

VENGEANCE: A CRIME AND OBSTACLE TO TRAUMA HEALING IN T.  
MORRISON'S *GOD HELP THE CHILD* (2015)

Dr. Saida Weslati, Ph. D  
English Department,  
Faculty of Letters, Arts & Humanities,  
University of Manouba  
[saida.oueslati@flah.uma.tn](mailto:saida.oueslati@flah.uma.tn)  
[Weslatisaida5@gmail.com](mailto:Weslatisaida5@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*This study examines child abuse and systemic violence against children. It sheds light on the fictional construction of vengeance, as a form of criminality and deficient coping mechanism with psychological trauma, in Toni Morrison's, God Help the Child (2015). It is premised on a textual analysis of revenge, its causes, manifestations and impacts on healing, as the characters' "embitterment" turns them into revengeful individuals and thwarts their efforts to restore dignity. Morrison argues that the victim mentality, coupled with emotionally-focused coping mechanisms, is self-destructive as it leads most of her protagonists to self-sabotage their recovery. To escape the trauma trap, victims and professional healers need to dissect the factors that block healing, namely indulgence in ideated, wished, or actualized revenge schemes. By thus showcasing the upsides of revenge, Morrison sets the stage for true healing from psychological trauma.*

**Keywords:** Crime, Healing, Toni Morrison, Vengeance, Trauma.

**Introduction**

A man that studieth revenge keeps his wounds green, which otherwise would heal.

—Francis Bacon, "Of Revenge"

This paper explores how the "revenge of the repressed, the oppressed, [and] the dispossessed" (Haiven) looks like in Toni Morrison's last novel, *God Help the Child* (2015). In this narrative, psychological trauma or "the affliction of the powerless" (Herman 33) is about the "wounded" / "injured" psyche" (Sieff 1), which Morrison reduces to loss of "dignity" (4). It is caused by multiple forms of direct and indirect violence; a conflict in which the writer juxtaposes victim protagonists—predominantly Black children—to dysfunctional mothers, whose concealed violence behind closed doors is additionally complicated by the challenges of surviving in a

racially-biased society, as antagonists. The *wounded* characters' daily struggles to cope with "embitterment" (Linden & Maercker 1) provoke in them vengeful desires that amount to punishable crimes if actualized, detected and reported. This scenario makes it easy to identify the direct cause-and-effect relationship between *violence* and *trauma* that sets in its aftermath, on the one hand, and *revenge* as a response to both, on the other. Most significant in this fictional account of violence and revenge is the avengers' entrapment into a cycle of psychological trauma. Victimization and fixation on the abuser are approached as emotion—rather than problem-focused coping mechanisms, which do not only block the process of healing, but also perpetuate the cycle of violence and trauma and derail justice.

Examining the dynamics of violence and counter-violence, through an in-depth reading of *vengeance* in a work of fiction, does by no means affect the quality of this type of research on the prevalence of epidemic violence in the contemporary world. Today, the role of literature "as an important mode to address [personal and] historical grievances" (Bancroft) is acknowledged in the academic and non-academic community, where fiction writers are often considered as sources of inspiration and wisdom. Their insights can help explain why the wrongs of the past are repeated and how such historical grievances and injustices as slavery, colonization and genocide "might be repaired or even avenged" (Bancroft). The mutual relationship between the real and its fictional representation has been stressed by many writers like Mark Twain, who once wrote that "[t]ruth is sometimes stranger than fiction" (qtd. in "M. Twain Quotes") or R. W. Emerson who believes that "fiction reveals truth that reality obscures" (qtd. in "R. W. Emerson Quotes"). Similarly, Toni Morrison embraces her role as a Black woman writer, whose "mission" is to tell the truth ("The Site" 83-102). For her, violence—domestic or political—is "vulgar," the normalization of which writers should never allow, for it is their role to "speak ... write... [and] do language. That is how civilizations heal" ("No Place").

The overarching aim of this paper is two-fold:

- First, to analyze Morrison's narrative construction of *revenge* as crime that begets crime and drags victims and victimizers—Blacks and Whites—into an interminable cycle of violence and counter-violence. This reaction is likely to perpetuate the cycle of inter- and intra-racial violence in American society.
- Second, to examine the way Morrison weaves the *revenge* trope with *crime* and *psychological trauma* to demonstrate that past traumas not only generate new traumas and victimize innocents, but also make escaping the trauma trap impossible. The ultimate purpose of this article is to point out the energy-draining effects of indulging in vengeful fantasies and responses; deficient coping mechanisms that are more likely to delay if not nullify the prospects of trauma healing altogether.

### Overview of the Literature on Revenge

According to the online *Oxford Languages* dictionary, ‘revenge’ is “the action of hurting or harming someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands” (languages.oup.com). It is this element of ‘violence’ that writers and peacemakers, in general, find disturbing and, thus, condemn revenge as an unhealthy response to prior violence, injustice, or conflict. Despite being a legitimate reaction to “legitimate rage” (Haiven), felt by protagonists traumatized by what Keita calls the “predicament of being black” (43-44), it is Morrison’s particular fictional interweaving of multiple forms of abuse and revenge as counter-violence, together with trauma, which has decided upon the theoretical paradigm within which the concept will be examined in this paper. Besides being premised on a textual analysis, the study will draw upon the insights of Critical Legal Studies and Trauma Theories to analyze the uses of revenge in *God Help the Child*. As Criminologists and legalists define the concept, *crime* refers to “legally prohibited [acts] by the state [to which] sanctions must apply” (White et al. 3). By *psychological trauma* Erickson means the “blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively” (153-54). While many trauma theorists align with this definition, Freud dwells on its most devastating harm, namely “repetition compulsion” (qtd. in Caruth 2), or the continuous reenactment of a traumatic event. Victims who are prey to this unconscious but pathological response to trauma believe this would help them understand why it happened and would heal. Similarly, Caruth thinks that what makes healing trauma challenging is the way it keeps getting back “to haunt the victim of trauma” (4), who feels utter “helplessness” (29) to confront it. Indeed, LaCapra thinks that trauma is “unmastered” (Rubenstein 159) because victims fail to “work through” it (qtd. in Rubenstein 159), due to their inability to distinguish between the overwhelming past experience and their present life, hence their entrapment in the trauma cycle and impossibility of achieving closure (Rubenstein 159). In *God Help the Child*, Morrison demonstrates that seeking vengeance, as most of her protagonists do to soothe the pain of abuse, is not only *criminal* but likely to *annihilate* the prospects of liberation from the grip of psychological trauma, the main thrust of her argument in this paper.

Actually, Morrison’s text brims with criminal acts, mostly committed by Whites against Blacks, but also by Blacks against Blacks and Blacks against Whites, in the private as well as public setting. Violent behavior include battery and assault, verbal, emotional, and sexual child abuse, child neglect, false testimonies, and racial stereotyping and discrimination. The frustrating part, however, remains that despite the unfathomable pain these wounds inflict upon the body, mind and psyche of victim protagonists, these hidden and insidious crimes are still out of reach of law, hence the offenders’ impunity. Very often, the instinct of revenge takes over as the

victims' immediate response to cope with anger and helplessness, as will be demonstrated in the forthcoming textual analysis.

A brief overview of the literature reveals that despite its "long past," revenge has "a short history" (Jackson et al. 355) as a subject of academic research. Broadly speaking, scholars in diverse disciplines acknowledge revenge both as a universal and timeless theme (Streep 2017; Wiggins 2018; Haiven 2022; etc.) and "as one of the oldest topics in Western literature and ... popular culture" (Hack 277). Some have revisited the concept and interrogated its global dimension, as "this allegedly timeless human curse" (Haiven) is detected and examined in many cultures. Actually, these findings uphold previous cross-cultural studies undertaken by Erickson & Horton in 1992 about the sweeping prevalence of "vengeful feuds or individual acts of vengeance in 90 % of contemporary and traditional societies around the world" (qtd. in Jackson et al. 321). Its implication in crimes and "as a causal factor in many homicides worldwide" was reported by Daly and Wilson in 1988 and Kopsaj in 2016 (qtd. in Jackson et al. 321). Nevertheless, despite its ubiquity and commonality, the havoc it wreaks in the lives of individuals and the toll it takes on societies, revenge remains a "neglected psychological phenomenon" (Linden & Maercker 42). As Jackson and his colleagues comment, ancient philosophers dismissed revenge as unworthy of serious reflection, treating it as "immoral and brutish" and avengers as "beasts" and "evildoers" (320).

Lack of scholarly interest in the subject does by no means imply that revenge has never had its heydays. On the contrary, revenge *is* actually the master plot in the tragedies of the Greek founders of world drama, namely Euripides' *Oresteia*, Aeschylus's *Bacchae*, and Sophocles' *Electra*, to name but a few (Britannica; Cuddon 1999; Roynon 2014). The Roman philosopher and playwright Seneca is credited with the revival of the Greek revenge tragedy, as his drama became an "admirable model" for sixteenth century English dramatists, still "struggling to impose form and order on the shapeless, though vigorous, native drama" (spearing). His influence on the development of the English revenge tragedy is evident in many Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies between 1580 and 1630 (Cuddon 744), starting from Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, the play that established the revenge genre in English drama, to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, "one of the bloodiest and most horrific of all plays," followed by *Hamlet*, in which Shakespeare took the revenge genre to its highest level (Cuddon 745).

The revenge tragedy also witnessed its decadence by the end of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods when the genre "became increasingly sensational and macabre... [with] [d]eath as the main subject on [the characters'] syllabus and murder their recreation" (Cuddon 745-746). Daniel Hack confirmed this perspective when he questioned the critics' marginalization

of the revenge motif in the nineteenth century novel, in which it is more often reduced to “subplot than plot” (277). In 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, the narrative texts of Lorca, Miller, and Rudkin attest to the continuous appeal of revenge to the American reader (Cuddon 746). Actually, Kyle Wiggins has explored the theme in post-war *American Revenge Narratives* (2018); she showcases the way writers like Toni Morrison and movie makers like Tarantino, among many others, have transformed the genre and broken the conventions of the Greek revenge tragedy (BU “Interview”). As she depicts it, the American characters’ revenge is often disproportionate and obsessive, adding that American avengers tend to “seek payment from systems ... rather than human antagonists” (BU “Interview”).

This overview of the ‘revenge’ scholarship cannot ignore the growing surge of writings produced mostly by psychologists, triggered by the complex and hidden psychology of revenge. Many have corroborated the strong correlation between the impulse to get even and affective states like “embitterment,” anger, and frustration (Dollard et al. 1939; Miller 1941; Jaff 2011; Grobink et al. 2015; van Edwards 2024; the Legal Quorum 2024; etc.). Researchers like Jackson and his collaborators have attempted to theorize ‘revenge’ in terms of its instigation, expression, and function and have undertaken a typology of revenge and avengers (335). Other scholars have mapped its psychological, social, and functional dynamics to create a prototype analysis of revenge (Elshout et al. 2015). Carlsmith’s empirical study on the alleged hedonic effects of revenge fantasies (Carlsmith et al. 2008) is paradigmatic in the field, as retaliation is found to bring no satisfaction to the avenger. Chester & Dewall (2015), Eadeh et al. (2017), and Lillie & Strelan (2016) (qtd. in Jackson et al. 326-327) have validated the finding that revenge increases the avenger’s dissatisfaction with justice.

Despite the merits of *forgiveness* as a viable alternative to violence to end conflict, *vindictiveness* has also been approached as a value, particularly in the context of war for deterrence purposes (McDermott et al. 2017). Today, revenge has become a critical tool that shapes the public discourse, as analysts employ terms like “revenge politics,” “revenge economics,” and “revenge culture” to depict the vengeful attitude of the global North towards the global South “for the crime of simply desiring to be free” (Haiven). Similarly, at the interpersonal level, some believe that turning the other cheek is a contrived and outmoded response to injustice! Belief in the nobility and moral superiority of the *forgiver*, as Bacon preaches, is replaced by “the art of precision retaliation” (Farrar), taught in master class form by a New York teacher, Philip Seldon, who also “offers a one-on-one \$75 service for individual advice” (Farrar), after learning--the hard way as is often the case--how “to exorcize his rage [against his childhood bullies] with a staggering array of retribution” (Farrar).

Morrison's belief in the universality, automaticity and immediacy of the revenge instinct manifests in her inclusion of the revenge motif in many of her novels. Though always featuring as subplot, her characters' vengefulness takes many forms but tends to serve one specific purpose: taking the law in their own hands when the prospects of justice are unlikely! In *Songs of Solomon* (1977), the Black men's secret society's mission, 'Seven Days,' is to take the life of an innocent White for the murder of each innocent Black, their way of balancing scales! In *Beloved* (1987), the title character stands for the return of the dead past to haunt the living and take revenge upon the mother murderer. In *Jazz* (1992), Violet attacks a dead corpse and attempts to disfigure the face of Dorcas, whom she holds responsible for her own abandonment. In *Love* (2003), Junior pushes her sexual molester, the prison administrator off of the balcony, an act which some read as "revolt in the struggle for freedom" (Ndoulou & Massala 77).

The following analysis will shed the spotlight on the forms that revenge takes in *God help the child* and its impact on avengers and targets of vengeance. It will, therefore, start by analyzing the revenge scheme of the Black mother and daughter—Sweetness and Bride—against *whiteness*. The discussion will then shed the spotlight on Booker, the young Black male protagonist crushed by a double trauma that triggered his vengeful fantasies against his brother's white murderer and Whites, held responsible for the injustice of slavery and ongoing racial oppression of Afro-Americans. Before closing the debate with the White protagonist's—Sophia Huxley—retaliation against her Black oppressor, the present discussion will stretch the debate even further by delving into Morrison's own personal take on revenge, which she does not deny but assumes is a natural response to injustice and inequality.

### **The Crime of Revenge: Wished, Ideated, and Actualized<sup>i</sup>**

As Jason Swindle comments, one "cannot think of a greater injustice than" ("Bearing") bearing false witness against an individual; a crime, which criminal defense lawyer England says is likely to "derail the basic goal of the justice system—discovering the truth" ("Perjury") and send innocent people behind bars. In *God Help the Child*, the white teacher Sofia is the victim of such an injustice that child Lula Ann Bride inflicted upon her, not out of malice or innate wickedness but out of an intense craving for her mother's attention. Despite the rewards the child reaped because of her successful performance at the court, it is Sweetness, her mother, who seems to have eventually emerged victorious. Under normal circumstances, a 'good' mother would certainly address and correct the misbehavior: she might, for instance, focus on the consequences of telling lies on the teacher's life and career, while stressing the importance of truth telling, being honest, and facing up to one's actions. However, being fixated on her internal wounds for which she holds all whites responsible, Sweetness jumped at the chance of incriminating Sofia, based on the *perjured testimony* of her daughter at the trial. Seeking vengeance is the crime the African American mother is implicated in, among many others.

One can also interpret the child's false testimony against the white teacher as a manifestation of reverse discrimination, attesting to the double-edged sword aspect of racism, which is likely to backfire on whites, as well. For Sweetness, Sofia Huxley seems to have made the perfect *scapegoat* for everything that has been going wrong, not only in her own life, but in that of generations of women in her family, as well. In Morrison's narrative, Sweetness is actually one of the three major protagonists, besides Bride and Booker, to represent African Americans who continue to suffer under the *white gaze*, which Morrison reduces to the idea that "[Black] lives have no meaning and no depth without the white gaze" (Asare "Understanding"). Despite having always passed for white, Sweetness is still a victim of the "insidious trauma" of racism which leaves "generations of people traumatized as a result of their ancestor's direct suffering" (qtd. in Webster & Dunn 111-142).

In *God Help the Child*, Morrison takes the concept of vicarious trauma from the realm of theory to that of *the lived*, as experienced by Sweetness who cannot take the whites' racist practices against Blacks for granted. It is for this reason that the trial of Sofia provides both mother and child with the opportunity to live out "vengeance fantasies borne of the powerlessness inherent in victimhood" (Dubber 841). For Lula Ann, the 'lie' is triggered by her invisibility, the locus of the child's trauma and the principal factor that "has predetermined her willingness to take any chance to assert her tangibility" (Liashuk 125). For Sweetness, seeking revenge stems from her firm conviction that *she* is the *victim* with a right to *vengeance*—not the white teacher; a standpoint that explains her vindictive attitude towards Sofia and guiltless eagerness to see her behind bars. It is surprising to learn how the mother's self-perception coincides with the way *actual* criminals portray themselves. In their study of the personal narratives criminals tell about their crimes and the role they play in them, Ioannou and his collaborators report that criminals tend to portray themselves as performing the role of 'hero,' 'professional offender,' 'avenger,' or 'victim' (Ioannou et al. 16-17). As her first-person confessions reveal, Sweetness does not assert any form of heroism or professionalism in her criminal act against Sofia; she, however, claims the mantle of victim who 'reacts with violence because this seems to be the only alternative solution resigning [her] actions to fate' (Ioannou et al. 17). She also assumes the role of 'avenger' that some criminals embrace, and according to which the revengeful offender "feels that he is doing the right and the manly thing by offending; having the sense that he could not help himself. It is he who is wronged and, in gaining revenge, is defending moral equality" (Ioannou et al. 17).

Actually, this way of perceiving the offending self reflects the mother's down-to-earth attitude to her own victimization and a need for justice, based on revenge. Despite their ubiquitous aspect and the traumatizing harm they cause for Blacks, the white offenders' crimes remain legally invisible, hence the mother's recourse to this barely recognized form of revenge, which

according to Liashuk, most critics have not paid due attention to (119-138). Furthermore, seeking revenge attests to the mother's lack of any spiritual or religious grounding, which trauma victims in general tend to draw upon, in times of adversity. Because the wounds of racial trauma are unfathomable, Sweetness emerges as a soulless mother with absolutely no faith in Christian ethics, like forgiveness. She, instead, prefers to apply the oldest of laws, namely that of 'an eye for an eye' to repay evil for evil, as she did with Sofia Huxley. What follows is, therefore, an account of the meanings, motivations, manifestations and outcomes of revenge and its subtle uses in *God Help the Child*.

### Revenge vs. Retribution

According to criminal law books, "vengeance is self-serving since it is arbitrarily... taken by anyone who feels injured and wishes to retaliate" (Miller 73). It is considered a *crime* because it is inherently "anathema to the rule of law" (Miller 73). In Western cultures, revenge is an offense against which "[c]hurch, state, and reason all counsel ... as sin, as crime, or as an irrationally backward-looking obsession with sunk costs" (Miller 70). Some other scholars consider revenge a crime because it "drives crime" (Hogenboom); recent studies indicate "up to 20% of homicides and 60% of school shootings are linked to revenge" (Hogenboom). Although used interchangeably, Robert Nozick argues that *revenge* and *retribution* are distinct concepts. Accordingly, revenge is defined as a "pathology" that inflicts "injury" on the presumed wrongdoer; it is personal and not proportionate to the harm caused; it gives pleasure to the avenger, and "there need be no generality in revenge" (qtd. in Miller 73). On the other hand, retribution occurs for a wrong; the punishment involved is proportionate to the "seriousness of the wrong" (qtd. in Miller 73); there is no personal relationship between the two parties; there need be no emotional tone; and it requires a general commitment to any wrong done to anyone. All in all, while retribution emerges as a more formal and impersonal way of getting justice, revenge comes out as a personal response to a specific wrong. As Miller comments, revenge is "lawless," "unruled and ruleless" (73); attributes that attest to its criminal nature.

There is no doubt that the condemnation of Sofia was driven more by a thirst for revenge than a need for retributive justice, targeting the collective healing or closure of the Blacks' wounds. The revenge scheme, in which mother and daughter are complicit, is stimulated by the child's *pathological* need for affection and the mother's *pathological* hatred of 'blackness,' caused by

... internalizing the mainstream socio-cultural premise of class being conditioned by skin color, the slightest variation of which toward the darker side of the spectrum would automatically mean a decline in one's social and economic positioning (Liashuk 123).

It thus becomes evident that both protagonists have a personal stake in targeting Sofia; a *scapegoat* for all the emotional pain generations of Whites have inflicted upon generations of

Blacks, due to their black skin color. At the personal level, Sweetness points her accusative finger at white Americans, whom she indirectly holds accountable for her own failed motherhood and her daughter's messed up childhood. At the collective level, her testimony bears witness to the "incidents from the past and present, worldviews forged by trauma, and a history tied to the transatlantic slave trade" (Fraser & King-Pedroso 1). The tragedy of Sweetness and all the Black she represents lies in being stabbed in their dignity; a bitter feeling that is exacerbated by their inability to cope with the Whites' humiliating treatment. In the passage below, Sweetness depicts some of the whites' crimes committed during earlier periods of African American history:

But how else can we hold on to a little dignity? How else can you avoid being spit on in a drugstore, shoving elbows, at the bus stop, walking in the gutter to let whites have the whole sidewalk, charged a nickel at the grocer's for a paper bag that's free to white shoppers? Let alone all the name-calling. I heard about all of that and much, much more. (Morrison, *God Help the Child* 4)

Things did not seem to have changed much by the 1990s, when Lula Ann Bride was born, and the early decade of the 21st century when she grew into young Bride and had to face the ugly reality of being black in a predominantly white culture. She, too, went through "times when she was made fun of and hurt" (35) and felt "[d]ismissed. Erased" (38) to the point of not being able to tell "which is worse, being dumped like trash or whipped like a slave" (38). She experienced the same feelings when she was ridiculed and embarrassed by the white medical student who introduced her to his white parents whom, as she soon came to realize, "was there to terrorize" (38). Bride could not get past all the racist slurs and name-calling, which the six-year old Lula Ann she used to be could not make sense of:

Just like later in school when other curses—with mysterious definitions but clear meanings—were hissed or shouted at me. Coon. Topsy. Clinkertop. Sambo. Ooga. Ape sounds and scratching of the sides, imitating zoo monkeys (56).

As she remembers the bullying in school, the very dark child was treated "like a freak, strange, soiling like a spill of ink on white paper" (56), and still could not report the abuse to the teacher, knowing that she "might get suspended or even expelled" (56). This is known as systemic racism, in which schools, the police, the judicial system and all public institutions engage in to intimidate Blacks, in their own ways. As Ramirez explains, this type of racist treatment denies African Americans the right to live with dignity and "search for self-realization and self-worth in a world that has deprived them of these values" (qtd. in Liashuk 124). As Akhteer argues, being treated with dignity, as Sweetness wishes, boils down to "the state of not being singled out," meaning "being accepted into the mainstream sociocultural group [and having] better employment ... to achieve greater social mobility" (qtd. in Liashuk 124).

### Vengeance African Style

Booker Starbern, the major male character, whom Morrison calls a “Luddite,” is an African American student who “had been shaped by talk in the flesh and text on paper” (Morrison 112). His interrogation of racial injustice against his folk manifests into an obsession with questions, “beginning with “Why” (110), denoting a tormented mind and need for

real answers concerning slavery, lynching, forced labor, sharecropping, racism, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, prison labor, migration, civil rights and black revolution movements [which he thinks] were all about money; Money withheld, money stolen, money as power, as war (110-111).

Actually, Booker’s interest in college, the varied courses he attended in the history and theories of economics, political science, psychology, humanities and African American Studies, and doing postgraduate research are all motivated by one single purpose: to understand the root cause of the race problem. Only a *materialist* approach to the question seems to have abated his anger, as he finally comes to understand that “money shaped every single oppression in the world” (111) and that “[w]ealth alone explained humanity’s evil” (122). Apart from the collective wound of racism, the young man is also a victim of childhood trauma, the wound caused by the loss of his little brother Adam, murdered with five other children by a white serial killer. Like all victims, Booker has had *vindictive* impulses to avenge his brother, spending “time inventing scenarios involving pain and despair without end” (120). Justice is all he wanted and beheading the culprit, as the public demands (119), does not seem to quench his thirst for revenge. Drawing upon his African culture, Booker invokes the African tradition of vengeance, according to which one of the tribes would lash “the dead body to the back of the one who had murdered it” (120). For Booker, “[t]hat would certainly be justice—to carry the rotten corpse around as a physical burden as well as public shame and damnation (120).

The atrocity of the African revenge tradition invokes the revenge tragedy, a genre established in the West by A. H. Thorndike in 1902, for whom Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* stands as “the revenge play par excellence” (King 4). The genre is associated with “grotesque spectacle and fatality” and “antisociality” (6-7), two major characteristics that contradict with the cotemporary practice of what King calls “civil vengeance,” or “retribution in the guise of civility” (4). As she further explains the concept in her work bearing the same title, “civil vengeance” designates “revenge’s integration into the social fabric, by which I mean government, law, religion as well as noninstitutional discourse” (4). Despite having a built-in Luddite mentality, Booker is still a *civil* young man whose desire to avenge his murdered brother, according to the justice norms set by the African tribe, attests to the unfathomable pain the horrible act causes. Furthermore, and notwithstanding the vulgar and uncivilized manner of punishing the murderer, Booker’s tone still conveys both a willingness to succumb to his revenge impulses and an obvious pleasure derived from the murderer’s misfortune that this tribal form of getting even and rendering

justice to the victim's family entails. "Revenge is sweet" (Jaffe) it seems, but despite its claimed *cathartic* and pain-purging effects, the satisfaction the avenger is said to get is often fleeting and "momentary" (Hogenboom), as the unfolding events in Morrison's text demonstrate.

### **The Black Mother's Revenge Plot**

Of all the three protagonists, Sweetness comes out as the most emotionally scarred by the whites' hate, which triggers her desire for retaliation. Her abhorrence of 'blackness' is deeply engrained in and caused by an equal abhorrence of 'whiteness' and whites, whom Sofia happens to represent while being forced to pay for their past and present crimes. As the trial episode shows, Sweetness's rage against Whites manifests textually, in two ways: First, through the downgrading terms she uses each time she refers to whites. As the following expressions show, the adjectives she attributes to offending whites have clearly negative connotations, drawing upon biblical, psychological, and even animalistic registers while evoking evil, sin, cowardice, perversion, dirt, and monstrosity. For Sweetness, the bullying white boys who physically attacked and humiliated the little black girl in the street are "white trash" (Morrison 41), the teachers charged with child molestation are "evil whites," "sinful teachers," "devils," "a gang of pervert teachers" and "freaks" (42). Being the principal offender, Sofia has had her share of curses and violent verbal attacks, launched at her by the furious parents of the allegedly molested children, including Sweetness with her hidden revenge plot, the public and the media. The teacher is literally stripped of her identity as woman and social status as teacher; both are obscured to give room to other identity attributes that deny her human nature and stress her monstrosity. Sofia is thus called "the lady monster" (14) and so is "her co-monster husband" (15), also one of the three teachers implicated in the alleged crime; "the filthy freak" (16) who is "old as dirt," and the "[d]evil. Bitch," "cold, like the snake she is," as some parents have come to see her (16).

The second textual evidence of the mother's vindictive attitude towards whites lies in her eagerness to criminalize the white teacher, at any cost. Her determination to send Sofia behind bars manifests in the preparatory work the mother did before her daughter's scheduled court appearance, in order to carry out her vengeance plan in the most satisfying way. To guarantee the success of Lula Ann's 'performance,' as she called it, Sweetness worked on such details as the neat physical appearance of the child, by fixing her "wild hair [which] was always a trial," braiding it down tight, and dressing her in "a blue and white sailor dress" (42) to ensure the witness's respect and credibility before judges. The mother also made sure Lula Ann would remember and follow the instructions of the social worker and psychologist. By so orchestrating the child's court appearance, the mother, just like all revenge-seekers, is driven by "a misguided attempt to transform shame into pride" (Beaumont).

Indeed, the outcome of the trial was highly rewarding, in that respect, for both mother and daughter. As the “proud as a peacock” mother remembers (Morrison 42), Lula Ann’s performance was flawless, because her daughter behaved “like a grown-up on the witness stand” (42). For the “nervous” mother, the child acted self-confidently and calmly, did not stumble, stutter or forget the professionals’ instructions and, most importantly, did not “put [her mother] to shame” (42). Real pride, for the mother avenger, lies in her daughter’s ability to “put the noose, so to speak, around” (42) Sofia’s neck hence “[t]he symbolic revenge power of the court trial” (Liashuk 125). Morrison’s focalization on the trial scene pits blackness against whiteness, where the black child witness symbolically “knock[s] it out of the park” (Morrison 42), as proud Sweetness comments on her daughter’s perfect performance. Liashuk comments on the scene in the following terms:

Sweetness’s reaction to Lula Ann’s court appearance is not the pride felt for a child standing up against the cruelty of adults. It is a power of a black girl to confront the Whites; for Sweetness Lula Ann is standing against the whole white world, whose privileges and demands for passing or marginalizing were the main reason for the failure in motherhood that Sweetness experienced. (126)

### Vengeance Morrison Style

In order to determine the status Morrison confers to *whiteness* in *God Help the Child*, one needs to shed the spotlight on Sofia Huxley, as its very embodiment and the object of the *revenge* scheme; two aspects of the problem, which together with *crime*, will make up the backbone of the following discussion. What the reader might find particularly shocking in Sofia’s trial is the way she reacted to the false testimony that “one of the ones,” as she referred to Lula Ann, the perjurer, “helped kill me, take my life away... [and] erase fifteen years of life as death” (Morrison 69-70). When the child pointed her finger towards Sofia “[I]like a cap pistol” (31), the latter was just speechless, as she “stared” at the child, looking “shocked, unbelieving” (31). In this context, one cannot not heed the way Sofia is *silenced* in Bride’s narrative and *vilified* in that of Sweetness! This can be interpreted as Morrison’s ‘revenge’ acted out with whatever means at hand, namely her art and writing craft, which relegate the white protagonist to the margins of the black characters’ stories.

Indeed, the representation of ‘whites’ and ‘whiteness’ in Morrison’s works of fiction has made the subject matter of scholar Roy F. Smith’s thesis, entitled, *Toni Morrison’s Argument with the Other: Irony, Metaphor, and Whiteness* (2000). Working on her novels published up to 2000, Smith notices the way “Morrison’s fiction reverses this representation and positions white people in the position of the Other” (1). The aim, Smith explains, is to force “white readers to experience the effects of being positioned as Other” (1) and to “become othered by a community that has itself traditionally occupied that space in American literature” (2).

Similarly, Morrison tends to portray whites as “survivable evils” whom Smith likens to “natural calamities, [which] engender feelings of anger within the community” (1); a strategy that marginalizes white characters by silencing them “unless their speech supports stereotypical portraits of racist behavior” (2).

In spite of Morrison’s unapologetic “othering” of whites in most of her narratives, Smith seems to be particularly fascinated with the writer’s neutrality as to the dynamics of oppression and those who engage in it. He has, thus, identified three patterns, according to which “oppression can be perpetrated by blacks against blacks as in *The Bluest Eye*, by whites against blacks as in *Beloved*, or by blacks against innocent whites as in *Song of Solomon*” (3) and *God Help the Child*, if one may add, as the case of Sofia illustrates it. In Morrison’s last oeuvre, one can even identify two additional patterns: in the first, oppression, read as child abuse, is inflicted by *white* mothers against *white* daughters, as the cases of Brooklyn, Sofia, and Rain illustrate. In the second, oppression, read as lethal violence, is perpetrated by a *white* serial killer against *white and non-white* children. The criminal, who was eventually caught and “convicted of SSS, the sexually stimulated slaughter of six boys,” is depicted as “an equal-opportunity killer ... [whose] victims seemed to be representative of the *We Are the World* video,” as Morrison comments on the horrible crimes (118). This levelling up in the treatment of oppression as a *human* rather than *race-bound impulse*, whose purpose is to subdue the other, attests to Morrison’s eventual capacity to transcend the little self, particularly that which is trauma-bound that the ongoing war between ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ causes.

Now, what does this have to do with *revenge*, the central issue in the trial of ‘whiteness’ that Sofia embodies and whom the black mother and daughter are determined to incriminate? The answer is obvious, for this is vengeance *Morrison style*, as roles are switched:

... the traditional power distribution has ended up dramatically reversed: a victim who is “so calm and sure of herself” (Morrison 42) this time, finally exposes the false appearance of virtue. In Lula Ann’s court appearance, Sweetness sees the skin privilege condemned, while the communal approval of her child kindles her joy of motherhood (Liashuk 126).

Not heeding Morrison’s personal take on the whites’ ongoing oppression of blacks in American society would certainly be an assault on Morrison’s intelligence and art. This would also violate her individual right to avenge her wounded “public self” as *Toni Morrison*, and her intimate self, as *Chloe*, as she intimated to her interviewer, Farah J. Griffin in 2015 (qtd. in Griffin 2020). Yes, indeed. Morrison, too, wants revenge though for different purposes! In a 2012 interview, Morrison was so enraged by police killings of blacks that she openly claimed vengeance, telling Hermione Hoby, her interviewer, that she had two unfulfilled wishes:

There are two things I want to see in life. One is a white kid shot in the back by a cop. Never happened. The second thing I want to see: a record of any white man in

the entire history of the world who has been convicted of raping a black woman. Just one (“Toni Morrison”).

Despite the shock one is likely to feel, due to the cruelty of the revenge scenario the author wants to see played out against a white kid, one can still figure out the reasons giving rise to such a weird wish made by no common revenge-seeker, namely Toni Morrison! Only Mario Gollwitzer’s theories of revenge of “comparative suffering” and the “understanding hypothesis” (qtd. in Jaffe) could help explain the satisfaction Morrison might derive from seeking revenge against whites, in such a violent manner. Endowed with common sense as she is, Morrison’s revenge wishes must be motivated more by the “understanding hypothesis” than “comparative suffering.” In other terms, by wanting revenge against the white oppressor, Morrison needs to “be assured that the [white] offender has made a direct connection between the retaliation and the initial behavior,” rather than just seeing him suffer in order to achieve “an emotional balance to the universe” (Gollwitzer, qtd. in Jaffe). It is the *lesson* Morrison wishes Whites would learn by experiencing the same pain a black would feel when his kid is stabbed by a white cop, or when a black woman is raped by a white man, whom she knows will get away with his crime. Only then, Morrison seems to insinuate, would real change occur to put an end to the long history of racial oppression against Blacks in America.

### **Sofia Huxley: The White Avenger**

As “revenge drives crime” (Hogenboom), the revenge-driven crime Sweetness and her daughter committed against the white teacher has led to one more violent, unreported and unpunished crime—assault and battery. The offense is committed by Sofia Huxley against Bride, some fifteen years later, on the same day she was released on parole. Unlike her mother, who has never expressed any feelings of guilt or regret, Bride “made a promise to” herself, for as she puts it, “a promise is a promise, especially if it’s to oneself” (Morrison 12), to compensate Sofia for the damage incurred. The intention was to “comfort” the white teacher and help her “get a good start” (20) in life. More important was her need to “feel good about [herself]. Not so disposable,” as she intimates to her closest friend, Brooklyn (49). Nevertheless, although Bride refused to live with the sting of remorse, she still could not imagine that the compensation in cash she planned would never help the unjustly convicted Sofia “forget and take the edge off bad luck [and] hopelessness” (12) that the false testimony and its consequent traumatizing prison experience gave rise to.

Indeed, according to Bride’s narrative, when Sofia recognized her, she changed, in no time at all, “from obedient ex-con to raging alligator. From slack-lipped to fangs. From slouch to hammer” (29). The attack was brutal as she “beat [Bride] half to death” (24); the incurred physical damage was so serious that only recourse to plastic surgery helped fix her disfigured face (21-29). The severity of the assault made Bride consider calling the police to eventually

make up her mind not to, to avoid “embarrassment” (22) and becoming the subject of much local gossip, which would harm her person and business (22). Being “whipped like a slave” (38), first, by her own mother and then by a “convict” (38), and “dumped like trash” by Booker, her lover, Bride has come to realize that neither “the scars” nor “the shame” of being so humiliated would let her forget (29). Yet, it was this very feeling of being “[e]rased” (38) in the aftermath of the violent encounter with Sofia that really triggered her *awakening* as who she is and wants to be (53-57). Reaching such a higher level of consciousness operates like the trigger that sets her on a journey towards self-recovery and healing.

In line with Bride’s narrative is that of Sofia who “blacked” (70) the very minute she identified her oppressor; her “fists took over as she thought she was battling the Devil... seductive but evil” that Bride personified (70). Sofia, too, thought of the police whom she expected Bride would call; during that time, the *real* victim who has suddenly turned into a criminal describes her eventual collapse in the aftermath of the violent episode, in a moving tone:

I curled up into a ball on the bed and waited for the police. Waited and waited. None came. If they had bashed in the door they would have seen a woman finally broken down after fifteen years of staying strong. For the first time after all those years, I cried. Cried and cried and cried until I fell asleep. When I woke up I reminded myself that freedom is never free. You have to fight for it. Work for it and make sure you are able to handle it. Now I think of it, that 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 clear and able. (70)

Being heavily loaded down with conflicting emotions of fear, helplessness, relief and hope, the above quoted passage is significant for its enlightening insights into the dynamics of crime, trauma, and trauma resolution. Sofia’s testimony speaks volumes about the traumatizing experience she had to endure as a detainee at the Decagon Women’s Correctional Center, in the desert of California. Actually, it is through Sofia’s eyes that the reader discovers the dark side of the American penitentiary; a system of social control that appears to deviate from its reformatory and correctional objectives, as it tends to encourage criminality instead of curbing it. As a prisoner, Sofia is forced to rub shoulders with such dangerous women detainees as “murderers, arsonists, drug dealers, bomb-throwing revolutionaries, and the mentally ill” (66). Ironically, however, it is Sofia and her cellmate Julie, both “sentenced for child abuse” (66), who are viewed as “the lowest of the low” and are, consequently, “avoided,” “cursed and spit on” (66).

What Sofia finds even more difficult to cope with is the supervisors’ physical and emotional mistreatment of women prisoners, who are “smacked,” “strip-searched ... at every exit and entrance” and always forced into “some prisoner-guard drama” (65). Women detainees are

also sexually abused by guards as well as inmates; a common practice that is clearly part of the American prison subculture, in general. Sofia's cellmate, Julie, a victim of the "gang rape by four women" and "the loving enslavement she was in with one of the elderly women—a husband called Lover whom no one trifled with" (67) is a case in point. Sexual abuse is far from being gender-specific, as Jack, Sofia's husband, testifies in his letters sent from prison, complaining about physical and sexual abuse as well as torture (67). Both cases attest, not only to the supervisors' inhuman treatment of prisoners, but also to that between inmates; as shocked Sofia reports, a "few of the cruelest ... offered to show" Julie how to hang herself, when she tried and failed to (67). For Sofia, the worst part of her prison trauma remains "the noise, quarrels, fights, laughter, shouts [that] went on and on" (65); once released on parole, she felt "hungry for silence more than food" (69), as the narrator comments.

It is for all those reasons that Sofia wanted to avenge her unjustly persecuted self; a wish come true when Bride offered her the opportunity to do so. No longer able to contain her anger and frustration, Sofia "blew. Really blew" (77), mostly due to her oppressor's humiliating offer, thinking "cash would erase fifteen years of life as death" (70), as Sofia puts it. Notwithstanding the severity of the assault and damage it caused to Bride, as well as the criminal and illegal nature of the out-of-court settlement of the conflict, Sofia's unplanned and extremely violent revenge seems to have eased much of the pain that she, for long years, kept inside, while feigning strength. For Sofia, the best part of the violent retaliation remains its *purging* and *relieving* effects, which the "bottling up [of] filth" and "unshed tears ... for fifteen years" (70) prevented. "Release" (77) and feeling "clear and able" is the "favor" and "gift" (70) Sofia is thankful Bride has offered her, by not reporting her crime of 'battery and assault' to the authorities. As she puts it: "Beating her, kicking and punching her freed me up more than being paroled" (70).

### Unresolved Trauma

At this level, one may legitimately ask, as Morrison herself did in a 2019 interview: "Is it legitimate to respond to violence with violence?" (qtd. in Louis). In other terms, does the author's use of the revenge trope in *God Help the Child* reflect the writer's tacit approval of violent retaliation to get even and resolve the racial problem in the United States? Far from it. Although Morrison is haunted by her desire for equality and justice, it is rancor that she wants abated to win peace of mind. Actually, all the avenger-characters have achieved is a fleeting sense of satisfaction and no closure. As Francis Bacon put it, by sticking to past wounds and memories, avengers choose to "labor in past matters," and by so doing, they "trifle with themselves" (qtd. in Carter.) As Morrison portrays them, all emotionally scarred protagonists who indulged in vengeful fantasies or exacted revenge against their perceived oppressors have ended physically, emotionally and mentally exhausted. Isolation and retreat

into calmer waters denote the deficiency of revenge to give them relief or closure. Indeed, experiencing defeat after defeat to abate psychological pain and mental anguish has filled all revenge seekers with despair, as they realize the futility of their anger and eagerness to give their abusers a taste of their own medicine. Only Bride, Morrison's major protagonist, has taken the opposite path. By not engaging in irrational attempts to reverse the irrevocable history of slavery and change her victimizers—abusive mother, racist whites, and exploitative/manipulative relationships—Bride has chosen to embark on a physical and internal journey to know whether she is made of “cotton” or “steel” (Morrison ) and ultimately reconnect with the lost self. This narrative construction of healing trauma reveals the extent to which Morrison believes in the individual rather than institutional resolution of the Black problem, and how she prioritizes self-knowledge and compassion over justice.

### Conclusion

This paper set out to analyze the fictional resolution of psychological trauma as constructed by Toni Morrison in her last narrative *God help the Child* (2015). It took issue with the meanings and uses of revenge /vengeance as a concept in the wider literature and as a focal theme in this paper, in which vindictive characters—trauma victims of childhood abuse, neglect, and racial oppression—indulge in vengeful desires and acts to get even and restore dignity. Although social and psychological studies have already reached unanimous conclusions about its fleeting nature and unrewarding effects for avengers, this study has tried to examine the fictional construction of revenge within the particular context of psychological trauma. The textual analysis of the concept has demonstrated that revenge—whether it is ideated, desired, or actuated—is in essence a criminal act that turns victims into victimizers. By adopting this emotion-focused coping mechanism, trauma victims—predominantly Black protagonists—not only lose their legal and moral right to justice but also contribute to the perpetuation of and entrapment of Blacks and whites, alike, in the trauma cycle. Furthermore, by depicting revenge as a major obstacle to healing the wounds of trauma that should be discarded as energy-draining and deficient, Morrison redirects trauma victims towards problem- and self-focused coping mechanisms that are likely to effect a real change in the victims' perspective and self-perception, and which have the potential of liberating them from the trauma trap. Though this last aspect of the problem has not been addressed in the present paper, Morrison's elaborate healing model is the subject of an upcoming research paper.

<sup>i</sup> This section is extracted from Chapter V, entitled “The Return of “Blackness” as Trigger of Crime and trauma in T. Morrison’s *God Help the Child*” of my doctoral thesis (Weslati, 2023), pp. (232 -251) under the supervision of Literature Professor, Mohamed Mansouri, English Department, Faculty of Letters, Arts, and Humanities (FLAH), University of Manouba. Tunisia. For more details, check the reference List.

## Works Cited

- Assare, Janice Gassam. “Understanding the White Gaze and How It Impacts Your Workplace.” *Forbes*. 28 Dec, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2021/12/28/understanding-the-white-gaze-and-how-it-impacts-your-workplace/>.
- Bancroft, Corinne. “Just Revenge.” [Course Description]. Engl. 425: Special Studies in the Literature of the US. Fall 2022. 425-bancroft-fall.pdf.
- Beaumont, Leland R. “Revenge. Getting Even.” *Emotional Competency*. <https://www.emotionalcompetency.com//revenge.htm>. Accessed Aug. 2022.
- BU College of General Studies. Interview. “From Toni Morrison to Tarantino—Analyzing America’s Vengeful Stories.” 9 Aug, 2018. <https://www.bu.edu/cgs/2018/08/09/from-toni-morrison-to-tarantino-analyzing-americas-vengeful-stories/>
- Carlsmith, Kevin M. et al. “The Paradoxical Consequences of Revenge.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 95, No. 6, 2008: 1316 –1324.DOI: 10.1037/a0012165. Pdf.
- Carter, Mason “Of Revenge, Francis Bacon: Line by Line Explanation.” [Class with Mason: School of Literary Studies](https://www.classwithmason.com/2023/08/of-revenge-francis-bacon-line-by-line.html), Last Updated 19 Dec. 2024. <https://www.classwithmason.com/2023/08/of-revenge-francis-bacon-line-by-line.html>.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The John Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Cuddon, John A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin Books, 1999.
- Dubber, Markus D. “Policing Possession: The War on Crime and the End of Criminal Law.” *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, vol. 91, no.1, 2000-2001, pp. 841-996. <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/>.
- Elshout, M. et al. (2015). “A prototype Analysis of Vengeance.” *Personal Relationships*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2015, pp. 502–523. <https://doi.org/10.1111/per.12092>.
- England, Deborah, c. “Perjury: Laws and Penalties.” *Criminal Defense Lawyer*, Last Updated by Rebecca Pirijs, 21 Mar. 2023. <https://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/crime-penalties/federal/perjury.htm>.

Erikson, Kai. *Everything in Its Path*. Simon & Schuster, 1976.

[https://books.google.tn/books/about/Everything\\_in\\_Its\\_Path.html?](https://books.google.tn/books/about/Everything_in_Its_Path.html?)

Farrar, Michel K. "The Cycle of Revenge." *God's Breath Publications*, 2007. <https://www.god'sbreathpublications.com>.

Fraser, Rhone and Natalie King-Pedroso, editors. *Critical Responses about the Black Family in Toni Morrison's God Help the Child: Conflicts in Comradeship*. Lexington Books, 2020. <https://dokumen.pub/critical-responses-about-the-black-family-in-toni-morrison-s-god-help-the-child-conflicts-in-comradeship-1793603987-9781793603982.html>.

Gäbler, Ira. & Andreas Maercker. "Revenge after Trauma: Theoretical Outline." *Embitterment. Societal, Psychological, and Clinical Perspectives*, edited by Michael Linden & Andreas Maercker, Springer, 2011, pp. 42-69. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-99741-3\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-99741-3_5). Gäbler\_Maercker\_chapter2.42011 (2) (2).pdf.

Griffin, Farah Jasmine. "Toni Morrison's 'God Help the Child': An Instant New York Times Best-Seller." *Essence*, Last updated 27 Oct. 2020. <https://www.essence.com/celebrity/toni-morrison-s-god-help-child-new-york-times-best-seller/>.

Hack, Daniel. "Revenge Stories of Modern Life." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2006, pp. 277–86. *JSTOR*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3830251>.

Haiven, Max. "Theses on Revenge Capitalism." *Social Text*, 20 Apr. 2022. [https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_topic/revenge-culture/](https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_topic/revenge-culture/).

Herman, Judith I. *Trauma and Recovery. The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 2015.

Hoby, Hermione. "Toni Morrison: 'I'm Writing for Black People ... I Don't Have to Apologise.'" *The Guardian*, 25 Apr. 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/25/toni-morrison-books-interview-god-help-the-child>.

Hogenboom, Melissa. "The Hidden Upsides of Revenge." BBC, 3 Apr. 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170403-the-hidden-upsides-of-revenge>

Ioannou, Maria C. et al. "Offenders' Crime Narratives across Different Types of Crimes." *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice*, vol. 15, no. 5, 2015, pp. 383-400. <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/24792>.

Jackson, Joshua C. et al. "Revenge: A Multilevel Review and Synthesis." *Annual Review of Psychology*. 4 Jan. 2019. Doi: 10.1146/annurev-psych-010418-103305.

Jaffe, Eric. "The Complicated Psychology of Revenge." *Association for Psychological Science*, Vol. 4, Oct. 2011. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/the-complicated-psychology-of-revenge>.

- Keita, Fatoumata. "Conjuring Aesthetic Blackness: Abjection and Trauma in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*." *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, Feb. 2018, pp. 43–55. [gale.com/apps/doc/A534879599/LitRC?u=anon~9aa69279&sid=googleScholar&xid=69d24a00](https://www.gale.com/apps/doc/A534879599/LitRC?u=anon~9aa69279&sid=googleScholar&xid=69d24a00).
- King, Emily L. *Civil Vengeance*. Cornell UP, 2019. <https://www.perlego.com/fr/book/1109948/civil-vengeance-literature-culture-and-early-modern-revenge-pdf>.
- King-Pedroso, Natalie. "'Editors' Introduction. Teaching Morrison's *God Help the Child*." *Critical Responses about the Black Family in Toni Morrison's 'God Help the Child': Conflicts in Comradeship*, edited by R. Fraser & N. King-Pedroso, Lexington Books, 2020, pp. 1-10.
- LaCapra, D. *Writing History. Writing Trauma*. The John Hopkins UP, 2014.
- Liashuk, Xenia. "The Loss and Regaining of Self: Identity Negotiation in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*." *Critical Responses about the Black Family in Toni Morrison's 'God Help the Child': Conflicts in Comradeship*, edited by R. Fraser & N. King-Pedroso, Lexington Books, 2020, pp. 119-138. <https://dokumen.pub/critical-responses-about-the-black-family-in-toni-morrison-s-god-help-the-child-conflicts-in-comradeship-1793603987-9781793603982.html>.
- Louis, Édouard. "Toni Morrison Remembered by Édouard Louis: 'Her Laugh Was Her Revenge against the World.'" *The Guardian*, 11 Aug., 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/11/toni-morrison-remembered-by-edouard-louis>.
- "Mark Twain Quotes." *Goodreads*, 2007-2025. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/4650-truth-is-stranger-than-fiction-but-it-is-because-fiction>.
- McDermott, Rose et al. "Blunt not the Heart, Enrage it: The Psychology of Revenge and Deterrence." *The Scholar*, vol. 1, no. 1, Nov. 2017, pp. 68–88. <https://tnsr.org/2017/11/blunt-not-heart-enrage-psychology-revenge-deterrence/>.
- Miller, William I. "In Defense of Revenge." *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, Minneapolis UP, 1999, pp. 70-89. *Medieval Cultures*, 16. [https://repository.law.umich.edu/book\\_capters/130](https://repository.law.umich.edu/book_capters/130).
- Morrison, Toni. *God Help the Child*. Vintage, 2015.
- . "No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear." *The Nation*, 23 Mar. 2015. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/no-place-self-pity-no-room-fear/>.
- . "The Site of Memory." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by William Zinsser, Houghton Mifflin, 1995, pp. 83-102. *Morrison-Site-of-Memory.pdf*.

- Ndoulou, léa blandine mbouilou & Hubert Franck Lylian Massala. "Black Women's Revolt in the Struggle for Freedom: An Exploration of Toni Morrison's Selected Novels." *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies*, vol. 04, no. 01, Jan. 2024, pp. 70-78. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.55677/ijssers/V04I1Y2024-09>.
- "Revenge." Oxford Languages [Google Dictionary]. Oxford university press. <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>. Accessed 12 Aug. 2025.
- Rubenstein, Richard L. "Book Reviews." Review of *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, by Dominick LaCapra. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 17, Number 1, spring 2003, pp. 158-161. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/8/article/43141/pdf>.
- "R. W. Emerson. Quotes." *BrainyQuote*, 2001- 2025. [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/ralph\\_waldo\\_emerson\\_120410.1](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/ralph_waldo_emerson_120410.1)
- Sieff, Daniela. "Unlocking the Secrets of the Wounded Psyche: Interview with Donald Kalsched." *Psychological Perspectives: A Semiannual Journal of Jungian Thought*. Jul. 2008. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233499296>. doi: 10.1080/00332920802454197.
- Spearing, E. M. "Seneca's Tragedies and the Elizabethan Drama." *The Translations of Seneca's Tragedies*. W. Hefper & Sons, 1912. *Shakespeare Online*. 2 Aug. 2011. [http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/Elizabethan\\_senecadrama.html](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/Elizabethan_senecadrama.html) >.
- Smith, Roy F. *Toni Morrison's Argument with the Other: Irony, Metaphor, and Whiteness*. 2000. California State University, PhD dissertation. Retrieved <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/1692>. Accessed Jan. 2022.
- Swindle, Jason. "Bearing False Witness." *Swindle Law Group*, 2 Jan. 2013. <https://www.swindlelaw.com/>.
- Webster, Denise C. & Erin C. Dunn, "Feminist Perspectives on Trauma." *Women & Therapy*, vol. 28, no. 3-4, 2005, pp. 111-142. DOI: [10.1300/J015v28n03\\_06](https://doi.org/10.1300/J015v28n03_06).
- Weslati, Saida. *Crime and Cowardice as Triggers of Individual and Collective Psychological Trauma within the Dysfunctional Mother-Daughter Dyad in Toni Morrison's God Help the Child (2015) and Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007)*. 2023. Faculty of Letters, Arts & Humanities, University of Manouba, PhD thesis.
- White, Rob et al. *Crime, Criminality and Criminal Justice*. Oxford UP, 2019. [https://books.google.com/books/about/Crime\\_Criminality\\_and\\_Criminal\\_Justice.html?hl=fr&id=PdAqvWEACAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Crime_Criminality_and_Criminal_Justice.html?hl=fr&id=PdAqvWEACAAJ).