

Conjuring Aesthetic Blackness: Abjection and Trauma in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the poetic of the quality or state of being a Black person in *God Help the Child* in order to show how Toni Morrison conjures and exorcises the terror of being a Black person so as to permit her Black protagonists to come to terms with the stigma of their skin colour. Hence, not only does she weave an aesthetic fabric around the abject, but she also proffers a narrative of healing and redemption so that the characters can be redeemed and reach catharsis; and she taps into the “apostrophic imagination” and deconstruction practices in order to transform the bane of being a Black person into a balm of healing, redemption, and rebirth.

Key words: blackness, abjection, trauma, Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child*.

Introduction

Marjorie Pryse contends that Black women novelists are “metaphorical conjure women” whose fiction has contributed to shed light on the commonalities of Black women’s experiences and their shared ancestral roots (Pryse, 1985:5). As one of the most reputable and revered novelists, Toni Morrison is also a conjure woman who has carved out a strong niche in the American literary pantheon. Her writing mirrors the predicament of being born Black in America and the attendant emotional strains spurred by this condition. With her latest oeuvre, *God Help the Child* (2015), Morrison conjures stories of racial prejudice and its impact on Black women’s maternal practices and the psychological development of their children.

Born Chloe Anthony Wofford, Toni Morrison is also a bestseller and an eclectic Nobel Prize-winning author whose creative work has sparked a storm of critical comments and appraisals. This upsurge of critical interest [This critical interest in Morrison can be explained by Ann du Cille's comment: "today there is so much interest in black women that I have begun to think of myself as a kind of sacred text. Not me personally, of course, but me as black woman, the other" (du Cille, 1994:591)] has given rise to a wide range of interpretive possibilities and a wealth of insights into her fiction. Although she is at her mid-eighties, Toni Morrison's creative genius is not on the wane. On the contrary, it seems to have acquired more poise and assurance over the years, particularly, with the release of her eleventh novel, *God Help the Child*.

This latest oeuvre takes up and challenges the main themes of her previous novels like *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. The narrative revolves around a plot of maternal loss with a history of racial hatred at the backdrop. It is a story of lost love and reconciliation, trauma and healing, abjection and redemption. It is above all, the story of a mother whose reluctance to accept her daughter's 'blue-black' colour and provide her with support and love, leads her to commit an abject crime. An innocent woman spends fifteen years in prison because of a false testimony of a little Black girl yearning for mother love and acceptance.

Like *The Bluest Eye* or *Native Son*, *God Help the Child* summons up all the terrors and horrors of blackness (the state of being a Black person). In addition, the novel re-enacts and dramatises the complexity of mother-daughter bond in the context of racial hierarchy where the lighter one's skin, the higher one's status in the social ladder, and the better chance one gets from life. Undoubtedly, the narrative opens the Pandora box of Black motherhood and attending trauma. It lays emphasis on the fact that "what you do to children matters. And they might never forget" (43). Lula Ann Bridewell's experience illustrates the idea that childhood trauma or sins return like lingering ghosts to visit and haunt their subjects in adult life. This return of the repressed shores up the idea of circularity and circling back that has been identified as an aesthetic hallmark of *Beloved* (Page, 1995).

In this paper, attempts will be made to show how Morrison conjures the terror of being a Black person by articulating an aesthetic transcendence framed around the abject and trauma. The aim of such a poetic is not only to reify blackness as an icon of beauty, an economic asset, but more importantly, to invest it with healing and redemptive powers conducive to impel catharsis. The author resorts to the apostrophic and deconstruction techniques to realise her subversive aesthetic of blackness (the quality or state of being a Black person), which makes room for the protagonists to overcome their racial trauma.

Genesis of Trauma: Loss and Self-Hatred

God Help the Child belongs to what Morrison has referred to as "a domestic affair" (Wilson, 1998:134) because it dramatises the 'pain of being black' (Angelo, 1998) in a society where whiteness represents the norm and the socially acceptable, while blackness is relegated at the margin. Set in the 1990s, the novel conjures the ghost of colour prejudice and stereotypes by unveiling its traumatic impact on a child whose birth is tainted by a genealogy of racial hatred and passing.

Sweetness Bridewell, haunted by the terror of blackness (the quality/state of being a Black person), deprives her only daughter of affection in order to preserve her privileged position, and thus, abide by the dominant rule of class solidarity and racial purity. Being “light-skinned, with good hair, what we call high yellow” (3), Sweetness is unwilling to accept her “ugly, too-black little girl” (144) because “ain’t nobody in my family anywhere near that color” (3). In doing so, she unwittingly maintains the iron curtain of racial divide and keeps blackness at bay.

Indeed, *God Help the Child* dramatises the internal racial prejudice that lies at the kernel of Black communities because of the legacy of slavery and white racism. In this regard, *Paradise* (1977) sheds light on the shame and trauma of the ‘disallowing’, which made the inhabitants of Ruby suspicious of outsiders and tenuous about racial purity. It is said that “all of them were handsome ...coal black, athletic, with noncommittal eyes”(160). Proud of their blackness, their horror of whiteness becomes “convulsive” as “they save the clarity of their hatred for the [light-skinned] men who had insulted them in ways too confounding for language.” (189)

The descendants of the founding fathers of Haven or Ruby have internalised this ineffable racial trauma to the extent that difference was perceived to be a threat, and strangers, enemies. Similarly, in *The Bluest Eye*, Geraldine draws a demarcation line between “Niggers and “Coloured” (87). In the same novel, Pauline becomes aloof toward her daughter, Pecola, because “she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (186). She relinquishes her maternal duty toward her and devotes all her time to white children. Consequently, Pecola is deprived of maternal love and support like Lula Ann Bridewell in *God Help the Child*. All these cases illustrate with an acute clarity Morrison’s statement that “there is a clear flight from blackness in a great deal of Afro-American literature. In others there is the duel with blackness (the quality/state of being a Black person), and in some cases“You’d never know” (Morrison, 1988:146). Whatever the stance of the writer, blackness lies at the heart of the conflicts and determines the fate of the characters as well as the aesthetic choices of the authors. As far as Morrison is concerned, she insists, “this black presence is central to any understanding” of American literature, hence, it “should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination” (Morrison, 1992:5).

God Help the Child takes issue with the legacy of ingrained racism and its negative influence on mothering. Every piece of Morrison’s fictional work reveals one aspect of the complexity of Black motherhood and its compelling drama. *God Help the Child*, by emphasising the primacy of maternal responsibility and childcare, also displays that mothering is not “all cooing, booties and diapers”(178). Rather, mothering involves a good deal of adrenaline and the implication of the whole community because Morrison confesses that, “two parents can’t raise a child anymore than one. You need a whole community – everybody to raise a child” (Angelo, 1994:260).

Unfortunately, Sweetness who inherits the patriarchal version of motherhood as an institution [Adrienne Rich has made a landmark contribution in the field of motherhood studies as she has tried to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood “that are superimposed on the other: *the potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential_ and all women _ shall remain under male control.” (Rich, 1986:2)], fails to connect her daughter to the beneficial and empowering nurturance of other women, referred to by O’Reilly as “othermothering” or “community mothering” (O’Reilly, 2004a: 11). Such a bond could have abated the racial trauma of Bride as she would have developed a viable real self, instead of this “false self” which according to Elaine Savory Fido, “is not only the result of patriarchy but the result of trauma between mother and daughter” (quoted in Sougou, 2002: 84). Consequently, Bride is lost, like her own mother, because she lacks solid cultural roots and Black female models to identify with. To paraphrase Guitar in *Song of Solomon*, Bride needs a chorus of aunts and Mamas to build her own self-confidence and identity. These ties are necessary to forge healthy and sound relationship with the community and reach self-love and reconciliation.

Motherhood has always been at the crux of Toni Morrison’s novels. She has always directed her creative searchlight towards the exploration of the Black mother-child dyad, foregrounding the fact that the bond mothers create with their daughters shape and determine the latter’s identity and psychological development. The looser this bond, the greater the daughters’ lack of self-confidence and assertiveness. The tighter this bond, the lesser trauma they undergo. In this regard, Andrea O’Reilly has termed her theory of motherhood “a politics of the heart” in which motherhood is not only a site of power but also a source of empowerment for children (O’Reilly, 2004 a: 1). Following Adrienne Rich’s distinction between motherhood and mothering, a legacy addressed by Andrea O’Reilly (2004b), Gloria Thomas Pillow probes the maternal psyche in Morrison’s work in order to highlight Black mothers’ strategies for survival and nurturing of their offspring (Thomas, 2010). In this framework, Manuela López Ramírez Valls probes the aftermath of toxic mothering (Valls, 2015) in *God Help the Child* by displaying how racial trauma of a mother intertwines with a child growing up to be a daughter and a successful career woman. She contends that Sweetness fails to provide her daughter the three essential maternal values (affection, effective preservation and cultural bearing) that could have equipped her to confront racial injustice and develop a strong sense of Black selfhood (Valls, 2015:115-16).

The novel dramatises the plight of Sweetness who belongs to the light-skinned Black people, referred to as coloured by Geraldine who are also conscious that “the line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant (87). Unfortunately, Sweetness who is all but sweet, gives birth to a baby whose dark skin colour plunged her headlong into the racial nightmares of the past. She opens her narrative with these terms: “It is not my fault. So you can’t blame me. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black..... Tar is the closest I can think of yet her hair don’t go with the skin. It’s different ___ straight but curly like those naked tribes in Australia. You might think she’s a throwback, but the throwback to what?”(3).

Sweetness regards her daughter as a “throwback.” She symbolises the return of the repressed self of Sweetness. She is the reincarnation of the tar women, those who represent “ancient properties” and the “civilization underneath” (Wilentz, 1991). The tar women, like the unnamed woman in yellow that Jadine encounters in Paris in *Tar Baby*, are known also to impel racial consciousness and pride because they shamelessly show off their blue-black untainted colour. But they also constitute a threat to those whose earnest desire is to whiten the race and forget about their ancestry. Sweetness belongs to those who wish to rub out their colour and she does not want her daughter to rub it in. Thus, she refuses to bear responsibility for her daughter’s “Sudanese black colour.” Rather, she lays the full blame on the American history of slavery and racism that has placed whiteness on pedestal and cast blackness (the quality/state of being a Black person) at the lowest level of humanity. Therefore, she justifies her aloofness and callousness by this confession: “I wasn’t a bad mother, you have to know that, but I may have done some hurtful things to my only child because I had to protect her. Had to. All because of skin privileges. At first I couldn’t see past all that black to know who she was and just plain love her. But I do. I really do. I think she understands now” (43).

Sweetness belongs to the “devouring mothers.” Unlike Sethe whose profound love leads her to kill Beloved, Sweetness’s gesture emanates from a selfish desire to preserve skin privilege. If we consider Bride to be the return of the repressed self of her mother, it is possible then to draw a parallelism between her and the eponymous character Beloved. In fact, both girls are daughters of history to use the terms of Asharaf when describing Beloved (Rushdy, 1999). Whilst Beloved has been identified as the ghost of slavery that comes back to haunt the living so that they can remember her and pass on her story, Bride is the daughter of the history of white supremacy and its attendant discourse of racial purification and “one drop rule.” Unlike other mothers, Sweetness advises Bride to call her by her real name instead of “Mother” or “Mama.” It “was safer. Being that black and having what I think are too-thick lips calling me “Mama” would confuse people” (6).

By equating whiteness with beauty and morality, and blackness (the quality/state of being a Black person) with ugliness and immorality, the hegemonic discourse has created a gulf between light-skinned Black people and dark skinned ones. In this framework, those who are black are favoured by nature may choose to pass for white. In this regard, Juda Bennett contends that passing appears in the form of a subplot in Morrison’s fiction. Unlike Nella Larsen, Langston Hughes or Jessie Fausset who directly probe the theme, Morrison invokes the issue through allusion. She identifies three categories of passing figures: those who cannot pass for white physically (*The Bluest Eye*, *Tar Baby*); those who can pass whites but who appear only through memories that are “partially lost, distorted or made ambiguous by the telling” (Golden Gray in *Jazz* and Sing Bird in *Song of Solomon*); and the case of *Paradise* and “Recitatif” where the dynamic of passing moves with a metafictional playfulness between the text to the reader thus, crossing the iron curtain of the colour line (Bennett, 2001:206). Like Pecola, Celie in *Color Purple*, Bride cannot pass white. The absence of maternal love triggers her trauma and self-hatred.

It is undeniable that the loss of maternal love coupled with the loss of Booker Stabern's affection triggers the trauma of Bride. Abandoned by a mother and a boy friend, Bride realises that "She had been scorned and rejected by everybody all her life. Booker was the one person she was able to confront" (98), but confronting him is tantamount to confronting herself because he has become a sort of alter ego to her. In order to cope with this lost love, she sleeps with men whose names she does not remember. So she wonders, "What's going on? I'm young; I'm successful and pretty.... So there! Sweetness. So why am I miserable (53). Bride's life has become too miserable. She has become a human wreck, a degraded person whose sense of self and morality has been upside down.

Her plight bears a striking similarity to that of Booker Stabern who carries the cross of the loss of his older brother, Adam, gruesomely murdered by a child molester. Booker "individualises his feelings to separate them from the sorrow and frenzied anger of other families" (120). He believes that this calamity belongs only to him; it was private and cannot be confined in one line of newspaper headlines (120). To re-enact the pain and keeps the memory of his deceased brother, Booker "had a small rose tattooed on his left shoulder (120). This act resembles the apostrophic which according to Kathleen Marks are "those gestures aimed at warding off, or resisting, a danger, a threat, or an imperative. They mirror, and put into effect that which they seek to avoid: one does what one finds horrible so as to mitigate its horror" (Marks, 2002:2). This self-inflicting pain enables Booker to mourn his brother and exorcise the pain of the loss.

Consequently, love and loss constitute the fulcrum of the traumatic experiences of Bride and Booker. This underlines Paul Gilroy's assertion that stories that dominate Black popular culture are usually "love and loss stories" which, according to him "transcode other forms of yearning and mourning associated with histories of dispersal and exile and the remembrance of unspeakable terror (Gilroy, 201). Such an 'unspeakable terror' informs *God Help the Child* which delves into the marrows of racial trauma and how to overcome it so as to enable healing and redemption. At the heart of the novel is Morrison's conviction that race, although unspeakable in academia and politically correct discourses, still matters even in this post-civil right era with its underpinning colour-blindness discourse. If dominant narratives have masked race by rendering it invisible and unspoken, Morrison's fiction unmasks its intricacies and damage.

In this regard, Delphine Gras relevantly points out that Morrison shatters the myth of post discourse by making it problematic and by laying bare its lies and limits because the novel "disarticulates racial categories, exposing them as detrimental social constructs that still dictate the ways Black female bodies are perceived and treated to this day" (Gras, 2015:3). Hence, the novel is a blow to the so-called colour-blindness discourse that was disparaged in the media and shored up by the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the first Black President in American the history. Indeed, this latest oeuvre unfolds the compelling drama of 'oppressive' mothering and daughterly alienation. It is a tragic-comedy that emphasises the primacy of skin colour and social class as essential factors of identification and social acceptance. The social abjection of Bride's colour and her own dejection reinforce the traumatic backlash that wreaks havoc in her quest for identity.

Precipitating Factors: Abjection and Dejection

Toni Morrison's fiction has been interpreted through the lenses of various theoretical and critical perspectives encompassing and overlapping sundry disciplines. From the gothic to the grotesque, the postcolonial to the postmodernist, to the gendered and the apocalyptic, critics have infused her art with a myriad of signification, insights and aesthetic conjectures. Of all her novels, *Beloved* seems to have attracted the most impassionate critical debates. Justine Tally has compared *Beloved* to a palimpsest because of the range of interpretive possibilities it has generated (Tally, 2001: xv). Regarded as her masterpiece in terms of language, characterization and themes, *Beloved* is deeply rooted in the infamous history of American chattel slavery. The eponymous *Beloved*'s supernatural aura and mystical beauty seem to have confused more than a reader. The uncanny, the magical realism, and the spellbinding narration have confounded and dumbfounded many a critics. Susan Corey writes that *Beloved* is a grotesque "a contradictory figure—positive and negative, attractive and repulsive. Both beautiful and freakish, she is abnormally strong with expressionless eyes, capable of changing shape and character or of becoming invisible" (Corey, 2000:37).

It can be asserted that *Beloved* sets the milestone for the aesthetic experimentation and venture that would inform Toni Morrison's writings over the next twenty-five years. The novel augurs a kind of aesthetic of involved with the quality/state of being a Black person whose contours and sketches began with *Sula*, another eponymous ambivalent and mystical character of Toni Morrison's fictional universe. Karen Carmean explains that *Sula* resists binary oppositions as she challenges the readers' conventional expectations about good and evil. In addition, the narrative is dominated by omissions, absences, paradox, irony and speculation all seasoned with a blending of the real and the supernatural. Hence, she beckons readers to give up dualistic thinking and surrender to the fluidity and open-endedness quality of the narrative (Carmean, 1999: 160). Such an act requires, according to her, an "imaginative exploration into the nature of life and art" (Carmean, 1999: 161).

With *God help the Child*, Morrison not only exposes a new aesthetic of blackness by painstakingly depicting the wounds of racial trauma, but she also throws light on the way that a dominant group fabricates racial abjection by stigmatising a whole category of people as filth, dirt and defilement. How does one feel about one's abjection? How does one confront and conjure social abjection? What does it mean to be cast as an abject? These questions pervade the novel.

In order to delve into these questions, it is axiomatic to define the notion of abjection and its function in Morrison's novel. Abject derives from the latin word *abjectus* which comes from the verb *abdicere* meaning "to cast off." It encompasses the idea of debasement and degradation; the sense of being below the normal standards of human decency and dignity (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Today, the term is synonymous with something 'ignoble', 'sordid' and 'repellent'. Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler have made landmark contribution in the interpretation of the issue. For Butler, the abject designates those: "Unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. (Butler, 1993:3),

This interpretation makes abjection an ambiguous state, a liminal space that disrupts identity. Hence, the abject is what the self strives to repudiate in order to attain the status of subjectivity. For Kristeva, abjection is a “a border” “ an “ambiguity”, it is “a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives” (Kristeva, 1982: 9-10). She warns that it is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules”. (Kristeva, 1982: 4). Kristeva repudiates the connotation of impurity and disease that are commonly invested with the abject by emphasising its subversive and unsettling connotations.

It goes without saying that Lula Ann Bridewell stands in that position of liminality because her colour does not respect positions or borders. Hence, she becomes a real threat to the hard-won light colour and social respectability of Louis and Sweetness Bridewell, her parents. Her colour inspires terror, embarrassment, revulsion and hatred because her “birth skin was pale like all babies’, even African ones, but it changed fast” (5) Terrified by what she terms Lulla Ann’s “terrible color”, she was tempted to strangle the baby but resisted. But what she could not with stand is her husband’s reaction. He blamed her and “treated Lula Ann like she was a stranger”, an “enemy”. He never touched her (5).

Consequently, Louis gives up his fatherly responsibilities by abandoning mother and daughter, blaming Sweetness of infidelity. Sweetness for her part refuses to touch her daughter because her skin colour becomes anathema. She becomes an abject whose “terrible color” revives her mother’s terror of blackness (the quality/state of being a Black person). Bride remembers that her mother hates to have any physical contact with her. She used “to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch. I made little mistakes deliberately but she had ways to punish me without touching the skin she hated.....” (31).

Besides, Bride has “funny-colored eyes, crow-black person with a blue tint, something witchy about them too” (6). Like Pauline who compares Pecola’s eyes to that of a puppy (126), Sweet compares her daughter’s to that of a witch. Witches have historically been cast at the margin. They were relegated to the ‘constitutive outside’ that Butler mentions because they undermine man’s authority and transgress social conventions. Assimilating her daughter to a witch is tantamount to reduce her to the position of an abject, a downgraded, fearful object. The abject, according to Kristeva is what “is jettisoned’, “radically excluded” and which brings the self to a place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1982: 2). Therefore, the abject is located outside the symbolic order. We can apply this notion to Morrison’s *Paradise*. In order to protect themselves from racial mixture, the disallowed groups of Black people who found the all-back town of Ruby have created their own abject groups, the convent women who refuse to abide by their phallogocentric system. As Chia Tsei adeptly remarks, “the social reality of the all-Black community is grounded on the exclusion of ‘out there’ whereby the consistency of the socio-symbolic edifice is formed” (Tsai, 2008: 181).

Importantly, the convent belongs to this “out-there” an abject space that constitutes a threat to the subjectivity and racial purity of ‘the eight rock.’ It therefore disrupts the symbolic order and unsettles the hegemonic masculine logic of the founding fathers. As the realm of the feminine logic, the convent is what is ‘jettisoned’ and radically expelled from the interstices of Ruby because its inhabitants have dared to live without men.

It is reported that “the whole house felt permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain, free of hunters but exciting too” (177). The independence and alleged sexual deviation of the convent women disrupt the heterosexual and male dominated norms of the founding fathers. Consequently, the convent has become the space of abjection *par excellence*.

Yet, Morrison’s genius in depicting the abjection of blackness (the quality/state of being a Black person) in this contemporary fable deserves a rapt attention. She deconstructs the long-standing social abjection of blackness by drawing attention to abject felonies like child molestation, rape and infanticide. The third part of the novel opens with Booker Stabern beating a predator on the brink of molesting a child:

Blood stained his knuckles and his fingers began to swell. The stranger he’d been beating wasn’t moving anymore or groaning.(....). None had apparently noticed the man licking his lips and waving his little white gristle toward them.Obviously the sight of the children was as pleasurable to the man as touching them because just as obviously, in his warped mind, they were calling to him and he was answering their plump thighs and their tight little behinds, beckoning in panties or shorts as they climbed up to the slide or pumped air on the swing. (109).

If the Black self has been cast to the domain of abjection in American society, Morrison shows that the very abject persons are like the strange man who was about to molest an innocent child or Mr. Humboldt who has cruelly assassinated Booker’s brother, Adam. Paedophilia, like any other form of rape, is castigated in Morrison’s fiction. Stories of children molested by lewd and lecherous adult men abound in *God Help the Child*. The story of Raisin, nicknamed Rain by the white couple that rescued her, is a case in point.

Another deconstruction technique at play in this novel which attests to Morrison’s genius and long-standing battle to humanise and valorise blackness, is her strategy to put into the limelight those who are considered to be normal, ordinary and inoffensive by the society but who represent the real danger. Bride has become an object of abjection owing to her skin colour, which, according to Booker “ is a genetic trait” but “not a flaw, not a curse, not a blessing nor a sin (143). His idea echoes James Baldwin’s point that “color is not a human or a personal reality” but “a political reality”, a “delusion” (Baldwin, 1995: 54).

Although inoffensive, Bride is regarded as an enemy by her own parents, a danger to their social identity. In fact, the unnamed man has the appearance of an angel. His “normal-looking” aspect makes him a nice fellow. Ironically, the paedophilic has acquired the status of subjectivity and social respectability because he belongs to the normally acceptable physical traits and colour. Nevertheless, Booker denounces the dupery and fallacy of this normative attitude toward those who have escaped the fate of abjection, stating, “they always said. “ He wouldn’t hurt a fly”. Where did that cliché come from? Why not hurt a fly? Did it mean he was too tender to take the life of a disease-carrying insect cut could happily ax the life of a child? (111).

Alice Manfred has made a similar comment about Joe Track who has coldly murdered Dorcas, his young mistress. Everybody thought he was a “a nice, neighbourly, everybody-knows-him man. The kind you let in your house because he was not dangerous... (73). Morrison has deftly deconstructed this myth in *God Help the Child*. Her lesson is that it is not colour or social class that should define abjection but evil and gruesome deeds and crimes.

In order to conjure the trauma of abjection related to blackness (the quality/state of being a Black person), Morrison makes blackness to symbolise positive things. She invests the colour with a wide range of connotations that contradict the dominant ideology about blackness. In *God Help the Child*, she makes blackness to connote catharsis and cleansing. The objected black character enables others characters to be atoned and redeemed after being confronted to the worst form of abjection. For instance, when Bride decides to repair her mistakes by offering her savings to Sofia Huxley, the teacher she unjustly accuses of molesting a child, she exorcises her feeling of abjection as it is reported here: “that black girl did me a favor. Not the foolish one she had in mind, not the money she offered, but the gift that neither of us planned: the release of tears unshed for fifteen years. No more bottling up. No more filth. Now I am clean and able” (70). In addition, Sofia gets a kind of epiphany when she realises that “freedom is never free. You have to fight for it. Work for it and make sure you are able to handle it (70).

In addition, blackness (the quality/state of being a Black person) becomes the symbol of nurturance, safety and rebirth. Rain calls Bride “my black lady”. A solitary child, Rain confesses that she would like to have a sister like Bride whom she refers to as her “black lady.” She recalls an incident where Bride saves her life: “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. She’s gone now... I miss my black lady” (105-106).

Moreover, blackness becomes a symbol of beauty and sophistication. Bride’s ‘blue-black’ colour which used to be a cross turns out to be the very colour that makes her art object, an icon of beauty, the “main attraction” of a celebration, the inventor of YOU, Girl, the new cosmetic product line (50). Jeri advises her to keep her blackness natural and wear only white colour. Because “Black sells. It is the hottest commodity in the civilized world. White girls, even brown girls have to strip naked to get that kind of attention” (36). The view that Black women’s body has become a hot commodity is reinforced by Ann du Cille’s remark that “Within the modern academy, racial and gender alterity has become a hot commodity that has claimed black women as its principal signifier” (du Cille, 1994:591). In endowing blackness with positive values, Morrison abates the stigma of abjection, enabling, a form of poetic catharsis, which in her narrative, is also a kind of poetic justice.

Finally, through her creative process , Morrison makes the reader feel the power of abjection. She beckons the reader to enter her imaginative world “without any prejudice, without any prefixed notions, but to have intimacy that’s so complete, it humanizes him in the same way that the characters are humanized from within by certain activity, and in the way in which I am humanized by the act of writing” (Ruas, 1993: 109).

It appears that, Morrison invites readers to go beyond their preconceptions and previous experiences in order to enter naked and innocent in a higher sphere of knowledge and experiences that will not only elevate and humanise them, but it will redeem them in an amazing way by enabling catharsis. Through the journey of abjection, both characters and readers are redeemed and humanised so as to enable catharsis.

Conclusion

In conjuring the quality or state of being a Black person, in a post-racial era, Morrison fulfils an apotropaic function. She summons up the most dreadful and repellent stories of blackness in order to solve the racial trauma of her characters and reveal their beautiful, lofty and sublime character. She deconstructs racial mythologies and stereotypes with a success story of a Black woman whose background was marked by a legacy of racial prejudice. In addition, the mysterious shrinking or disappearance of certain parts of Bride's body attests the presence of the uncanny and the grotesque that already inform *Beloved* and *Sula*. Morrison's aesthetic of blackness expounds her own ethical stance geared toward the celebration of the quality or state of being a Black person, hence, blackness and its cultural values. She also subverts the patriarchal institution of motherhood by laying strong emphasis on the empowering and gratifying nature of mothering, displaying by the same token, that it is not "all cooing, booties and diapers"(178).

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