Childhood is “not a story to pass on”: Trauma and Memory Paradox in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

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Abstract

This paper examines how Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child* is structured around the paradox of memory; that is, the need to remember and to disremember the past. On the one hand, Bride has to relive her memory in order to confess her lies and in order to find her authentic self. On the other hand, Booker has to forget the past in order to conduct an active life. Memory centralizes Booker as the African voice when he relates the story of his brother’s abuse, that is to say, the abuse of the African culture. But, at the same time, it decentralizes him from the future projects he desires to achieve since he spends most of his time lamenting the loss of his brother. Bride, at first, believes that memory is the worst thing about healing, but, then, she realizes the reverse. By remembering the past, Bride reaches recovery. She becomes the mother figure of her Black community who wears the earrings of wisdom, spirituality and culture.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child*, the paradox of memory, childhood and trauma.

1-Introduction

Historically, Blacks have been inhumanly enslaved, raped and tortured, and even after breaking the shackles of slavery, stereotypes continue to corrosively influence the construction of their identity. In her works, Toni Morrison highlights the issue of racism and its destructive effects on African American community. She plays the role of the mother figure that passionately embraces her children and teaches them how to survive in a white racist society. Morrison preludes her *God help the Child* with an extract from the Bible stating that: “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not” (LUKE 18:16). Jesus, the preacher of the human soul, is no longer appropriated by whites. He addresses children, blacks and whites, to come unto him, the symbol of love, help and sacrifice, in order to espouse his own virtues and forbid the racist materialist society from perverting their own innocent souls. Morrison wonders how African American community can attain solidarity if children are not encircled by a functional family that is founded on love and conviction.

In fact, issues of race, inferiority and legacies of slavery continue to shape the Afro-American society, which deepens the psychological wound of black people. Like the colonized people who are left
traumatized after an oppressive colonial experience, African Americans are still living the trauma of racism. It therefore seems logical to approach the work of trauma theorists in order to grasp the legacies of colonialism and slavery. Cathy Caruth has been a distinguished theorist in the area of trauma studies. In Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (1996), she defines trauma as an “overwhelming experience of sudden and catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.” (11) As this quotation suggests, the effects of the traumatic experience are felt tardily through hallucinations, flashbacks or nightmares.

Moreover, trauma theory sheds light on the psychic problems that result from the objectification of individuals as David Lloyd has argued in his essay ‘Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?’ (2000): “Trauma entails violent intrusion and a sense of utter objectification that annihilates the person as subject or agent.” (212-24) This annihilation of subjectivity may also be seen in internalised racism. Fanon highlights this phenomenon in Black Skin, White Masks. Accordingly, he states: “Through the call of the other, the black person is stripped of subjectivity, and becomes conscious of himself as merely an object “in the midst of other objects […] not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.” (109-10) This suggests that African American identity is specifically generated by being defined as black by a white person. Other theorists have discussed the possibility of ‘transmitting’ trauma from the survivor to the testimony’s witness, or even later to generations of the survivor’s descendants.

As Luckhurst proposes in The Trauma Question (2008):

Trauma […] appears to be worryingly transmissible: it leaks between mental and physical symptoms, between patients (as in the ‘contagions’ of hysteria or shell shock), between patients and doctors via the mysterious process of transference or suggestion, and between victims and their listeners or viewers who are commonly moved to forms of overwhelming sympathy, even to the extent of claiming secondary victimhood (3)

Here, it is clear that the effects of trauma may extend beyond the immediate victims. This concern with transmitting trauma can also be found in the work of Marianne Hirsch, who has used the term ‘postmemory’ in her critical works since 1992. In ‘The Generation of Postmemory’ (2008), Hirsch defines the term as a way of explaining what she calls the belated ‘memories’ experienced by those who did not directly witness the traumatic events. Postmemory is “a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove.” (103)

In fact, trauma is a recurrent theme in the works of Toni Morrison. She often highlights the dark spots of the past that haunt the majority of African American characters. In ”Shared Memory: Slavery and Large-Group Trauma in Beloved and Paradise,” Evelyn Jaffee Schreiber shows how Beloved captures "the inherited and bodily aspects of communal trauma” (27), while Paradise asserts that "the generational transmission of slavery's trauma produces a cultural history that cannot be forgotten” (28). Schreiber further states that, in Beloved, Morrison's ex-slaves "carry the generational memory of abuse" and their
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"post-slavery reality reactivates the prior bodily experience and threat of real bodily harm” (36). In “Inherited and Generational Trauma: Coming of Age in The Bluest Eye, Sula, and Song of Solomon,” Schreiber examines the impact of racial trauma on the African American experience and demonstrates how inherited historical, community, and familial trauma complicate the lives of characters like Pecola Breedlove, Nel Wright, Sula Peace, and Milkman Dead, who are “shaped by their parents' trauma” (65). In God Help the Child, Wang and Wu (2016) notice that the novel chronicles childhood trauma by investigating the impact of skin colour on familial solidarity and personal life. Their study goes further to argue that this novel points out to a whole nation’s trauma rather than an individual trauma (pp 107-114). In “Making of the body: Childhood trauma in Toni Morrison’s God Help the Child”, MA Yan and Liu Li-hui demonstrates how childhood trauma passes from one generation to another, and eventually becomes the whole nation’s collective memory (pp 19-23).

It is worth mentioning that in God Help the Child, scholars have covered Bride’s childhood trauma and its impact on her adulthood, but they sparsely probe into the negative effect of Booker’s traumatic memory on his own personality. Accordingly, this paper aims to echo the paradox of memory in God Help the Child. That is, it shows how memory can be negative as well as positive for Booker and Bride. Some critics like Christine McLeod highlight the memory paradox in Morrison’s Beloved as a way to show whether the history of slavery needs to be spoken or not. In her “Black American Literature and Postcolonial Debate”, Christine McLeod (1997) notes that the repeated sentence on the closing pages of Beloved “It was not a story to pass on” (Morrison 1987, 274-275) reflects the paradox of memory. With emphasis on the final preposition, the sentence refers to the fact that Beloved’s story is extremely painful to be narrated, and, subsequently, should not be transmitted to succeeding generations. But, with the emphasis on “pass”, the sentence means the opposite, that is, those who have received the story should assume the responsibility to transmit it. Therefore, Beloved highlights the theme of remembering and disremembering the past. Like Beloved, which is not a story to pass on, childhood in God Help the Child is not a story to pass on. It fluctuates between the dual tension of remembering and forgetting. Childhood memory is a healing power for Bride’s self-inflicted pains as she needs to confess her lies and to reconcile with her Blackness, and meanwhile it impairs Booker’s psychology as it immerses him in the whirl of silence, disability and inaction. This paper focuses on the main characters, Bride and Booker, who have transmitted their traumatic childhood to the reader through the trope of memory. Nevertheless, memory, in this novel, is paradoxical in that it acts as a connector and disconnector. The absence of memory can lead to dysfunction, but, paradoxically, memories that excessively generate emotions can be equally disabling. On the one hand, memory helps Bride to re-connect with her own authentic self. On the other hand, it disconnects Booker from his current life and confines him in the chains of passivity.

2- Memory is “the worst thing about healing” for Booker

Booker’s memory foregrounds the intellectual atmosphere and the familial solidarity he grows up in. He makes reference to Saturday conferences in which two necessary questions are asked for every child: “What have you learned that is true? What problem do you have?” (Morrison 2015, 112) This reverses
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the Americentric or Eurocentric thoughts that consider black families as ignorant and disunited. Similarly, naming the family in alphabetical order shows that African Americans have power to produce language. This de-centers the western paradigm, which is based on the precept that the powerful is the white man. Booker, however, switches to another crucial event which leads to the destruction of his own community; it is the intrusion of the white man into their own communal memory. His memory is imbued with the bloody abuse of Adam. Booker could not re-adapt into an environment his brother is stolen from. Therefore, following his brother’s murder, “Booker had no companion. Both were dead” (Morrison 2015,115). He wants to create a memorial for his brother, “a modest scholarship in his name” (Morrison 2015,124), but his family rejects this. His father tells him: “You are not the only one grieving. Folks mourn in different ways.” (Morrison 2015,124) Booker, then, breaks from his own family. The disruption in Booker’s family comes as a result of the whites’ abusive practices.

The name of Booker’s killed brother “Adam” signifies the root of humankind and innocence. It also represents the first letter A in the family, which is the root of language. His brother and the other five boys “seemed to be representative voice of We are The World” (Morrison 2015,118). “The nicest man in the world” (Morrison 2015,111) silences them because of their call for freedom and equality. But, the question that should be posed here is the following: Who does the nicest man represent? The nicest man is USA that adopts the idealist policy in the eyes of the world but violates “the human rights of 22 million Afro-Americans...[and] still has the audacity or the nerve to stand up and represent himself as the leader of the free world. Not only is he a crook, he’s a hypocrite” (Malcom X 1965). The “small white terrier”(Morrison 2015,119) of the nicest man by which he attracts children stands for the motto of cooperation and loyalty that USA implements in both domestic and foreign spheres. Through such motto, USA allures Americans and different nations to fall in the trap of abuse and exploitation. Moreover, this nicest man does not satisfy his sinister lust by raping the innocence only, but he also inscribes them in his own historical agenda by tattooing them. More pointedly, Booker could not ignore the abuse of his brother which reminds him of slavery, oppression, lynching and segregation in all its forms. For him, this event should not be forgotten as it symbolizes the transgression of African American privacy. It should not be confined to “one line in newspaper’s list of six victims” (Morrison 2015, 120), but it should be, instead, voiced in the courses of history that bypass such calamities.

Booker goes back in memory to supply the reader with the bloody and abusive practices against blacks. Through his mental philosophy, one could question the various secrets behind history and economy. Booker sets off his own journey by questioning the devil of the world that is the American Dream, the nightmare that destroys the moral values, exploits the deprived and seeks gold on the sweat of slaves. The course he attends was about the worth trashing figure of Adam Smith and his disciples who set up the mocking motto of prosperity “Laisser Faire” which should be instead “Laisser Mourir”. For Booker, hypocrisy and exploitation do not exist only in capitalism but even in communist attitudes prophesied by the “chameleon Marx” (Morrison 2015,110) who obliquely seeks totalitarian monopoly over wealth. Moreover, Booker portrays money as the main motive behind the different kinds of oppression and expansion of different empires in the world. He “suspected most of the real answers
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concerning slavery, lynching, forced labor, sharecropping, racism, reconstruction, Jim Crow, prison labor, migration, civil rights and black revolution movements were all about money.” (Morrison 2015, 110) He further states that money perverts the purity and innocence of religion, giving an example of “the bejeweled, glamorously dressed Pope whispering homilies over the Vatican’s vault” (Morrison 2015, 111). Furthermore, Booker points to the denied fact that slaves are the ones who “catapulted the whole country from agriculture into the industrial age in two decades” (Morrison 2015, 111). As a contribution to promote his own black community, Booker sets plans to write books that give voice to African Americans who were not inscribed in history that is written by the White man.

Booker, whose name signifies knowledge, embodies the voice of Afrocentrism that attempts to relocate Africans in human history and to eliminate any kind of subordination to Western epistemology. Molefi Kete Asante (1989) defines Afrocentrism as “placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior.” (6) He stresses the importance of visualizing African history from the perspectives of Africans than those of the west. In Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change, Asante (2003) maintains that: “Europe only gives you a part of history, and most often it is not your history. European and some black European teachers will often dissuade you in your study of your own, but study it anyway and you will become what they do not wish you to become, liberated.” (53) This underscores the white man’s ideological power in manipulating history and knowledge. He plans to spread the White culture and suppress the minor ones.

Morrison does not allocate an independent voice to Booker but uses the omniscient narrator to let the reader know about his life because he represents the voice of African culture which is definitely occluded in Western epistemology. As a point of fact, Afrocentrism opposes both of Eurocentrism and Americentrism that monopolize history and knowledge for the white man whereas African people are peripheralized. Morrison (2015) creates an arena where the two conflicting institutions, Americentrism and Afrocentrism, combat against each other. This scene takes place when Brooklyn, the Americentric voice, attempts to sexually abuse Booker, believing that he will succumb to her power. She assumes that he will be overwhelmed by her glamorous whiteness and tenderness, but she is dazed by his own self-pride. He ignores her and describes her as dung. Brooklyn also does not acknowledge his eagerness for knowledge. She says “He didn’t have a dime to his name” (Morrison 2015, 59). Her vision embodies the Americentric belief that considers African Americans as ignorant; however, his insistence on reading despite her seductive ways shows the opposite. Through Booker, Morrison wants to regain power to Black people who were denied their rights in the Constitution because “Voting, after all, was inextricably connected to the ability to read” (Morrison 1995, 89). She believes that “literacy [is] power” (Morrison 1995, 89).

The name ‘Booker’ does not only connote knowledge, but it also refers to Booker T. Washington who was one of the foremost African American leaders of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and of the contemporary black elites, founding the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Though he was born into slavery, Booker T. Washington strived to continue his own education and became the leading voice of the former slaves and their descendants. He made several contributions to his black community by building the community’s economic strength and pride and by focusing on self-help and schooling. In
fact, Booker, in *God Help the child*, is a mocking version of Booker T Washington. Though he is a knowledgeable person, the death of Adam distracted him from being a black activist like Booker T. Washington. Before the death of Adam, Booker sets an outline for future essays and books that will cover the hypocrisy of American history; however, the murder of his brother shifted the course of his goals. He becomes passive, inactive and entrapped in the memory of his murdered brother. Through Booker, Morrison wants to demonstrate how suffering and segregation can be a strong stimulus for Black individuals to fight for their own rights with knowledge and self pride like Booker T. Washington whose sufferance turns him into an outstanding black activist, recognized by white and black communities.

Although Booker is armed with knowledge and self-pride that is manifest in his confrontation with Brooklyn, he remains disabled and inactive because of his obsession with the memory of his brother. Memory decentralizes him from the future projects he wants to achieve. He seeks security by taking trumpet lessons. In this context, he says that “it was one thing to lose a brother-that broke his heart-but a world without Louis Armstrong’s trumpet crushed it” (Morrison 2015, 114). Booker wants to be Louis Armstrong, the pioneer of Jazz music who glamorizes Black culture through music. For African American, music voices their own pains and trauma like the slaves who used to sing in order to create a kind of solace after the harsh treatment of the slave-owners. Booker wants to escape the harsh reality of his brother’s abuse through music. As a reaction to the Americentric discourse, Booker begins to defamiliarize the white Man’ language by forming “unpunctuated sentences into musical language that expressed his questions about or results of his thinking.” (Morrison 2015, 123) He resorts to music in order to stress his own oral traditions and thus to oppose the dominance of White culture. In fact, music is associated with the aesthetic tradition of Afro-American culture, and by basing her last novel on it, Morrison “simply wanted to write literature that was irrevocably, indisputably Black” (Morrison 1984, 389). The language of the trumpet is a call for Afro-American community to hold on to their authentic cultural identity and to cherish their black color. This call for a communal response is part of the healing process that this novel emphasizes. Though the trumpet represents Booker’s Afrocentric leanings, it consumes a large part of his life. It immerses him in passivity, silence and inaction. He abandons his future plans, and turns into lamenting and commemorating his trauma by cuddling the trumpet. As a point of fact, wallowing in lamentation cannot give justice to the buried, those who were raped, lynched and killed without receiving a proper burial.

Booker realizes his own plight and acknowledges that “memory is the worst thing about healing” (Morrison 2015, 29). In order to liberate himself from the shackles of his past, Booker takes three different measures: First he writes a letter to Adam in which he apologizes for enslaving and entrapping his own soul instead of rebirthing it through fruitful actions. Second, he throws away the trumpet which was reminiscent of his past and which has locked him in the dark room of sadness and mourning. Third, he plans to start a new life with Bride who would fill in the emotional gap inside him. By taking such measures, Booker succeeds in burying his own past in order to start a new healthy life. He starts to think and to work on his book projects that will elucidate the political, historical and economical anathemas of his community.
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3-Memory “is the [best] thing about healing” for Bride.

Unlike Booker who needs to disremember the past, Bride needs to remember it. Bride’s painful memory starts from the day of her delivery when her mother projects an appalling gaze on her blue-black skin. The underestimation Bride receives from her mother has traumatized her. Sweetness imputes the shame of her daughter’s color to the racist society that surrounds her. She thinks that being a colored woman is considered a hindrance in society, so what about possessing such midnight skin? This seems more embarrassing for her. The wound that Bride incurs in her childhood is incredible. Instead of finding security and solace at home, she receives self-loathing and disgust. Sweetness is the opposite of the mother figure in Langston Hughes’s “Mother to Son,” who teaches her children how to be proud of their race and culture. Instead, she teaches her daughter how to lower her head in streets and not to respond to any stereotypes. Bride’s schoolmates treat her like “a spill of ink on white paper” (Morrison 2015, 56). Bride depicts her submissiveness to the prejudices she encounters as “lethal viruses through [her] veins, with no antibiotic available” (Morrison 2015, 57).

When growing up, Bride decides to retaliate. She develops a strong and daring immunity by embracing the American Dream. She becomes a successful woman, owning a line in a cosmetic company. She believes that success will make people appreciate her existence in a white society. She strengthens her black beauty by wearing white clothes that stand for the white mask. Even her name ‘Bride’ signifies beauty inside whiteness. Furthermore, Sweetness becomes more satisfied with her daughter because she is using her blackness “in her advantage beautiful white clothes” (Morrison 2015, 43). In the early stages of her work, Jeri requires Bride to reserve the black-white apartheid wall in her physical appearance by disparaging her from putting on makeup. He wants her to be a Black woman inside white clothes. Respectively, he says: “Just you, girl. All sable and ice. A panther in snow” (Morrison 2015, 34). He reveals his racist and exploitative intentions, saying: “Black sells. It’s the hottest commodity in the civilized world.” (Morrison 2015, 36). Besides, the name of the product line “You, Girl” that Jeri proposes to Bride embeds racist connotations. Racism is clear in Jeri’s words, which can basically be interpreted to mean: You, Black exotic girl who needs Cosmetics to hide her ugliness. However, Bride tends to liberate her product line from any kind of racism by devoting it to “girls and women of all complexions from ebony to lemonade to milk” (Morrison 2015, 10).

Bride believes that “Except for Sylvia, Inc., and Brooklyn, she felt she had been scorned and rejected by everybody all her life” (Morrison 2015, 98), but she is absolutely wrong because both of them are exploiting her blackness. First, the company commodifies her and transforms her into a one-dimensional girl. She becomes interested only in her good-looking physical appearance. Bride’s emphasis on her physical beauty reflects her traumatic absorption of the black color. Secondly, Brooklyn tends to exploit Bride’s Blackness to achieve her own wicked plans. She pretends to be her intimate friend but her language reveals the evil inside her. She exposes to the reader her hidden desire to take over Bride’s success. In this context, she says: “I’ll take care of everything at work. Bride will be on sick leave for a long time, and somebody has to take on her responsibilities. And who knows how that might turn out?”
Her language is pregnant with racist signs when she says: “How can she persuade women to improve their looks with products that can’t improve her own? There isn’t enough You, Girl foundation in the world to hide eye scars, a broken nose and facial skin scraped down to pink hypodermis.” (Morrison 2015, 26). Bride is aware of Brooklyn’s exploitative plans for “she is [the] acting regional manager now” (Morrison 2015, 57), but she tries to ignore this fact by showing to the reader that Brooklyn is “the one person [she] can trust. Completely” (Morrison 2015, 22). In another passage, she says: “I couldn’t have been healed without Brooklyn”. (Morrison 2015, 57) Bride is so submissive to Brooklyn because if she loses her, she will be again self- alienated and isolated like in her childhood. She will have no surrogate friend especially after the man with whom she feels emotionally secure abandons her. This man is Booker, the black man. With him, she does not need Brooklyn at all; she feels confident and strong. In this vein, Brooklyn describes Bride when she is with Booker as “confident, not so needy or constantly, obviously soliciting praise” (Morrison 2015, 58).

Because of Booker’s departure, Bride’s trauma exacerbates. She keeps replicating the last words he said before his departure: “You are not the woman I want.” (Morrison 2015, 8) These words are uttered on the same day she decides to revive her own memory, which is imprisoning a desperate white woman her for fifteen years. Bride’s lie comes because of the traumatic atmosphere she grows up in. In order to gain a smile from her stern Sweetness, Bride accuses an innocent white woman of child abuse. Though she achieves tremendous success in her life, this lie is still haunting her memory. On that day, she wants to correct her own mistake, believing that money and Makeup would compensate what has been lost of Sophia’s life. However, Sophia declines Bride’s offer. She bristles with irritation and welcomes Bride with harsh whipping. After this accident, Bride’s healing process begins. Respectively, Sophia says “Am putting the Black back together, healing her” (Morrison 2015, 77). Bride loses her pearl earrings at Sophia’s house doors. These earrings are a reward from her mother for her testimony against Sophia. As a sign of redemption, Bride loses her mother’s gift at her victim’s door to launch a new life. However, Bride is not completely healed. She has to reconcile with her Blackness that is embodied in Booker. In this vein, she says: “Booker was the one person she was able to confront--which was the same as confronting herself” (Morrison 2015, 98).

Bride’s quest for blackness requires a means of transportation, that is, memory. What is distinct for memory is its reflection in Bride’s bodily changes that are represented in chaste earlobes, fall of hair, flatness of her chest, her shrinking body and her delayed menstrual period. One could notice that her childhood trauma has taken a corporeal form. In this respect, Laura Di Prete (2003) argues that “the body becomes the vehicle through which trauma is told.” (2) By the same token, Freud (1957) argues that repressed traumatic memories resurrect themselves in corporeal forms through the metaphor of “the foreign body”. Accordingly, he says: “the memory of trauma acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work.” (6) It is worth mentioning that Bride makes an inevitable contact with her corporeal memory as a way to redeem her past and, thus, to rebirth herself.
This novel can be seen as an example of magical realism in the way it blends the real with the imaginary to create mass delusion and hesitation. Such hesitation helps to create a cultural corrective for the truth. Louis Leal (1967) argues that the magical realist writer “confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts.” (121) Foreman (1995) argues magic realism in Morrison’s novels represents a multifunctional narrative technique since it creates an African-American space that celebrates Afro-American culture. He equally elaborates that magic in Morrison’s “fiction functions to strengthen generational ties to African American cosmologies and thus offer to a deracinated generation strategies of survival” (300). As a case in point, Bride’s magical transformation leads her to question the reality of her blackness, to subvert both of the white gaze and the self-reflexive gaze of her black community, and finally to re-connect with her black origins.

Bride directs her journey to a rural magical land where she can meet with her authentic identity. Morrison purposefully chooses the poor rural Whiskey land, whose name signifies the cheapest kinds of wines in comparison to the luxurious wines of the city such as champagne, to liberate Bride from the perverted spirit of the American Dream. Booker informs the reader that he intends not to give deference to money which is the evil of the world. Instead, he prefers to live in a poor land free from the corruption of the city. In any magical realist novel, the events take place in rural settings because resistance starts from the countryside. For Latin American writers, rural settings represent the reservoir of oral tradition, religious beliefs and rituals, and social customs which inspired them to use magic as their chief artistic technique. Faris (1995) argues that magical realism “has tended to concentrate on rural settings and to rely on rural inspiration,” and she also adds that in such narratives “ancient systems of belief and local lore often underlie the text.” (182) In the same vein, Bride, in this magical realist novel, travels to Whiskey land in order to resist the luxurious life of the city, seeking her own black culture.

In addition to this, Bride comes across a historical memory when she crashes against the biggest tree in California. Supposedly, this tree is the General Sherman which is named after General Sherman who fought in the civil war to outlaw slavery. Bride’s clash with this biggest tree represents her clash with General Sherman who is going to liberate her from the White supremacy embodied in Brooklyn and Sylvia Inc. Injured during this new civil war, Bride starts to discover the real meaning of life. She seeks refuge with a nice couple, Steve and Evelyn, who take care of her without expecting anything in return. She discerns the sense of solidarity and happiness between the members of this White family despite their poverty. There, Bride realizes that money does not create happiness. In fact, the good treatment Bride receives from the white couple regardless of her color emphasizes the theme of humanism and racial tolerance. This theme is also underlined when Bride sacrifices her life to rescue the white girl Raisin who was once abused by her own materialistic mother. Accordingly, Raisin says “My heart was beating fast because nobody had done that before. I mean Steve and Evelyn took me in and all but nobody put their own self in danger to save me. Save my life. But that’s what my black lady did without even thinking about it.” (Morrison 2015, 106) Raisin finds in Bride the mother figure she is looking for. By sacrificing her body to protect Raisin, Bride shifts from being a one dimensional character to being a two dimensional one; she becomes a woman of a beautiful body and a good soul.
It is worth mentioning that Morrison introduces the character to highlight the defects of the white community, mocking the myth of the happy white family. In order to gain wealth, Raisin’s mother forces her daughter to be a young prostitute and kicks her out of the house after rejecting her offer. Bride wonders that “Even Sweetness, who for years couldn’t bear to look at or touch her, never threw her out.” (Morrison 2015, 101) Furthermore, the name Raisin refers to the American Dream that, in Langston Hughes’s words, dries up “like a raisin in the sun” (cited in Rampersad 1995, 426). However, when the poor family embraces Raisin, they change her name to Rain; they want to rebirth her soul through strong familial relations, love and spirituality.

To be a three-dimensional woman, Bride needs to nourish her mind with knowledge and culture by re-uniting with Booker. The final phase of her journey takes place in Queen’s house. This lady, who is Booker’s aunt, contributes by empowering Bride with culture. She depicts Bride as being hungry of Black culture, saying “I know hungry when I see it” (Morrison 2015, 144). Allegorically, the name “Queen” refers to Africa as the queen of culture and traditions. Like Africa, Queen has been colonized by many husbands from different nations. Each of her husbands “snatch[es] a child or two from her, claim[es] them or abscond[es] with them.”  (Morrison 2015, 159) It is worth mentioning that the husbands stand for the colonizers who steal Africans from their own continent to be slaves in their empires. Queen prepares for Bride a United Nations recipe that symbolizes the history of the scramble for Africa. Respectively, she says: “It’s my United Nations recipe from the food of all my husband’s hometown” (Morrison 2015, 147). In fact, Queen reflects the helpless state of Africa whose children are living in the Diaspora.

Queen urges Booker to hang on to Adam “tooth and claw” (Morrison, 117) until the hour of forgetting strikes. Booker, however, misuses her advice and becomes obsessed with the memory of his brother. Queen means that Booker should not forget his own painful past, but he should invest this memory into something worthy that may give justice to all Blacks who died out of segregation. When she notices that this history becomes a burden in Booker’s life, she instructs him to forget the past and start a new life. Queen, however, fails to apply this advice to her own life. She could not forget her snatched daughter Hana. Like Booker, Queen laments the loss of Hana, but she could nothing to restore her. She could only hang her children’s photos in her house in the same way the nicest man tattoos the names of his victims on his shoulder.

Though Queen participates in the abuse of her children by her own submissiveness, she attempts to unite Booker and Bride together. She encourages both of them to meet in a confessional session in which they correct the errors of the past. After confessing her lie to Booker, Bride dives into a deep sleep after which she resurrects with a renewed soul. By remembering the past, Bride reaches her complete recovery and thus her body returns to its normal structure. Bride, at first, believes that “memory is the worst thing about healing” (Morrison 2015, 29), but, then, she realizes that her healing hinges on her reconciliation with the past. The fire scene, where people have gathered to rescue Queen, unites both Booker and Bride and teaches them how to work as one soul in order not to let their original culture, represented in Queen, burn out. In this scene, Bride “pull[s] off her T-shirt and uses it to smother the hair fire” (Morrison 2015, 165). The t-shirt symbolizes Bride’s inauthentic self. By removing it, Bride gets rid of her white mask and
embrace her own authentic identity. When Queen dies, Booker throws her ashes into the river in order to fertilize the land with African culture. He also grants her golden earrings to Bride. These earrings represent the voice of culture and wisdom, which is the weapon of the mother figure in African American community. After wearing Queen’s earrings, Bride empowers herself with culture and becomes the future three-dimensional mother figure.

As a conclusion, both Booker and Bride pass through a painful traumatic childhood. The novel is written in the language of memory. It is rife with intensive use of flashbacks. However, memory plays a dual function. For Bride, memory succeeds in healing the trauma she inherited from her mother. Her mother’s disgust with her blue-black color propels her to destroy the life of an innocent White woman. By reliving her memory and reconciling with her Blackness, Bride successfully heals her traumatic wounds. She becomes the future mother figure and the bearer of culture. For Booker, memory entraps him in a reckless and aimless life. He achieves nothing from the plans he sets before graduation. The trumpet was the language through which he expresses his painful past. When he realizes his own passivity, he throws it off and looks forward to building a prosperous future for his own child. Therefore, memory is the worst thing about healing for Booker, but, paradoxically, it is the best thing about healing for Bride.
References


