



Object Relations Theory in Morrison's *God Help the Child*: A Psychoanalytic Reading

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Abstract

The aim of this paper, in Morrison's fictional novel, *God Help the Child* (2015), is to examine the detrimental impact of the hostile and violent mistreatment of a light-skinned mother who restrains from nurturing her Black daughter. Nancy Chodorow's (1978) Object Relations Theory helps us determine how patterns of gendered-parenting and early-childhood development contribute to the reproduction of traditional sex roles. Her theory includes three basic "affects", namely attachment, frustration, and rejection, in which the female identity is chiefly based on the inextricable attachment to the mother, and the status of women in culture is defined by the tie between the mother and daughter. These "affects" are universal emotions that are vital for infantile identity formation. Drawing upon her Psychoanalytic theory, the overarching argument of this paper is that the mother is the initial object for the infant to gratify its desires; however, from Freud's (1926) standpoint, her breast, as the source of nurturance, is the first object. For our purposes, traditional theory of Freudian Oedipus Complex is not the primary concern of this paper and Chodorow's (1978) contemporary Object Relations Theory is applied, for Psychoanalytic Feminism contributes to examining the ambivalent nature of motherhood. Our findings indicate that Chodorow elucidates the essence of motherhood in terms of the social constructions in lieu of biological ones. Given both Chodorow's and Freud's (1926) viewpoints, the inextricable maternal bond between Sweetness and Bride, the mother and daughter of the novel, is traumatically distorted once the mother deprives her infant of the maternal milk.

Keywords: object relations, attachment, frustration, rejection, *God Help the Child*

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Introduction

Toni Morrison is one of the most eminent Nobel-Prize-Winning Black female authors who had received many awards for her novels, including Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* (1987) and Nobel Prize for literature. The concept of mothering is a core issue for the Feminist theory, and motherhood has a persistent presence in Morrison's masterpieces. Ghasemi (2010) opines that Morrison's preoccupation with the idea of "motherhood" represents the significance of "maternity" as a pivotal element of a female's existence (p. 243). Motherhood plays a pivotal role in a child's life. It can construct or shatter a child's future if it is of constructive or destructive relations with the children, respectively. Morrison, in her own fiction, prioritizes motherhood and makes it an influential idea in order to give weight to the identity of the Black mothers that furnish the children with sensation and realization of their independent personality. Motherhood is an intricate state in which the Black mothers oscillate between blending feelings of love and hatred towards their children under the dominance of the patriarchy.

In Toni Morrison's fiction, *God Help the Child* (2015), motherhood is a sacred passion, which is unique in nature. Not only does a mother nurture her child but also she gives the child the confidence that stays with it throughout its life. One can provide the child with food and shelter; however, the agony and true sentiments of the child can properly be comprehended by the mother. The Black mother sacrifices herself for the welfare and prosperity of the child and hopes to see the child successful and cheerful throughout its life. Morrison's major fiction, namely *God Help the Child* (2015), is a proof to the sacrifices that the Black mothers make for the prosperity of their children, since the Black mothers had to resort to the hostile mistreatment of their children to apparently save them from the violent White world. The vicissitudes in a child's life are dependent on the nature of the relation that a child has with its bearer. Besides, the stream of motherhood is dependent, to a great extent, on the environment in which a mother exists. Mothers, who live in stable and satisfactory conditions, nurture their children peacefully and wholeheartedly and entertain the basic necessities of their lives. Children are psychologically blessed if they possess nurturing mothers in their lives. Furthermore, their attitude towards life is constructive and meaningful, whereas the Black mothers who belong to slum regions, which are abundant of poverty, ignorance, and slavery, have various perspectives to deal with life. In order to cope with such intricate circumstances, the Black mothers empower their children on hard grounds in order to survive in the racist world, especially if they possess the Black skin. In the African-American context, Black motherhood differs from White motherhood due to the racial problems that the Black women experience. Motherhood has been subjected by patriarchy and the task of mothering is basically procreating new children that will promote patriarchy. Thus, a colored mother should do extra task as compared to the task of the White mother who is responsible for protecting and nurturing her child in order to enhance its identity.

Reinforcing Chodorow's (1978) influential work, namely *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Collins (1999), in "Shifting the Center", remarks, "the work of Chodorow . . . has been highly influential in framing the predominant themes in feminist discourse" (p. 387). As a psychoanalyst, Chodorow (1978) states, "Women's mothering is a central and defining feature of the social organization of gender and is implicated in the construction and reproduction of male dominance itself" (p. 9). Her object relations theory gives a psychoanalytical approach towards an individual's psyche. Chodorow (1978) opines, "psychic structure develops through experiences of anxiety and frustration" (p. 44). Menaces to the self-development create some major anxiety in the psyche and the image of fear that would be repressed in "unconscious" mind. Chodorow (1978) proceeds, "an infant who experiences this anxiety develops instead a 'false self' based on reactions to intrusion" (p. 60). She emphasizes that whatever the infant experiences at its initial stage can construct or shatter its whole personality. If an infant encounters ignorance and abusive behavior, it will affect its adulthood. Her theory has originated from Freudian Oedipus Complex theory that helps us figure out how patterns of gendered-parenting and early-childhood development contribute to the reproduction of traditional sex roles. She elucidates the ideology of motherhood in the light of the social constructions in lieu of the biological ones.

God Help the Child (2015) emphasizes the role of colorism in the form of the mental and physical abuse which the parents inflict on their own children. As Bride, formerly known as Lula Ann Bridewell, becomes successful in her cosmetics business, her private life does not bring her emotional fulfillment. Bride's light-skinned parents are prejudiced against her "Sudanese Black" (p. 2) skin. Bride's father, Louis, even avoids staring at his infant due to his colorist viewpoint and abandons his wife, Sweetness, for cheating on him and leaves her to raise the child on her own. Sweetness is not only emotionally detached from her daughter, but also ashamed of Bride's Black skin. After leaving home, Bride falls in love with Booker, yet their relationship is shattered when he abruptly abandons her, writing in a note that she was not the woman he wanted. She ultimately finds Booker in the small town of Whiskey, CA, after a car crash during which she develops a hospitable relationship with a couple, Steve and Evelyn. Her reunion with Booker leads to forgiveness and her confession that she is pregnant.

Drawing upon Chodorow's (1978) Psychoanalytic Object Relations theory, the overarching argument of this paper is that the mother is the initial object for the infant to gratify its desires; however, from Freud's (1926) viewpoint, her breast, as the source of nurturance, is the first object to satisfy its desires. The objective of this paper is to scrutinize the deleterious impact of the hostile and vicious mistreatment of a light-skinned mother who refrains from nurturing her Black daughter as an ordinary figure. We try to respond to two fundamental questions, namely how can maternal bond between Sweetness and Bride be interpreted through Chodorow's (1978) concept of "object relations theory"? and second; in what manner, can the heterosexual bond between Bride, Booker, and Brooklyn be viewed as either

functional or dysfunctional through the notion of “heterosexual orientation” in *God Help the Child* (2015)?

Literature Review

There are two groups of critics that study the essence of motherhood either in terms of biological or social constructions in Morrison's selected novel, namely *God Help the Child* (2015). The first group pivots on the biological aspect of mothering. Critics, such as Balint and Balint (1965), and Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994) are among those who belong to the first group. However, the second group pivots on the social aspect of mothering. Critics, such as Adrienne Rich (1976), Sara Ruddick (1989), and Barbara Katz Rothman (1994) fit in the second group.

From the psychoanalytic perspective, it is natural for women to fulfil the task of mothering due to the maternal instincts. In “Contribution to the Symposium on the Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship”, Balint and Balint (1965), belonging to the first group of the critics, for example, speak of a “need” or “drive” to mother succeeding the pregnancy, a “biological” and “instinctual” mother-infant mutuality, an “instinctive maternity” in which “what is libidinal satisfaction to one must be libidinal satisfying action to the other and the mother and child are equally satisfied in this condition” (as cited in Chodorow, 1965, p. 22). In better terms, the maternal bond provides satisfaction for both parties. Chodorow (1978) refers to Balint and Balint (1965) recommendation:

the infant's lack of reality principle and its primary love toward its mother is reciprocated by the mother. . . . Just as the child does not recognize the separate identity of the mother, so the mother looks upon her child as a part of herself whose interests are identical with her own. (as cited in Chodorow, 1965, p. 61)

Likewise, Glenn (1994), in *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, contends that the ideology of mothering is viewed as “natural, universal, and unchanging” (p. 3). The ideology of motherhood is fundamentally a universal model which attributes the responsibility of mothering and nurturance specifically to the biological mother whose only task is the infant's prosperity and nurturance during the formative period. The racist mythology which cherishes biological motherhood traces back to the historical oppression of women. This concept speculates that women are naturally and instinctively equipped to be mothers, and once motherhood is bestowed on them, they are portrayed as caring creatures, whose identities blends with those of their children. The product of this identification of womanhood and motherhood is irrefutably gender oppression. Glenn (1994) further emphasizes the relationship between the idea of mothering and gender which she defines as the “socially constructed relationships and practices organized around perceived differences between the sexes” (p. 3). The creation of the ideology of motherhood which pinpoints self-sacrifice and submission of individuality is in harmony with the systematic oppression of women. The ideology of motherhood has been employed by the male-oriented social order to restrict women's active participation in the

government of society. Hence, by portraying motherhood as “natural, a patriarchal ideology of mothering locks women into biological reproduction and denies them identities and selfhood outside mothering” (Glenn, 1994, p. 9). Glenn (1994) remarks that ideology is an efficient device for “keeping people in their place, in part because it is so flexible” (p. 10).

In *Of Woman Born*, Rich (1976), belonging to the second group of critics, basically depicts women as the most oppressed party. Rich (1976) shares the idea of mutual bond between the child and the mother with Chodorow (1978). Rich (1976) remarks, “it’s as if, in the mother’s eyes, her smile, her stroking touch, the child first reads the message: You are there! And the mother, too, is discovering her own existence newly” (p. 36). Similar to Chodorow (1978), Rich (1976) believes, based on a false belief, the female’s missions as nurturing children, and doing household chores are not regarded as significant tasks. Rich (1976) adds, “child and mother alike are depreciated, because only grown men and women in the paid labor force are supposed to be ‘productive’” (p. 38). Rich (1976) postulates that motherhood in the current form has not equipped the Black mother with the effective requisites to perform her task. She states, “institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal ‘instinct’ rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self” (p. 42).

Naturally, in *Maternal Thinking*, Ruddick (1989) maintains that mothering involves “higher philosophical thought (as opposed to instinct)” (p. 4). This dimension of mothering assigns sophistication and humanity to the mission of nurturance and refutes the biological definitions of mothering, which, for the Black women, have been one of the avenues of suppression and dehumanization since the slavery era. All individuals, females, othermothers, or male caregivers can learn to become nurturers, since as Ruddick’s (1989) notion of “maternal thinking” indicates, the interaction among reflection, judgment, and emotion leads to the performance of competent caregiving and nurturance (p. 5). Ruddick’s (1989) definition of motherhood as a discipline which necessitates the philosophical thought, process of learning, and exchange of emotion. Ruddick (1989) highlights the constraints of biological motherhood. It is insufficient for a woman to physically bear a child to attain the goals of motherhood. The intricate experience of motherhood necessitates the process of maternal thinking, reflection, and emotional engagement.

Influenced by Ruddick’s (1989) theory of “maternal thinking”, Rothman (1994), in “Beyond Mothers and Fathers”, opines that regarding mothering as “a way of thinking” and a gradual process of learning to nurture, “shifts our focus from who the mother is to what she is doing” (p. 55). One of the connotations of maternal thinking is that mothering is not gender-oriented. In better terms, an individual engaged “needs not to be a mother, needs not [to] be a woman” to be able to fulfill the efficient maternal care (p. 55).

The aforementioned critics, including both the first and the second group, have obviously portrayed the Black mothers as victimized or victimizer for the child either in terms of biological aspect of mothering, in line with the first group, or in terms of social aspect of mothering, in line with the second group; however, none of them have concentrated on the social aspect of mothering through Chodorow's object relations theory. In order to fill the existing gap, traditional theory of Freudian Oedipus Complex is not the primary concern of this paper and we will apply Chodorow's contemporary Object Relations Theory, for the combination of Psychoanalysis and Feminism are the effective contributions for examining both motherhood and womanhood. Our position, in this paper, is closer to the second group, who employed social dimension of mothering. At the same time, we limit our research to the relationship between the mother parent and her children, especially with the daughters. Toni Morrison, who has written *God Help the Child* (2015), is an African-American writer. Thus, this paper will primarily be applicable to the African-American culture.

Discussion

Object Relations Theory

In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow (1978) provides a psychoanalytic theory of the female identity and the maternal bond derived from the Freudian Oedipus Complex, though she primarily depends on object relations theory, as a psychoanalytic touchstone, which rests upon the perspective that each individual's psychological life is created through personal relationships with others. Chodorow (1978) remarks that female identity is chiefly based on the inextricable attachment and closeness to the mother and the position of women in culture is defined by the tie between mother and daughter. The object relations theory is a psychoanalytic one, which emphasizes a social view of psychological development. The term was coined by Ronald Fairbairn (1952) in his book entitled *Psychoanalytical Studies of the Personality*. Its fundamental idea is that individuals are eager to maintain successful relationship with each other and failure to do so will cause serious problems in life later. As the infant does not possess any "ego" capacities, it depends on its mother. In this regard, the mother operates as an "external ego" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 62) for the infant. Fairbairn (1952) calls this early period as "infantile dependence" (as cited in Chodorow, 1952, p. 59), in which the infant prevents its separation from the mother. Sigmund Freud (1914) originally employed the term "object" to mean the ways in which an infant directs instinctual drives toward gratification (as cited in Chodorow, 1914, p. 45). Freud (1914) asserted that there were two sorts of drives, sexual and aggressive ones. Chodorow (1978) states:

The interpretation of psychic structure that stresses the mental personality as object rather than subject is fundamental to the development of psychoanalytic ego psychology, the school that has come to dominate the American psychoanalytic tradition. Ego psychology begins with an acceptance of Freud's drive theory, the notion that behavior and

development are determined by inborn aggressive and libidinal drives seeking gratification. (as cited in Chodorow, 1914, p. 45)

Social Object Relations that are related to the libidinal level developments are essential. As a result, the infant's initial social and physical relationship with the world is through suckling its mother's breast, which is an oral stage. At birth, the infant depends on its mother and it also does not differentiate between itself and the objects around it. In better terms, the infant feels a sort of "oneness" with the whole world and particularly with the mother. In this regard, the mother functions as the child's "external ego" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 62). While Freud (1926) opines that "heterosexual orientation" and genital primacy are commonly normal in women's biological destiny, Chodorow (1978) highlights the importance of a girl's relation with her own mother throughout the Oedipal phase. In Chodorow's (1978) viewpoint, it is not the identification with the opposite sex parents that modifies the child's ego, "rather the ego in its internal object-relation situation changes . . . differently for boys and girls" (p. 114). Chodorow (1978), as cited in Glenn (1994), contends that the girls undergo identity formation "through continuous attachment and identification with the mother" (p. 4), whereas the boys identify themselves by a gradual detachment and enhancing an independent self-sense from the mother. Accordingly, daughters and sons are differently treated. The daughter who shares "a core female identity with her mother was encouraged to imitate her, while the son was expected to be separate and autonomous" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 151). Furthermore, Chodorow (1978) states, "the boy identifies with his father because he can then gain the benefits of being the one who gives punishment, of being masculine and superior" (p. 113). In Freud's (1914) account of the Oedipus Complex, women solely are subordinate to men, and as a result, lacking a penis is a sign of vulnerability and powerlessness. In his account of the "penis envy", Freud's (1914) overemphasis on the penis is sensible in the context of the social privilege enjoyed by men (as cited in Goulimari, 2015, p. 132). These object relation differences illuminate the difference between male and female personality formation better than the traditional one. Object Relations Theory include three basic "affects", namely attachment, frustration, and rejection, which can exist between the self-object, or mother, and the other-object. These "affects" are universal emotions, which are vital for the identity formation of an infant during its childhood.

Attachment, Frustration, and Rejection

Chodorow (1978) pivots on John Bowlby's (1969) "attachment" theory. According to Bowlby (1969), attachment relies on the maternal bond through the maintenance of a large portion of physical proximity and contact to her infant. Attachment enhances in association with a particular figure who has provided the strongest and most intensive bond with the infant. The primary affectional attachment object is virtually the mother, the child's primary caretaker, with whom the infant interacts in an intense and a strong way. Bowlby (1969) differentiates between "attachment" and "dependence". An infant is dependent on whomever is providing the fleeting care, whereas attachment grows in reaction to the quality of the interaction in which the primary physiological demands have not been met. Those mothers who are frequently available but are unresponsive or unsociable with

their children might become more “attached” to their fathers, who are constantly unavailable but strongly and intensively interact with their infants when they are available (Chodorow, 1978, pp. 71-72).

Influenced by Bowlby's (1969) “attachment” theory, Chodorow (1978) stresses that attachment refers to the desire of the “ego” to sustain in a tranquil and stable relationship with people or things which they identify with. Individuals of this category have trouble with attachments that are profoundly held with people, conditions, or environments that are working for them. Some individuals are motivated to change their self-image to become more acceptable and appreciated by others. Other individuals learn to become attached to a comfort site which they associate with independence and freedom. Freud's (1914) idea of “libidinal attachment”, in this case, is not that of an infant to mother, but of sexual instincts to ego instincts which he calls an “anaclitic” type of object-relationship, which literally means “leaning-on” (Chodorow, 1978, p. 64).

Individuals of the “frustration” phase, as Chodorow (1978) states, feel that their comfort and desires are not sufficiently taken care of. “The self” is depicted as hungry and there are traits, such as being “uncomfortable” or “dissatisfied” of not being taken care of or being paid proper attention to. These feelings are the product of profoundly conditioned patterns during an individual's childhood. Some individuals of this group are “aggressive”, because their parents have not properly guided them and involuntarily anticipate others to “defend” and “nurture” them (pp. 69-70).

In the “rejection” group, as Chodorow (1978) asserts, the self is considered weak and possibly rejected or victimized by others as inferiors and outsiders, whereas others are regarded as powerful and abusive. Individuals of this phase anticipate to be rejected anytime and, as a result, they secure themselves in various ways. They often conceal their own actual desires and vulnerabilities, utilizing abilities or resources to defend themselves against further rejection. Once the infant enters the reality principle, it distinguishes itself as separated from the mother. Chodorow (1978) remarks, “It is at this point that the rule of the reality sense starts in the emotional life of man” (p. 69). The infant apparently views this separation as the mother's rejection and arouses the feeling of vulnerability within it. Fairbairn (1952), as cited in Chodorow (1978), portrays this situation in this way, “the infant does not simply reject early bad objects but internalizes them in order to both hate and control them” (p. 69). They are repressed, since they seem unendurable and intolerable.

The Signs of “Attachment”, “Frustration”, and “Rejection” in *Bride*

Morrison's novel, namely *God Help the Child* (2015), begins with the guilt and regret of *Bride*'s mother, Sweetness, who defends herself, “It's not my fault. So you can't blame me. I didn't do it and have no idea how it happened” (p. 2). Sweetness, who is a light-skinned woman, is blessed with an unwanted dark Black infant that frightens her. She states, “She [*Bride*] was so black, she scared me” (p. 2). The signs of “frustration” can be observed in *Bride* as she is starved for the

maternal care, affection, and attention. The negligence of Sweetness is chiefly portrayed through the little girl's burning desire to be slapped in order to be touched by her mother. Bride recalls, "I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch" (p. 14). She felt that she was invisible in her childhood. Chodorow (1978) traces Balint and Balint's (1965) idea of "being empty of oneself". Pinpointing the idea of "being empty of oneself", Alice Balint claims, "women who feel empty of themselves feel that they are not being accorded a separate reality nor the agency to interpret the world in their own way. This feeling has its origins in the early mother-daughter relationship" (as cited in Chodorow, 1978, p. 100). Bride was so "empty of herself" that she had to live in a void. Her feeling of "emptiness" and guilt blend together owing to her accusing an innocent woman and her childhood repressions gradually appear in her adulthood. As soon as Sofia Huxley is released from the prison, Bride, who still feels guilty of convicting an innocent teacher fifteen years ago, yearns to soothe her conscience or "superego" by offering the pecuniary assistance to Sofia. In her confrontation with Sofia in her house, Bride narrates:

'Look what I brought you.' I can't resist and place the bag on the bed. I reach inside and on top of the gift package of YOU, GIRL I lay two envelopes—the slim one with the airline gift certificate then the fat one with five thousand dollars. About two hundred dollars for each year if she had served her full sentence. (p. 8)

Yet, Sofia brutally beats Bride, for she strives to give her a gift and akin to freedom "nothing [in life] is free" (p. 8) and throws her gifts. She either retaliates for Bride's testimony which put her behind bars or solely releases her pent-up rage and fear that she had concealed for the fifteen years in the prison. Although Bride is physically damaged, with her vicious attack and the release of the repressed anger, Sofia is spiritually shattered. Sofia is crying for the first time after fifteen years. The therapeutic value of crying makes her purify herself, as Sofia narrates:

. . . black girl did do 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. (p. 28)

It is beneficial for us to apply the "affects" of Chodorow's (1978) Object Relations theory, namely "attachment", "frustration", and "rejection", to Bride, who does not experience the emotional "attachment" to her mother, Sweetness. She strives to become attached to her mother; however, Sweetness rejects and neglects her all the time and leads Bride to tell a big lie, accusing her teacher of molesting some students solely to be touched by her mother. Sofia Huxley spends fifteen years in the jail without committing any crime. Bride, who witnessed against the harassment of her teacher, narrates:

Outside the courtroom all the mothers smiled at me, and two actually touched and hugged me. Fathers gave me thumbs-up. Best of all was

Sweetness. As we walked down the courthouse steps she held my hand. . . . She never did that before and it surprised me as much as it pleased me because I always knew she didn't like touching me. I could tell. Distaste was all over her face when I was little and she had to bathe me. (pp. 13-14)

Only after that incident, for the first time, does Bride receive the timely adoration and appreciation of her mother. Sweetness feels so cheerful, and they walk the streets hand in hand. As a gift, Sweetness “had her ears pierced and bought her a pair of earrings—tiny gold hoops” (p. 17). Bride strives to attract the attention of others by her beauty, fashionable appearance, and self-image in order to become more acceptable and appreciated by others to compensate her lack of “attachment” which she had already experienced in her childhood with her own mother. Likewise, a prominent critic like Robert Allen Papinchak (1992) examines the issue of “Untouchability” in Sherwood Anderson’s (1916) “Hands” in which “Hands” are the origin of a schoolteacher’s “virtuous reputation” when he, as a dexterous field laborer, uses them to pick strawberries, and the principal reason of his “scandal” when he uses them to “caress” his students (pp. 8-9). To Papinchak (1992), Anderson was one of the pioneering American authors to experiment “Untouchability”. Reinforcing Papinchak’s (1992) viewpoint on “Untouchability”, Zare Zadeh and Mehrvand (2022) postulates that there exists a remarkable similarity between *God Help the Child* (2015) and “Hands” (1916), in which an innocent gifted schoolteacher, namely Adolph Myers, who inspired his students to learn, and who freely showed love and affection for them, akin to the White-skinned school teacher, Sofia Huxley, is charged with being a pederast, whose “touching”, rubbing the boys’ shoulders and ruffling their hair made the parents of his students react in “anger”, resulting in “rejection”, and “fear” leading to “frustration” for twenty years (pp. 94-95). Myers, akin to Sofia Huxley, feels no guilt or shame in his relationship with the schoolboys; nonetheless, he realizes that their parents find something evil and shameful in his “hands”. When a “halfwitted boy”, who became enamored of Myers, imagines his “touches” for carnal advances, his father, namely Henry Bradford, becomes “frustrated” and severely beats Myers. Shockingly, there is no account of Myers’s pain or shock, which is similar to the case of Sofia Huxley, who did not cry for fifteen years (Zare Zadeh & Mehrvand, 2022, pp. 94-95).

After the birth of Bride, Sweetness is increasingly “frustrated” with nurturing her, owing to the Black color of her skin, and feeding her becomes too insulting for her. Sweetness is the only person to whom Bride becomes attached, yet the triangular Oedipus Complex breaks down for Bride when Sweetness does not even feed her forsaken daughter for once. According to Chodorow’s (1978) Object Relations theory, the mother is the first object that the infant experiences. However, Freud (1914) holds that, not the mother, but her breast which is the origin of nurturance is the first object for the infant (as cited in Chodorow, 1978, p. 63). Given both Chodorow’s (1978) and Freud’s (1914) viewpoints, the maternal bond is traumatically shattered after Sweetness defies breast-feeding her own child, Bride. Breast-feeding is the basic right of the infant, yet Sweetness deprives Bride of the

maternal milk, which signifies the maternal existence and enduring love. Sweetness narrates, “All I know is that for me, nursing her was like having a pickaninny sucking my teat. I went to bottle-feeding soon as I got home” (Morrison, 2015, p. 2).

Bride is akin to Galatea in the Greek mythology. Bride is portrayed as “A midnight Galatea [Bride] always and already alive. . . . When the music stopped, his Galatea turned to face him and surrender to him the reckless smile he’d always imagined” (p. 53). Galatea was a sea nymph, who fell in love with a handsome Sicilian youth named, Acis. She was pursued by the Cyclops Polyphemus, who chanted the ludicrous songs in order to court her. When Galatea rejected Polyphemus, he murdered Acis by crushing him under a rock. Galatea fled by diving into the sea and transformed her lover, Acis, into a stream. The allusion to the Greek mythology portrays that loving Bride can lead to Booker’s excruciating misery. The feeling of “anxiety” or “frustration” grows in Bride after Booker suddenly “abandons” or rejects her without clarifying his reasons and solely echoing six words, “You not the woman I want” (p. 4). Booker’s absence ignites a fear of “abandonment” or “rejection” in Bride. Chodorow (1978) postulates, “the preoccupation with issues of intimacy and merging, however, can also lead to avoidance. Fear of fusion may overwhelm the attraction to it, and fear of loss of a love object may make the experience of love too risky” (p. 79). Bride was gratified with her job, beauty, and possessions, yet she did not feel the same in her “unconscious” psyche. Bride narrates:

What is happening to me? My life is falling down. . . . What’s going on? I’m young; I’m successful and pretty. Really pretty, so there! Sweetness. So why am I so miserable? Because he left me? I have what I’ve worked for and am good at it. I’m proud of myself, I really am, but it’s the Vicodin and the hangover that make me keep remembering some not-so-proud junk in the past. (Morrison, 2015, p. 53)

Salván (2018) views Bride’s deep depression results in the loss of her womanly features, including “her pubic and armpit hair, her pierced ears, and her breasts” (p. 615). The more she emotionally acts like an infant, the more her body begins to have a childlike appearance, which embodies her transformation from the confident charming woman into the frightened needy infant (Salván, 2018, p. 615). Bride has eventually grown into a mature woman, leaving the scared little daughter behind to stimulate her power as a Black woman. She is also pregnant, signifying the return of her adulthood capabilities, such as “menstruation” and “lactation” (Salván, 2018, p. 62)

Maternal Love as “Primary Love”

“Attachment affect” contributes to “primary love” theory, which was coined by Balint and Balint (1965). The hypothesis of “primary love” opines, “infants have a primary need for human contact for itself. Attempts to fulfill this need play a fundamental role in any person’s development and eventual psychic makeup” (as cited in Chodorow, 1978, p. 64). Balint and Balint (1965), as cited in

Chodorow (1978), remarks the infant's ultimate goal is "to be [unconditionally] loved and satisfied, without being under any obligation to give anything in return" (p. 65). The "primary love" between an infant and its mother has a psychological impact on the future life of that individual as an adult. Those individuals who experience the "primary love" in their childhood yearn to recreate this experience. Balint and Balint (1965) recommends that adult-love relationships are an attempt to reconstruct primary intimacy. Furthermore, the inextricable intimacy can contribute to the fear of "abandonment / rejection" or loss of a love object. Ronald Fairbairn (1952), as cited in Chodorow (1978), regards the relationship between the infant and its mother as "the foundation upon which all his future relationships with love objects are based" (p. 79). Besides, for possessing the potential to be appropriate parents, each individual requires to experience a proper maternal bond during childhood. The gratification of "primary love" offers "well-being and tranquility" and fulfills infantile anticipations, whereas failure to gratify it provides "a violent and intense reaction" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 84). Similar to Balint and Balint (1965), Chodorow (1978) states, "the mother-infant relationship provides gratification to mother as well as infant" (p. 85). Sweetness does not enjoy being with Bride nor does she allow her daughter to feel gratified and experience her mother as a "primary love". The "primary love" should be bestowed on the infant in order to pave the way for its happiness and tranquility and if it does not occur, it will cause a violent and intense reaction (Chodorow, 1978, p. 84). Bride internalizes the image of her own mother as a "rejecting" and "denying" gratification in her "unconscious" psyche and feels vulnerable, powerless, and defenseless in her bitter relationship with her mother. What disturbs Bride in her "unconscious" psyche leads to her unhappiness in her future life. As evident, the bitterness of Sweetness ironically causes her daughter to "abandon" or "reject" her as soon as possible.

Heterosexual Orientation: Bride, Booker, and Brooklyn

A pivotal phase in a girl's life, as Chodorow (1978) asserts, is the "heterosexual orientation", in which her father plays a crucial role. After her mother, the girl's next object-relation is her father. The girl seeks for other types of relationships, for more "power" than her father's "phallus" that can bring her and fulfill her desires (p. 118). Fathers, as the infant's second object of primary libidinal interest, play a pivotal role in the identity formation of both girls and boys. Chodorow (1978) postulates, "fathers generally sex-type their children more consciously than mothers along traditional gender-role lines, and that they do encourage feminine heterosexual behavior in their young daughters" (p. 118). Fathers should develop the masculine roles in their boys and heterosexual relationship in their girls. Yet, due to fathers' extra-familial involvements, they are not able to be in a constant contact with their children. Chodorow (1978) poses Marjorie Leonard's (1966) argument, "Fathers . . . must be able to make themselves available as a heterosexual love object and to offer affection without being seduced by their daughters' fantasies or seducing them with their own. Otherwise, . . . a girl will not develop proper heterosexuality" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 118). According to Chodorow (1978), there exist two components of girls' heterosexual orientation. The

first one is the girls' motivation to seek other relationships, different from what they experienced with their mothers, and the second one is the girls' motivation to seek power that their fathers possess and can lend them as a sexual asset (Chodorow, 1978, p. 118). The fathers' role is to interact with their daughters in a way that encourages them to shape a heterosexual or feminine attachment with them. Fathers' excessive absence or constant rejection and negligence lead to the unhealthy development of their children and doubles maternal responsibilities and unendurable pressures of mothering.

It is really useful for us to examine Bride's affair with Booker through the heterosexual orientation. Due to the fact that Bride did not experience the father-daughter bond and her heterosexual demands were not fulfilled by her absent father, she was motivated to maintain other kinds of relationships in adulthood which strengthen her and become a substitute for her father. Thus, Bride replaces Booker with her absent father. Fairbairn (1952), pivots on "the way the mother remains as an important inner object throughout her growing infant's life" (as cited in Chodorow, 1978, p. 79). For Bride, Booker is the second object of primary libidinal interest besides her mother. There exist two elements of the women's heterosexual orientation:

One is that a girl's relation to her mother motivates her to look elsewhere for other kinds of relationships, and for the power which a [phallus] might bring her. Second, she is likely to be encouraged to look elsewhere to fulfill these generalized needs by her father, who also lends them a sexualized tone. . . . a father is supposed to make himself available to his daughter. (Chodorow, 1978, p. 118)

Bride does not have any expectations in her relationship with Booker. For Booker, "six months spend into the bliss of edible sex, free-style music, challenging books and the company of an easy undemanding Bride" (Morrison, 2015, p. 54). Bride solely wants him to be with her, which seems to be a substitute for an uncanny mother whom she did not have the opportunity to physically and psychologically touch throughout her childhood. The intimate physical and carnal affair between Bride and Booker can function as a bridge through which Bride re-experiences the body of her mother, Sweetness, as the initial body. Besides, Bride's sense of hospitality and affinity with her mother was solely restricted to the severe chastisement:

I 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—bed without supper, lock me in my room—but her screaming at me was the worst. (p. 31)

According to Rich (1976), another relationship that fulfills one's emotional satisfaction is the tendency of girls or women to bond with other girls and women as their best friends. Rich (1976) opines that the relationship between the mothers and the daughters is a magical one, "Two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine

months inside the other” (p. 220). Similarly, Chodorow (1978) remarks that the girls commonly find a “best friend” with whom they can share their secrets (p. 137). According to Chodorow (1978), in the latency stage, a prepubertal girl familiarizes herself with the non-familial relational world. She becomes critical to her family and strives to become attached to anyone, except her mother. Chodorow (1978) explains, throughout latency, an adolescent girl stays away from her mother and is motivated to have inextricable relationship with other girls as her “best friend” (p. 137). Reinforcing Chodorow’s (1978) recommendation, Deutsch (1944), as cited in Chodorow (1978), mentions that many prepubertal girls are motivated to find a “best friend” in order to “share all confidences about their heterosexual relationships” (p. 200). For Bride, Brooklyn is the best friend on whom she can trust. After breaking up with Booker and being beaten by Sofia Huxley, the only friend with whom Bride interacts is Brooklyn. Bride narrates, “Hammers of pain make it hard to get out my cellphone and dial Brooklyn, the person I can trust. Completely” (Morrison, 2015, p. 22). Chodorow (1978) adjusts Deutsch’s (1944), as cited in Chodorow (1978), recommendation:

Female relationships sometimes express a woman’s psychological participation in the relational triangle. Some women . . . always need a woman rival in their relationship to a man; others need a best friend with whom they share all confidences about their heterosexual relationships. These relationships are one way of resolving and recreating the mother-daughter bond and are an expression of women’s general relational capacities and definition of self in relationship. (p. 200)

Chodorow (1978) states that puberty for girls is a phase of “greater resolution in favor of heterosexuality” (p. 138). Resultantly, the father-absence ignites insecure feeling in girls towards other men and boys. Naturally, such girls depend more on other adult women. By the same token, from Rich’s (1976) viewpoint, “the daughter seeking intimacy with her own mother, the woman seeking intimacy with another woman, not her mother but toward whom she turns those passionate longings” (p. 228). After puberty, the girl re-identifies with her mother. As an adult woman, she strives to fulfill her demands to be loved and re-experience the sense of dual unity she already had with her mother. Chodorow (1978) recommends that one procedure of gratifying this need by women is “through the creation and maintenance of important personal relations with other women” (p. 200). Deutsch (1944), as cited in Chodorow (1978), opines that the adult women are motivated to participate in a triangular relationship and always need a woman rival in their relationships with men (p. 200). In this regard, Brooklyn completes the relational triangle in which Bride had never situated herself and functions as a rival for her. Brooklyn psychologically regards Bride as her rival and strives to win the heart of Booker. Brooklyn echoes, “when the three of us were together [Bride] was different somehow. Confident, not so needy or constantly, obviously soliciting praise” (Morrison, 2015, p. 24). Brooklyn vividly confesses how she once strived to deceive Booker into loving him, “One day just for fun I flirted with him, tried to

seduce him. In [Bride's] own bedroom, mind you. . . . I whispered, 'Don't you want another flower in your garden?'" (p. 24). Likewise, in another similar case, Brooklyn, who unflatteringly compares Bride's eyes with alien eyes, is jealous of both Bride's gorgeous eyes and her influential power on the White men. Furthermore, she is jealous of Bride's success in her cosmetics job. Brooklyn narrates that Bride's position at Sylvia company might fall vacant and she might go bankrupt soon, because Brooklyn believes that Bride should not sell beauty products that she herself does not use to improve her own beauty.

At the end of *God Help the Child* (2015), Booker narrates that he left Bride, because he cannot apprehend why she tries to bring gifts to a child molester, like Sofia Huxley. Bride confesses that she lied to capture the attention and approval of Sweetness, who would be proud of her "as a peacock" (p. 16). Booker admits that he left Bride, for he had to be hospitable to pederasts, like Mr. Humboldt, who murdered his brother, Adam. After resolving his problems with Bride and finding out about her succeeding pregnancy, Booker's "heterosexual bond" with Bride turns out to be functional again.

Conclusion

In brief, both Freudian Oedipus Complex and Chodorow's (1978) social Object Relations theory indicated that there is a child who desires, a mother who displays an object of desire, and a father who displays an obstacle to that desire. According to Chodorow's (1978) Object Relations theory, the infant experiences the mother as the initial object to gratify its desires; however, Freud (1914) believes that, not the mother, but her breast, which is the source of nurturance, is the initial object for the child. Freud (1914) mentions, "the infant's ego (self-preservative) instincts direct it to the source of nurturance—the mother's breast—and then to the mother" (as cited in Chodorow, 1978, p. 63). Chodorow (1978), who elaborated on a new and positive account of feminine development, pivoted on a special and functional bond between the mother and the daughter, inaccessible to the male infant. Chodorow (1978) further maintained that mothers identified with the female infants; thus, they were motivated to view their daughters as the reflection of themselves, creating an eternal "attachment" and emotional bond that could make it difficult for girls to shape their "true identities" (as cited in Glenn, 1994, p. 46). Freud (1914) particularly focused on the psychosexual development in an infant's personality formation. Chodorow's (1978) Object Relations Theory, specifically Feminist, adopted Freudian Oedipus Complex. Unlike Freud (1914), who focused on instincts and libido, Chodorow (1978) emphasized the relational aspects of the psychic development. She claimed that girls would shape their gender identity by bonding with their mothers (as cited in Glenn, 1994, p. 4).

The maternal bond between Sweetness and Bride through Chodorow's (1978) concept of "Object Relations" theory was examined. After the birth of Bride, Sweetness was increasingly "frustrated" with nurturing her infant owing to the Black color of her skin and feeding her became too insulting for her. Sweetness was

the only person to whom Bride became attached, yet the triangular Oedipus Complex broke down for Bride when Sweetness did not even feed her forsaken daughter for once. Given both Chodorow's (1978) and Freud's (1914) viewpoints, the maternal bond was traumatically shattered after Sweetness defied breast-feeding her own child, Bride. Breast-feeding is the basic right of the infant, yet Sweetness deprived Bride of the maternal milk, which signified the maternal existence and enduring love. Bride's affair with Booker through the concept of "heterosexual orientation" was further examined. Since Bride did not experience the father-daughter bond and her heterosexual demands were not fulfilled by her absent father, she was motivated to maintain other kinds of relationships in adulthood which strengthened her and became a substitute for her father. For Bride, besides her mother, Booker was the second object of primary libidinal interest. Accordingly, Bride replaced her absent father with Booker. After breaking up with Booker, Brooklyn was the best friend whom Bride could trust. Brooklyn completed the relational triangle in which Bride had never situated herself, who functioned as a rival for her. Brooklyn psychologically regarded Bride as her rival and strived to win the heart of Booker by betraying Bride's trust and deceiving Booker into loving him. Thus, the "heterosexual bond" between Brooklyn and Booker was dysfunctional. Furthermore, Brooklyn was jealous of Bride's success in her cosmetics job and her influential power on the White men. The friendship between Bride and Brooklyn proved to be dysfunctional, whereas the "heterosexual bond" between Bride and Booker was functional till Booker abandoned Bride, which turned out to be a dysfunctional "heterosexual bond". After finding out about Bride's succeeding pregnancy, Booker's "heterosexual bond" with Bride turned out to be functional again.

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