying to save herself from drowning. She realizes that Tweet could have died and even resents Shayla for her selfishness:

> "I didn't know how to apologize for wanting to save my own life. I wrapped my arms around her, like a mother might, pressed my lips into her neck. Her body relaxed into mine and the shivering stalled. I heard her sigh. "I love you," I said, and I willed the words to vibrate at a higher frequency, to jounce through her solid-seeming skin and settle in her bloodstream, as with the voice of God" (30).

This quote emphasizes the strength of sisterhood. A bond so strong only the ones involved can understand. Similar to Twin being Sorrow's safety net in *A Mercy* as Shayla embraces Tweet in the way mother would. Tweet begins to relax in her arms. When Shayla says "I love you" it brings comfort to Tweet as if it was the voice of God himself. Once they get to shore all Shayla can say is that she loves Tweet. Although Tweet did not respond she still hugs her because in some way she knows that her cousin was just as scared as everyone else. Shayla 's reaction to pull on everyone especially her cousin disregarding her own fear may not have been safe, but it shows that even when we do the worst things to each other the bond that is created in sisterhood is stronger than anything.

Writing about sisterhood has made me realize my own survival strategies. I recognize my strategies in  the special kinds of doubles I have seen in Morrison and Montiz's works. Morrison incorporates doubles frequently in her work to encourage reflection and growth. She does this in novels like *The Bluest Eye* and in *A Mercy*. We have already seen the creation of a double,an imagined sister named Twin. It can be argued that Sorrow's creation of Twin has a psychological term(dissociative personality disorder) that allowed her to detach and heal from her traumatic experiences to save herself. Twin may also be an imaginary force or imagined sister. In either explanation, seeing yourself as part of a double creates a way to process difficult experiences.

This project has been a healing process for me. I was so passionate about characters like Sorrow and Denver because I saw myself in them and I wanted to show people that no matter what, you can heal yourself for yourself. At age 14 I was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia, a chronic condition that is often accompanied with widespread physical pain all over. After intense encounters with my fibromyalgia diagnosis, I also created a double. Similar to Sorrow's "Twin." I created a double named Julia. During that time I felt like a prisoner in my own body. In order to

save myself I had to figure out how to process what was happening to me. Below is a poem I wrote some years ago in a dialogue format that describes the conversations between us:

Tasha &' Julia
Tasha : Hello, who are you ?
Julia : Fibromyalgia
Tasha : Why me ?
Julia : Why not you ?
Tasha : What is this ?
Julia : something the doctor's missed
Tasha : What is that supposed to mean ?
Julia : it was already in your genes
Tasha : I only came for a school physical
Julia : a misdiagnosis ?
Tasha : yeah
Julia : typical
Tasha : What now ?
Julia : trust in yourself
Tasha : How ?
Julia: you will figure it out
Tasha : it's been four years
and you still bring me to tears
Julia : you're stronger than your darkest fears
Tasha: it's time I avow
as the listeners raise a brow
Julia : their rejection
is God's protection
Tasha : I have been pushing people away
it's just too hard to explain
Julia : Does it make you feel weak ?
Tasha : *conjures up the words to speak*

Julia : with purpose you are unique
a voice for the voiceless, remember ?
it feels colder than December
Tasha : Will I ever be able to sleep
the scarring is too deep
too much pressure on my shoulders
Who wants to carry these boulders ?
Should I keep going ?
Julia : yes,  it would be owin
Tasha:  these past years I have been in agony
Remember when my family was mad at me ?
too many thoughts of blasphemy
Julia : the hammer banging on your shins
sharp pains unlike needles and pins
the squeezing of your chest
there is no room to rest
sore and sensitive to touch and light
a defenseless fight
the pain in your hips lowered your mobility
mentally dreading all medical facilities
eighteen tender points of pain throughout your body
your memories have been foggy
Tasha: the medicine is mediocre
it's all politics in the face of poker
Julia : take your time
everything will be fine
Tasha : How can you be so sure ?
with you, there is no cure
Julia : the research is obscure
Tasha : in and out of school trying to keep my composure
When will the pain and suffering be over ?

Julia : a bruise you can not heal

Tasha : Will the listeners ever understand how I feel ?

5.28.19

6:14p.m. Tasha Jasmin

This poem describes parts of my journey and the doubling I experienced. I felt betrayed by my own body and since it is a condition that is not explicitly visible, it took a toll on my mental health. I felt vulnerable and silenced, like how Denver and Sorrow feel when they are shunned in their respective novels. Julia When I read how these characters learned to re-define themselves by creating sustaining emotional bonds to help them process pain and trauma, I felt like I knew that story. In order to save myself I learned to interpret doubleness and sisterhood and use it to be able to process that experience.Like, “Sorrow” I have a twin (“Julia”) but I also have real-world sister-friends who saved my life. She/they made me stronger and gave me a new perspective and a voice.

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