

Halle

General Summary

Halle's character is one that always hopes and dreams of freedom. What separates him from the rest of the slave population that long for the same things is that Halle retains the mindset that it's possible. This belief in the hard work and rewards is reflected and supported in how he is able to buy his mother's freedom, Baby Suggs, through years of extra labor on Saturdays which is unusual in itself because typically slaves are never able to buy another slave's freedom. He is continually hopeful to the point where when Sixo suggests running away to freedom he is the first one of the Sweet Home men to support the idea.

All in all we are painted an image of a man whose life experiences have supported the idea that dreams can be accomplished. However this all changes when he is in the loft watching his wife, Sethe, being raped and her milk being "taken" by the schoolteacher's nephews. Unable to fight or defend Sethe, he is broken by experiencing for the first time the helplessness of slavery.

Through Halle's relationship with his children we see a difference between paternal and maternal connections with kin. A mother's bond is shown to be much stronger towards her children while a father's bond is the strongest towards the mother.

This is the way they were--had been. All of the Sweet Home men, before and after Halle, treated her to a mild brotherly flirtation, so subtle you had to scratch for it.

First hint of who her husband was and shows part of Halle's character in how we can see that he wasn't intensely overprotective

"When she say Halle went?"

"Eighteen fifty-five. The day my baby was born."

Tells of how Halle, a strong and hopeful man, seems to have given up on life the day that Denver was born, not because of the birth of his daughter but because he had been forced to watch Sethe being raped which broke his spirit.

And so they were: Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, Paul A Garner, Halle Suggs and Sixo, the wild man. All in their twenties, minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, rubbing their thighs and waiting for the new -the one who took Baby Suggs' place after Halle bought her with five years of Sundays. Maybe that was why she chose him. A twenty-year-old man so in love with his mother he gave up five years of Sabbaths just to see her sit down for a change was a serious recommendation.

Halle is shown akin to the rest of the sweet home men in how he has carnal desires like the rest of them and shows him in a very normal light. However this is very quickly contrasted at the mentioning of how he bought his mother's freedom which immediately makes him stand out in a positive way so as to make the audience understand Sethe's attraction to Halle.

How different they were without her, how they laughed and played and urinated and sang. All but Sixo, who laughed once--at the very end. Halle, of course,

was the nicest. Baby Suggs' eighth and last child, who rented himself out all over the county to buy her away from there.

Describes the actions of the Sweet Home men without the presence of Sethe. Halle is said to be “the nicest” and being that his definition in the eyes of Paul D is “nice” then we can assume he wasn’t merely superficially “nice” but rather he had kindness in his heart to the point where he would “rent himself out” to buy his mother’s freedom but is stated in a differed way in how there is more of an emphasis on how he is not just working but subjecting himself to further slavery and working against the rules of the “sabbath” as was stated earlier.

Not since Halle had a man looked at her that way: not loving or passionate, but interested, as though he were examining an ear of corn for quality.

Halle was more like a brother than a husband. His care suggested a family relationship rather than a man's laying claim. For years they saw each other in full daylight only on Sundays. The rest of the time they spoke or touched or ate in darkness. Predawn darkness and the afterlight of sunset. So looking at each other intently was a Sunday morning pleasure and Halle examined her as though storing up what he saw in sunlight for the shadow he saw the rest of the week. And he had so little time.

Examines the relationship between Halle and Sethe in how it is not a passionate relationship like one would expect due to the actions and desires of the Sweet Home men as they awaited her impending arrival. Rather there is a sweetness to it and this overall contrasts the schoolteacher’s ideas that the slaves are merely animals because animals would be raping animals (“cows”) like they were in the beginning yet at Sethe’s arrival and eventual marriage to Halle, Halle is shown to be more “civilized” than he was portrayed before.

"Halle's nice, Sethe. He'll be good to you."

Over and over again it is repeated that Halle is “nice” and a good person and will be good to Sethe yet this image of a good, wholesome and kind Halle is contrasted in how he is eventually driven mad with grief in the loft.

Both Halle and Sethe were under the impression that they were hidden.

Scrunched down among the stalks they couldn't see anything, including the corn tops waving over their heads and visible to everyone else.

...

Halle wanted privacy for her and got public display.

The concept of privacy is related to being civilized and human and in this sentence is what Halle and Sethe long for and think they have achieved through marriage and yet though they think they have found that privacy within the field, in reality they are still out in the open and everyone knows what they’re doing and the intimacy/privacy is false and lost because in the end they are merely livestock.

But it was like Halle said. She didn't want to be the only white person on the farm and a woman too. So she was satisfied when the schoolteacher agreed to come.

Halle seems very sensible if he was able to predict Mrs. Garner's actions after the death of her husband. He understands the position that Mrs. Garner is in and in that we can predict he also understands the perspective of whitefolk as a whole as well.

By the time he got to Ohio, then to Cincinnati, then to Halle Suggs' mother's house, he thought he had seen and felt it all. Even now as he put back the window frame he had smashed, he could not account for the pleasure in his surprise at seeing Halle's wife alive, barefoot with uncovered hair--walking around the corner of the house with her shoes and stockings in her hands.

Halle leaves such a strong impression upon Paul D that he refers to everything that is of Baby Suggs and Sethe as "Halle Sugg's mother's house" and "Halle's wife".

"What Halle ever do to you? Halle stood by you. He never left you."

"What'd he leave then if not me?"

"I don't know, but it wasn't you. That's a fact."

"Then he did worse; he left his children."

"You don't know that."

"He wasn't there. He wasn't where he said he would be."

"He was there."

"Then why didn't he show himself? Why did I have to pack my babies off and stay behind to look for him?"

"He couldn't get out the loft."

"Loft? What loft?"

Here we see a clear example of how Halle's character is shown through memories and conversations and more is continually being learned about Halle because information is revealed to the reader and to the other characters over time rather than everything being revealed from Halle's point of view all at once. Halle's death makes him unable to represent himself, his feeling, his entirety which in a way reflects slavery because at the "end" of slavery it's not truly over either. As the memory of Halle survives and haunts Sethe and all who knew him, so to does slavery in the form of Beloved.

"If he is alive, and saw that, he won't step foot in my door. Not Halle."

"It broke him, Sethe." Paul D looked up at her and sighed. "You may as well know it all. Last time I saw him he was sitting by the chum. He had butter all over his face."

In comparison to the lively and hopeful, "nice" character that is set up about Halle beforehand, seeing Sethe being raped and being unable to do anything about it "breaks" Halle to the point where he is degraded to an animal like state, "smearing butter on his face"

A man ain't a goddamn ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every goddamn minute of the day. Things get to him. Things he can't chop down because they're inside. (pg 81).

Paul D refers to Halle as an axe who has always been trying to cut down what we can assume to be “Trees”, “woods”, or “jungle” which in all refers to slavery. Paul D says that a man is NOT an axe, NOT a tool, NOT tireless which we can take as Halle became tired for once. His dreaming spirit broken which is represented in how Halle smears butter on his own face. This in a sense is similar to how pigs roll in the mud, dirtying himself. Therefore it’s like Halle became degraded to the status of just another animal, like what schoolteacher has been teaching his nephews all along.

"He'll make it. If I made it, Halle sure can."

If Halle had not been broken by watching the schoolteacher’s nephews take Sethe’s milk, he would have made it to freedom.

Garner, Mrs. Garner, herself, Halle, and four boys, over half named Paul, made up the entire population.

Garner's boys, including Halle, did all of that--which was a blessing since she could not have managed it anyway

There seems to be a separation between Halle and the Pauls. We see this first in his naming, that he is not Paul H but Halle Suggs. When Garner’s boys are referred to, it is necessary to add “including Halle” in order to clarify the group. Halle seems to be more individual and freer than the rest of the slaves on Sweet Home.

Her hip hurt every single day--but she never spoke of it. Only Halle, who had watched her movements closely for the last four years, knew that to get in and out of bed she had to lift her thigh with both hands, which was why he spoke to Mr. Garner about buying her out of there so she could sit down for a change. Sweet boy. The one person who did something hard for her: gave her his work, his life and now his children.

We can note the observant, considerate, and caring nature of Halle and how un-slavelike he was. It seems that he wasn’t oppressed by the nature of slavery in the same way the rest were perhaps because he had his mother, perhaps because he had a wife, perhaps because he had children, and perhaps because he had good “owners”. He had so many notions of control and ownership that made him feel like his own person and all of this together gave him a false image of a softer sort of slavery. And in the loft, the weight of slavery finally fell upon him and broke him.

When Mr. Garner agreed to the arrangements with Halle, and when Halle looked like it meant more to him that she go free than anything in the world, she let herself be taken 'cross the river. Of the two hard things standing on her feet till she dropped or leaving her last and probably only living child--she chose the hard thing that made him happy, and never put to him the question she put to herself: What for? What does a sixty-odd-year-old slavewoman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for? And when she stepped foot on free ground she could not believe that Halle knew what she didn't; that Halle, who had never drawn one free breath, knew that there was nothing like it in this world. It scared her.

Paul D used the money he worked for to buy his mother’s freedom even though she didn’t have that much longer to live and he did it because it probably “meant more to him that she go free than anything in the world”.

The prickly, mean-eyed Sweet Home girl he knew as Halle's girl was obedient (like Halle), shy (like Halle), and work-crazy (like Halle). He was wrong.

Sethe is shown to be unknowingly very similar to Halle. In a way this similarity in spirit parallels Sethe and Halle's relationship in how they weren't passionate lovers but rather like siblings as was explained earlier in how Halle would look at Sethe.

They buttered Halle's face; gave Paul D iron to eat; crisped Sixo; hanged her own mother.

We see a shift in Sethe's view of Halle not making it to 124 in how she says "they buttered Halle's face" as if they were physically there smearing it on his face for him because they might as well have because it's the whitefolks actions that broke him.

When Halle came in I asked him what he thought about schoolteacher. He said there wasn't nothing to think about. Said, He's white, ain't he?

I said, But I mean is he like Mr. Garner?

"What you want to know, Sethe?"

"Him and her," I said, "they ain't like the whites I seen before.

The ones in the big place I was before I came here."

"How these different?" he asked me.

"Well," I said, "they talk soft for one thing."

"It don't matter, Sethe. What they say is the same. Loud or soft."

Shows that Halle views all whites the same and when it's mentioned that there are different kinds by Sethe, Halle is confused because he's never really experienced truly cruel slave owners because he's lived under Mr. and Mrs. Garner his entire life. However he still understands that despite being "soft" or "loud", slavery is still slavery.

"Still, he did it. Let you work it off."

"Uh huh."

"Wake up, Halle."

"I said, Uh huh."

"He could of said no. He didn't tell you no."

"No, he didn't tell me no. She worked here for ten years. If she worked another ten you think she would've made it out? I pay him for her last years and in return he got you, me and three more coming up. I got one more year of debt work; one more."

It seems that Halle didn't really understand how lucky he was that Mr. Garner allowed him to buy Baby Suggs' freedom. He is unable to appreciate the rarity of it because he's never seen anything else and when Sethe expresses surprise at it, he doesn't even consider what it'd be like if Mr. Garner says no. Even when it comes to paying it off he sees it as a job where he works and is rewarded and through this he is freed from slavery in a sense but he is still trapped in the institution no matter what.

Garner called and announced them men--but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? That was the wonder of Sixo, and even Halle; it was always clear to Paul D that those two were men whether Garner said so or not.

Paul D is able to notice how even though Garner called the Sweet Home guys men, Halle and Sixo were the only ones that really were in Paul D's eyes.

That she would rattle, and that would be the sign. Sixo was going, his woman was going, and Halle was taking his whole family. The two Pauls say they need time to think about it.

Halle is one of the only ones who makes a quick immediate decision that he is going to run away and not only he but his entire family as well. We see how Halle holds freedom in very high regard and though realizes the dangers, he has come to the conclusion that for his entire family death is a worthy adversary for freedom. This spirit is taken up by Sethe who kills Beloved in order to stay with Halle's dreams of pursuing freedom despite the cost.

Halle will bring Sethe and the three children

The act of bringing Sethe and the children is like leading and providing, traits that are related to manliness and masculinity. However in the end Halle is unable to because of his madness and Sethe is forced to step up to the plate.

Maybe Halle got in the barn, hid there and got locked in with the rest of schoolteacher's stock. Maybe anything. He disappeared and everybody was on his own.

The most likely possibility of what happened to Halle after his disappearance is this scenario in which he degrades to the point of being just another animal amongst the schoolteacher's livestock.