

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol.6.Issue.2.2019 (Apr-June)

ISSN  
INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

AN IMPACT AND REMINISCENCE ON TONI MORRISON'S "GOD HELP THE CHILD"

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.6219.32>



ABSTRACT

In my study, I attempt to shed light on the stigmatization of African-American women by white American beauty standards. Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child* (2015) provides an insight into the African – American girls and women's daily struggles with regards to their external appearance. The study emphasis on the hardness and stresses on the interpretation of the individual, the importance in the role of mother, its influence being disordered and traumatic behaviour resulting from an unsettling and disturbing past memories and experience. My study focuses on the protagonist, Bride, who is led to question her self-constructed adult Identity and to address her past. In the course of the plot, Brides external appearance is textually fore grounded as the privileged site for the construction of her Identity, whereby the marks of an identity crisis appears as symptoms of a childhood trauma. This article aims at analysing how the novel's revelatory structure links the apparently unrelated transformations undergone by Bride into a unique narrative of secrecy and trauma. My approach to the novel draws on black feminism, Gender studies, trauma studies and narratology in an attempt to bridge the gap between two apparently distant aspects, past memory and its impact for survival in terms of memory for an individual livelihood. The article comments on the ways in which Morrison's novel deals with the problems of individual trauma and the oppressive power of memory. The foremost aim of this paper is to reveal the mechanism of memory – in terms of re-memory as Morrison puts it in her novel through the paradigms of Paul Ricoeur on how individual memory shifts into a collective way. This also means Bride's history becomes African-American's collective history. The principle objective of the study is to analyse the psychological tactics adopted by the black characters to erase the past memories in order to survive in an adverse environment.

KEYWORDS : memory, trauma, identity, black feminism

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a moment or an event that is so sheering and horrific that it is best to try to push it further and further back into your mind when traumatized, it is very normal to close the memory and for self-defense to suppress the terrible emotional experience. Sometimes this neglecting and abandoning might

be the best way to forget and so do the characters Bride and Brooklyn in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*. Trying to ignore their past and to avoid any related confrontations, they try to forget their haunted memories in *God Help the Child*. But I think this forgetting is permanent and it lasts only until the smallest event prompts the memory and then the formidable past is experienced once again as painful as it once was. Toni Morrison carries Lula Ann on a kind of Journey from being a child who identifies herself with adulthood, to a woman who begins to identify herself as a human being Morrison brings this picture to life by letting Bride face her childhood trauma as past and bring to mind the events that she worked extremely hard to suppress and to forget. It seems impossible for her to remain in denial of the past. I argue that the function of memory concerning the past experience of the main characters depends upon their spatial and temporal relationships both in the individual and the collective levels of the memory.

In most of her novels, Morrison focuses on past events and their influence on the present. Morrison describes her own motivation for inserting the past memories in her works: Morrison's own non-linear family history also contributes to this focus because she had strong influences from her parents. Every woman was responsible for fostering her own emotional development by defining her identity, preserving her dignity and charting her destiny.

## DISCUSSION

When the case of the novel is considered, remembering can be seen as a creative and natural process associated with recollecting past events, while memory is regarded as a conscious act. According to Ricoeur, "Memory must belong to the realm of interiority because individuals see themselves as the true possessors of their own memories" (Lavenne et al. 2005). Along with the terms of remembrance and memory, there appears in the novel another term, "rememory". Memory being a passive and static force dependent on the rememberer (more individual). While "re-memory", sounds as if it is an active power independent of the one who remembers (more collective and past oriented). Therefore it is possible to revisit memories both physically and mentally and as such it spans around the region between personal memory and collective memory taking past and present mingle which intensifies memory through making it more dynamic. Trying to ignore their past and to avoid any related confrontations, they try to forget their haunted memories in *God Help the Child*. But I think this forgetting is permanent and it lasts only until the smallest event prompts the memory and then the formidable past is experienced once again as painful as it once was. Toni Morrison carries Lula Ann on a kind of Journey from being a child who identifies herself with adulthood, to a woman who begins to identify herself as a human being. Morrison brings this picture to life by letting Bride face her childhood trauma as past and bring to mind the events that she worked extremely hard to suppress and to forget. It seems impossible for her to remain in denial of the past. I argue that the function of memory concerning the past experience of the main characters depends upon their spatial and temporal relationships both in the individual and the collective levels of the memory. Bride was confronted in her haunted life with the most terrifying experiences her life was full of loss, fright and abuse. All the events that happened from her childhood would drive any other person completely insane but Bride was so strong and she found a way for her survival. She believed that she was able to live a peaceful life, but eventually that turned out to be utterly impossible, Bride was desperate to forget not only the bad memory but also the things she once had allowed herself to feel and to have such as love and hope, these she tried to leave behind, as she was supposed to keep her from getting mad by being captured by her terrible past. But Brooklyn himself had chosen the same way as Bride had to be able to move on, forgetting the past for him too it was hard to talk about the things that had happened. Like Bride he too was confronting a struggle with his dark history of the past. Those who cannot let go of the past cause self-destruction and those who do let go of the past choose to respect and accept it and to mourn for the past find unexpected freedom.

In his introduction to *Psychology*, C.T. Morgan writes, The black man as a member of an ethnic minority was expected to reject his own cultural past and identity and embrace American values from hair style and clothing to aspirations and cultural heroes. Many American also did this but to little avail for white people continued to see black skin and African features as synonymous with an alien and inferior culture. (136)As black women have come into new awareness of their powers, they have struggled to liberate

themselves, and have enriched and expanded the international corpus of black literature. They feel the need to get rid of stereotypes and break through the myths and wish to survive whole. A vast amount of experimental evidence indicates that learning new things interfaces with our memory of what we learned earlier and prior learning interfaces with our memory of thing learned later. People generally remember pleasant events more often than they do unpleasant ones; the unpleasant memories have been repressed. Thematically, there is a lot in here about erasure, not only Bride's Richard Matheson-reminiscent fairy tale reduction, some of it involving what appears to be a magic razor, Sweetness erasing Lula Ann as much as possible, Sofia, the convicted Molester, doing her best to erase Bride from her life, as Bride had attempted to erase her guilt for what she had done, and it can be no accident that bride is the designer of cosmetics, and even thinks about people in terms of how the right makeup can erase their flaws. In *God Help the Child*, Toni Morrison explores the relationship between the horrors of haunting memories causes so much pain for the characters who endured physical abuse as well as psychological and emotional hardships, former characters may try to block out the pain, failing to reconcile with their past. As this novel is set in contemporary times that revisits themes from the past that are central to understanding American society. Bride's unjust and tragic childhood that haunts her present and doesn't allow her to enjoy her success as an entrepreneur is at the end, a metaphor for the US history, drenched as it is in racism.

Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* leafs through the consequences of the recurrence of the past terrible experiences in the makeup of the present and the memory of childhood traumas on the individual's psyche. A cursory reading of the novella does not reveal, at first glance, the post-traumatic stress disorder the two characters, Booker and Bride, are caught in, as the love story of this damaged young couple is the direct and immediate concern of the text.

Nevertheless, a scrutinous analysis manages to trace the impact of childhood trauma the two characters, Bride and Booker, have endured. The recurrence of the buried experiences, in accordance with the manifestation of the unconscious is always plausible and probable.

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