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硕士学位论文

迷失与复原：《最蓝的眼睛》与《上帝救助孩子》中的童年创伤

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**Loss and Resilience: Childhood Trauma in *The Bluest Eye*
and *God Help the Child***

A thesis

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Requirements for the Degree of
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By

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Abstract

As the first black woman writer who won the Nobel Prize in literature in American history, Toni Morrison has enjoyed a great reputation in the country and around the world. Mainly describing the traumatic experiences of the African-Americans, her works show their hard living conditions. *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child* are respectively Morrison's first novel and the latest one. From the perspective of childhood trauma, the two novels explore the impact of childhood trauma on the growth of children and reveal a series of problems existing in American society.

Based on trauma theory, this paper makes a detailed analysis of the childhood trauma that the leading characters in the two works have suffered, and compares the different outcomes caused by the trauma. Finally, the reasons for the failure of trauma recovery of the former and the success of the latter are discussed respectively with the application of trauma and recovery theory. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola has mainly suffered cultural, familial and social trauma. In the end she gets lost and falls into the abyss of misery, because she is unable to establish a new connection with the outside world, and there is no proper listener to give her the right guidance. In *God Help the Child*, except for the trauma from culture and family, sexual abuse on children has become one of the sources of trauma in the story. After suffering a series of trauma, the hero and heroine rebuild their sense of security and find the appropriate listeners to tell the painful past. In the end, they find themselves, become independent and confident, and smile to embrace the new life. In the two works, Morrison reveals her understanding towards the treatment of trauma of the blacks from different angles: only when the blacks preserve and develop their own culture can they heal trauma and find themselves.

Because of the immature mental and physical development, the trauma which children suffered in their childhood can cause great harm to their growth. Through the comparative analysis of Morrison's two works, the author believes that the characters

in the two novels have suffered psychological trauma which mainly comes from culture, family and society. In addition to the efforts the characters have made, the success of recovery relies on the care and love from the outside world. It can be seen from the two novels that Morrison's cognition and understanding towards children growth and trauma have become more mature and optimistic. Through the two works, Morrison shows her good wishes for the bright future of human beings without trauma.

Key Words: Toni Morrison; *The Bluest Eye*; *God Help the Child*; childhood trauma; trauma theory

摘 要

作为美国历史上首位获得诺贝尔文学奖的黑人女作家，托妮·莫里森在当代美国乃至全世界都享有盛誉。其作品大都通过描述美国黑人的创伤经历，真实地展现了他们艰难的生活境遇。《最蓝的眼睛》和《上帝救助孩子》分别是莫里森的处女作和最新一部作品。这两部小说从童年创伤角度入手，探讨童年创伤对儿童成长带来的影响，向读者揭示了美国社会中存在的种种问题。

本文以创伤理论为基础，对两部作品中人物遭受的童年创伤做了详细的分析，并对比二者创伤产生的不同结果，结合创伤与复原理论分别探讨了前者创伤复原失败和后者成功的原因。《最蓝的眼睛》中佩科拉主要遭受来自文化、家庭和社会三个方面的创伤。由于未能与外界建立联系，并且没有合适的倾听者给她正确的指引，佩科拉最终迷失自我，走向毁灭的深渊。而在《上帝救助孩子》中，主人公除了受到来自文化和家庭的创伤外，对儿童的性侵犯成为故事中人物创伤的来源之一。在遭遇一系列的创伤后，男女主人公通过重建安全感并找到合适的倾听者诉说伤痛的往事，最终找回自我，变得独立和自信，微笑迎接新生活。在这两部作品中，莫里森从不同的角度揭示了她对黑人治疗创伤的理解：黑人只有保留和发展本民族文化，才能修复创伤，找回自我。

由于心智和身体机能尚未发育成熟，童年时期遭遇的创伤对儿童的成长会带来巨大的伤害和打击。通过对莫里森两部作品的分析，作者认为，在这两部作品中人物遭受的主要创伤来源于文化、家庭和社会三个方面。复原的成功与否，除了依靠自身的努力，还需要外界给与关怀与呵护。此外，可以看出莫里森对儿童成长、创伤的认识和理解变得更为成熟和乐观，这两部作品同时寄托了莫里森对人类远离伤痛的美好希望。

关键词：托妮·莫里森；《最蓝的眼睛》；《上帝救助孩子》；童年创伤；创伤理论

Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Abstract	ii
摘 要	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Toni Morrison and Her Major Works.....	1
1.2 Literature Review.....	4
1.2.1 Traumatic Studies of Toni Morrison's Works Abroad	4
1.2.2 Traumatic Studies of Toni Morrison's Works at Home	7
1.3 Trauma Theory.....	10
1.3.1 The Origin and Development of Trauma Theory.....	10
1.3.2 Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery Theory	13
Chapter 2 Causes of Trauma in <i>The Bluest Eye</i> and <i>God Help the Child</i>	16
2.1 Traumatic Experiences in <i>The Bluest Eye</i>	16
2.1.1 Cultural Roots of Trauma: Impact of White Supremacy	17
2.1.2 Familial Roots of Trauma: Parental Injuries.....	22
2.1.2.1 Lack of Maternal Love.....	22
2.1.2.2 The Distortion of Father's Love.....	24
2.1.3 Social Roots of Trauma: Disregard in Black Community	26
2.2 Traumatic Experiences in <i>God Help the Child</i>	28
2.2.1 Cultural Roots of Trauma: Discrimination	29
2.2.1.1 Racism from the Whites.....	29
2.2.1.2 Colorism in Black Community	31
2.2.2 Familial Roots of Trauma: Mother's Misinterpretation of Love	32
2.2.3 Social Roots of Trauma: Child Sexual Abuse.....	34
2.2.3.1 The Influence of Others' Sexual Abuse Experiences.....	34
2.2.3.2 Personal Experiences of Sexual Abuse	36
Chapter 3 Different Results from Childhood Trauma	39

3.1 Aftereffects of Childhood Trauma in <i>The Bluest Eye</i>	39
3.1.1 Loss of Identity	40
3.1.2 Abnormality of Personality	41
3.2 Resilience from Childhood Traumatic Experiences in <i>God Help the Child</i> ...	43
3.2.1 Being Independent and Confident	44
3.2.2 Integration into White and Black Community	46
Chapter 4 Reasons of Different Results	48
4.1 Failure to Heal Childhood Trauma in <i>The Bluest Eye</i>	48
4.1.1 Being Unable to Connect with the Outside World.....	48
4.1.2 Wrong Guidance of Listeners	49
4.1.3 Misinterpretation of Religion.....	51
4.2 Recovery from Childhood Trauma in <i>God Help the Child</i>	52
4.2.1 Establishing the Sense of Safety	53
4.2.2 Speaking out the Traumatic Experiences	54
4.2.3 Finding a Good Listener	57
Chapter 5 Conclusion	60
Works Cited	62
Appendix Publications during M.A. Study	66

Chapter 1 Introduction

The literary achievements of Toni Morrison have marked a milestone after Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison in black literature. As a remarkable contemporary African-American woman writer, Toni Morrison has devoted herself to preserving and developing traditional black culture, and exploring the new direction of black literature. Her works probe into the history, culture and living conditions of African Americans and reveal various problems exposed in the society, which have made a huge contribution to American literature.

In this chapter, a brief introduction to Toni Morrison as well as her major works is given at the very beginning. Then the author summarizes traumatic studies on Morrison's works from different angles at home and abroad. Besides, as the theoretical basis of this thesis, trauma theory and Judith Herman's trauma and recovery theory are discussed in the chapter.

1.1 Toni Morrison and Her Major Works

Toni Morrison is one of the most famous contemporary African-American writers. She has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, which makes her the first female African-American writer who won this honor. Her works vividly describe the tough existence of the black community, which reflects that African-American ethnic culture is faced with the distortion and threat of white hegemonic culture. As a woman writer, Morrison combines the self-seeking of black women and the reconstruction of national consciousness through her own experiences and feminine insight.

Morrison is the second child in an African-American working-class family and was nourished by the traditional black culture. In 1949, she was admitted to the historically black Howard University with good grades, majoring in English and minoring in classical literature. After earning the Bachelor of Art degree, Morrison went to Cornell University for further study, where she focused on the research of

Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner's works, which has greatly enlightened her literary creation. Upon graduation, she became a teacher at Texas Southern University and then at Howard University where she met Harold Morrison and got married. They had two sons but divorced in 1964. After the breakup of her marriage, she turned to be an editor of Random House. During that time, Morrison devoted herself to drawing public attention to black literature, and the working experience helped her gain deeper insight into racial and cultural issues between the black and the white. At the same time, she started to write, and it was the beginning of her writing career. She was not only an editor and writer, but also a mother. When she started her first novel *The Bluest Eye*, she got up very early every morning to make time to write, and looked after her two children alone. However, Morrison did not give up teaching. She resumed her teaching career as an associate professor in the State University of New York in 1971.

In her literary career, Morrison has gained many honors and awards. In 1977, her third novel *Song of Solomon* won the National Book Critics Circle Award. Her fifth novel *Beloved*, a best-seller for 25 weeks, attracted wide attention since it was published. With such high acclaim, *Beloved* won the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988. Five years later, in 1993, the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Morrison, which made her the first, and so far the only black woman writer to win the prize. The prize has also established her unshakable status in the American literary world.

From 1970 to 2015, Morrison has published eleven novels in total. She has successfully created the various images of black people, especially black women, such as Pecola, Sula, Sethe, Eva and so forth. The characters in her works are not invisible and ignored any more, but those who struggled for existence and freedom. They not only symbolize the black women who live a tragic life, but also reflect that the racial and cultural conflicts between black and white at that time. In addition, Morrison gives voice to those black people who lived on the margins of white-dominated society and tried to maintain the black traditional culture in form of literature.

In 1970, Morrison published *The Bluest Eye*, which made her spring into fame. Its publication marked a breakthrough of African-American-themed novels. Morrison got the inspiration from a conversation in her childhood. A girl told her that she dreamed to get a pair of beautiful blue eyes which white people owned. In the novel, Morrison puts the emphasis on the suffering of a black girl who longed for a pair of the bluest eyes. The novel reveals that the white culture has brought a huge impact on the black's national culture, and reflects the confusion, loss and distortion of the blacks under the conflicts between black culture and white culture. Published in 1973, Morrison's second novel *Sula* shows the miserable experiences of the blacks especially black women by depicting a friendship between two black women. Her third novel *Song of Solomon* attracts worldwide attention and brings her national reputation. Her fourth novel, *Tar Baby*, published in 1981, shows the survival predicament of the black in America and reveals that love and freedom are the most precious.

In 1987, her most celebrated novel, *Beloved*, was published. It won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and established her status in American literature. Morrison was inspired by a real story happening in nineteenth century that a female slave killed her child to protect him from slavery. In the novel, the mother Sethe murders her daughter Beloved to save her from slavery life, but the ghost of Beloved is back to earth after eighteen years to torture her mother. The sixth novel, *Jazz*, came out in 1992, which is about a love triangle and murder story in New York City. Five years later, *Paradise* came out and formed a trilogy with *Beloved* and *Jazz*. They are all about love and the exploration of African American history. Subsequently, Morrison published *Love* in 2003 and *A Mercy* in 2008. In 2012, at the age of 81, Morrison brought out her tenth novel *Home*, telling a story of an American veteran who took part in Korean War. Her latest novel, *God Help the Child*, once published in 2015, attracted widespread attention among readership as well as critics.

1.2 Literature Review

Since the publication of *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison has attracted a lot of attention from domestic and foreign scholars. The study of Morrison started early overseas, and the earliest review article could be traced back to 1975, while it was in the late 1980s that domestic scholars began to pay attention to Toni Morrison. After being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, Morrison and her works have become a popular research topic all over the world. In the following part, the author summarizes and analyzes the traumatic study of Toni Morrison's works at home and abroad.

1.2.1 Traumatic Studies of Toni Morrison's Works Abroad

The studies on Toni Morrison abroad are abundant and most of them are from America. The early researches can be traced back to 1970s, after the publication of *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, mainly focusing on thematic studies and the analysis of contents. It was after 1990s when she won the Nobel Prize in Literature that the study on Toni Morrison moved to prosperity. In this period, research subjects were various, including narrative strategy, postmodernism, psychological analysis, post-colonialism, sociological approach and so forth. The fever increased in the twenty-first century, and the research perspectives are multiple. Except for the above critical approaches, many new perspectives such as space, eco-criticism, black music emerge successively at the same time. Among them, researches from traumatic perspective begin to draw public attention.

The research on trauma theory can be traced back to the nineteenth century, and its application in literature has sprung up since 1990s in America. At the very beginning, trauma theory was limitedly used in the studies on the war-themed literary works. It was in the early twenty-first century that researchers began to make studies on Toni Morrison's works from the perspective of trauma. They discussed and analyzed the roots of African-Americans' trauma from race, history, culture and so on.

Since the characters in Morrison's novels mainly depict the living conditions of black people, scholars have been paying continuous attention to the racial problems in

her works. From the perspective of trauma, J. Brooks Bouson analyzes the racial trauma in Morrison's seven novels in his symbolic work. Bouson (2000) believes that the motive force of Morrison's literary creation is racial shame and self-hatred. In this book, he makes a detailed and impressive analysis of the roots of racial trauma which the protagonists have suffered in *The Bluest Eye*. Bouson remarks that *The Bluest Eye* "dramatizes an extreme form of the shame-vulnerability and shame-anxiety suffered by African Americans in white American" (2000: 25). The destructive power caused by racial trauma to the African-Americans is their inferiority, shame, and the severe damage of their self-consciousness. Likewise, the same analytical framework is applied to reveal the racial shame and trauma of Morrison's other six novels in the rest part of the book.

Another scholar who also interprets Morrison's works from the perspective of racial trauma is Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber. She analyzes the connections of trauma, memory and identity construction by the application of psychoanalysis theory, attachment theory and Lacan's mirror theory. Schreiber points out that "one of Toni Morrison's greatest achievements is her ability to depict what it means to be black in American society" (2001: 1). Besides, Schreiber proves the relationship of trauma, memory and recovery, and believes that home is not only a physical space for living, but also a place to ease the pain and to recover from trauma. This book is so successful because it specifically and profoundly reveals the theme of trauma in Morrison's works, closely combining trauma theory with the analysis of the contents. However, her traumatic researches on Morrison's works are from single aspect concentrating on the trauma that the blacks suffered caused by racial problems. When discussing the way to recover from trauma, the author thinks that home is the best place of the treatment, while ignoring the positive effects of other factors in healing such as black culture and community.

Some scholars focus on the traumatic analysis of Morrison's masterwork *Beloved* from the perspective of history. They think that the traumatic life of the African Americans is brought about by slavery. Florian Bast (2011) believes that Morrison shows the trauma in *Beloved* caused by slavery with the application of the figure of

speech. She proposes that the color red has a close relationship with trauma and has metaphorical meaning like the awful influence of slavery, because “red symbolizes slavery and concepts associated with it, such as racist violence after the Civil War” (Bast, 2011: 1071). Another scholar Peter Ramos reveals the living condition and psychological status of the black people before and after the abolishment of slavery by the comparative analysis of *Beloved* and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*. Ramos (2008) believes that Morrison has depicted the horrible traumatic experiences by employing the image ghost based on the theme of slavery.

Kristya Bryant-Berg (2009) makes a comparative study on the novels of Louise Erdrich and Toni Morrison from perspective of cultural trauma. By analyzing the common ground between communal trauma and personal trauma, historical trauma and transhistorical trauma, and the cyclical nature of collective trauma, she reveals “the long-term poverty, cultural dislocation and racism are manifestation of trauma” (Bryant-Berg, 2009: iv). Moreover, she probes into the roots of trauma in Morrison’s *A Mercy*, and points out the same theme revealed in *A Mercy* and *Beloved*, which is the trauma brought by slavery.

In addition to those traumatic analysis mentioned above, Christine Grogan researches the damage of familial trauma to children. Grogan probes into the “literary representations of father-daughter incest and the complex trauma associated with it” (2011: iii). She elaborates that *The Bluest Eye* “compel us to confront the traumatogenic nature of social oppression, especially that which is endemic to the structure of the heteropatriarchal family and American racism and classism” (Grogan, 2011: iii). Grogan believes that the harm is potential but long-term, because victims often cannot pour out the traumatic experiences. Grogan’s research discusses the trauma of father-daughter incest from the new viewpoints feminism and trauma theory, which is innovative in the traumatic study of Morrison’s works.

In general, the researches on Toni Morrison abroad have become hot since the 1990s, and scholars have tried to study her works from different angles. Although the application of trauma theory to the analysis of literary works starts late, it makes some breakthroughs and gains a certain number of research achievements. However, there

are still some deficiencies. On the one hand, the traumatic study on Morrison's work concentrates too much on her masterpiece *Beloved*, or other representative works such as *Song of Solomon* or *Sula*. On the other hand, most theses simply explore the reasons and formation of trauma, but ignore deep discussion on the analysis of its recovery from trauma.

1.2.2 Traumatic Studies of Toni Morrison's Works at Home

The domestic study of Toni Morrison begins late. It was in the early 1980s that Morrison was mentioned in some academic articles. Dong Dingshan published *The Recent Publications of African-Americans*, which firstly mentioned Toni Morrison and her works. After introducing Morrison's editing career and her previous two novels, Dong considered that Morrison had become one of American mainstream writers. It was in the late 1980s that Toni Morrison's works caught Chinese scholars' attention, but just a few achievements came out. After Morrison won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, scholars paid more attention to her. In this period, the researches on Morrison's works mainly focused on the translation and introduction of her novels and the analysis of her prize-winning works. It was in the new century that the study of Morrison reached the climax. Dozens of journal articles from multi-angles come out every year, which has enriched the research on Morrison.

The traumatic study of Toni Morrison's works begins from the twenty-first century. In recent years, some academic works and articles interpreting Morrison's novels from the perspective of trauma theory came out. They are mainly focusing on historical, racial, familial, social and cultural trauma that the characters have suffered, and on the therapy of the trauma.

From the perspective of historical trauma, Chen Jie (2004) elaborates the aftermath of slavery and its impacts on the black individual, family and community in Morrison's *Beloved*. Although the healing of trauma has been discussed in her thesis, she only mentions the help of black community but ignores other factors. In fact, this thesis does not apply the trauma theory to analysis, but expresses the living conditions of black people under the oppression of slavery with the word "trauma", which is

essentially exploring the racism in *Beloved*.

Shang Biwu believes that the characters in Morrison's *A Mercy* have suffered psychological trauma to different degrees. Therefore, he tries to analyze the individual trauma of the characters and the way to heal it with the application of trauma theory. Shang (2011) remarks that memory is cruel because it could recreate the miserable past, but it also has high literary value. At the same time, he points out that "narrating is not only the purpose and means to support the traumatized people to live, but also an important way for them to realize self-healing" (Shang; 2011: 90). As the first domestic study analyzing *A Mercy* from trauma, the thesis has made an in-depth discussion from a novel angle.

Another writer who probes into the way to recover from trauma is Zeng Na. She analyzes how the leading character in Morrison's *Beloved* heals the painful trauma by forgetting the torturous past, recalling the painful memory and seeking the help of black community. Zeng Na points out that the trauma of Sethe is "not only individual, but also comes from nation and history" (2009: 124). The thesis mainly discusses the therapy of trauma, which is innovative compared with those traumatic studies on *Beloved*. However, it focuses too much on individual feeling rather than overall analysis of the process of recovery by the application of trauma theory.

Besides, some researchers try to reveal the trauma in Morrison's works from multi-angles. For example, Li Huimin (2011) discusses the trauma from racism, family violence and religion and their symptoms in her master thesis. Li believes that the novel reflects Morrison's attitude towards white cultural hegemony, and the way for black people to recover from trauma is "uttering their trauma and reserving the black culture" (2011: IV). Shi Min (2012) remarks Morrison's nine novels at length from the perspective of racial, familial, historical, social and cultural trauma. She explores the traumatic manifestation of the protagonists in the nine novels and finds out that the way to recover is narrative therapy, "including verbal statement and actions" (Shi; 2012: 78).

Comparatively, the number of studies on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child* is limited. Although *The Bluest Eye* is Morrison's first novel, it

did not make a splash when it was published. Later, the researches on this work mainly concentrate on feminism and racialism, but are rarely from the perspective of trauma theory. Zhang Chunying and He Jiangsheng (2007) explore the connections of childhood trauma, economic conditions, family environment, socio-cultural background and behavioral consequences in *The Bluest Eye* by using graphic method. However, they overemphasize the inevitability of the tragedy without applying trauma theory. Wang Lili (2013) elaborates African-American women's trauma from the racial, cultural and social perspectives in Toni Morrison's six novels including *The Bluest Eye*. She analyzes the psychological trauma of children and adult women under the influence of the white cultural hegemony in *The Bluest Eye*. In the dissertation, Wang believes that the cultural trauma Pecola has suffered is caused by racism and the aesthetic standards of the whites. She points out that "the children are getting lost under the influence of white-dominated culture and the aesthetic standard of 'white is beauty'" (Wang; 2013: 87). In her opinion, Morrison rebukes that the traditional black culture has been corroded by the white culture, and she tries to help the black women solve cultural conflict and escape from the pain caused by the permeation white-dominated culture.

Since *God Help the Child* is Morrison's latest novel, there are a small number of researches, especially from the angle of trauma theory. Wang Shouren and Wu Xinyun (2016) explore the influence of skin color on personal growth and the harm of sexual abuse for children. When discussing the influence of the skin color, the authors believe that "there is intertextuality between *God Help the Child* and *The Bluest Eye*" (Wang & Wu; 2016: 109). At the end of the article, they remark that narrative therapy is the way to recover and get freedom of mind, and they consider that Morrison has shown her strong faith in and good wishes for the bright future through the novel. Yu Rongfang (2017) discusses the roots, symptoms and the therapy of childhood trauma in *God Help the Child*. In terms of the roots of childhood trauma, the author explains it in three aspects: culture, society and family. Besides, Yu points out that the effective way to recover from childhood trauma is narration, because "those people who have experienced tragic events are shrouded in their growth and are in urgent need of

decompression and healing” (2017: 37).

From the summary mentioned above, it can be seen that the domestic study of Toni Morrison’s works from the perspectives of trauma is quite novel, but it has some limitations. Firstly, the researches mainly focus on Morrison’s master work *Beloved*, or other works such as *A Mercy* or *Sula*. Secondly, the angles of the traumatic study are quite repetitive. For example, the traumatic researches on *The Bluest Eye* are mostly concentrating on cultural and familial roots. Thirdly, the study of Morrison’s works tends to focus on the analysis of her single work rather than two or more works. Generally speaking, the research results are limited and lack systematic studies and discussion. Therefore, the paper selects childhood trauma, which is seldom researched in Morrison’s works before, as the entry point. The author is going to make detailed analysis of the causes of trauma from culture, family and society respectively in Morrison’s two novels, her first novel and the latest one. Besides, the way to recover from childhood trauma will be discussed. The findings will be more convictive because of the comparative study on how the characters in the two novels heal trauma.

1.3 Trauma Theory

In this paper, the author will employ the basic connotation of trauma theory to interpret the childhood trauma in her first novel and the latest one, and analyze the failure and success of recovery of the characters in the two novels according to trauma and recovery theory. As the theoretical basis of the thesis, the origin and development of trauma theory and Judith Herman’s trauma and recovery theory are introduced in the following parts.

1.3.1 The Origin and Development of Trauma Theory

The word “trauma” originates from the Greek word “traumatizo”, which refers to physical injury or wound caused by external force. Originally used in the area of physical medicine, it means injury or damage to a biological organism. In its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and especially in Freud’s

text, the term *trauma* was often described as a wound inflicted upon the mind. With the development of human civilization, people paid a lot attention to psychological trauma, a repetitive damage to mind and psyche that would have an impact on daily lives.

Trauma is considered much more than pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche, but the story of a wound that cries out, attempting to tell the truth or reality. Unlike the injury inflicted on a body, the wound of mind caused by an event that a person has experienced too soon and unexpectedly will impose repetitive nightmares or actions on the survivor. Therefore, the root of trauma could not be simply attributed to a violent event, but rather the process which interferes with the survivor constantly later on. In other words, trauma includes not only direct and visible physical trauma but also the psychological trauma which is indirect and invisible.

The exploration of trauma has mainly developed in three stages. The first stage could be regarded as the study of hysteria. Based on the investigation of hysteria, the archetypal psychological disorder of women, the early study on trauma began in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Some famous psychologists such as Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud devoted themselves to its study. At the beginning, more attention was paid to the physical manifestation of symptoms. French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, the father of the study of hysteria, focused on its resembled neurological damage, namely motor paralyses, sensory losses, convulsions and amnesias. By the mid 1890s, Janet, Freud and Joseph Breuer reached a similar conclusion that hysteria was a condition caused by psychological trauma. Later, these investigators discovered a treatment called “talking cure”, which has become the basis of modern psychotherapy.

The catastrophe of the First World War brought psychological trauma into public and the trauma theory was getting prosperous then, which marked the second stage of the study of trauma theory. At that time, people enjoyed an abundant material life with the fast development of society whereas they bore the psychological trauma of the war and suffered from nervous fears. Thus, the research focused on the cure of

combat neurosis. Although the physical wound could be healed, many patients suffered restlessness, irritableness and even torment by nightmares. Doctor Rivers, a famous English neurologist and psychiatrist, advocated humane treatment based upon psychoanalytic principles by treating patients with dignity and respect. According to Doctor Rivers, the cure strategy for the traumatized soldiers in the Second World War was to make them keep in touch with their fellow soldiers. With the aim of rapidly returning the soldiers into their fields, psychiatrists treated them with brief therapy as close as possible to the battle lines. It was by the mid of 1970s that hundreds of rap groups were organized by veterans and more than a hundred outreach centers were set up, based upon a self-help and peer-counseling model of treatment.

Until 1980, the characteristic syndrome of psychological trauma was finally accepted officially. In the same year, the new category, “post-traumatic stress disorder” was included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. For the first time, the universality of trauma was admitted and it was regarded as an experience that involved a “recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone” (American Psychiatric Association, 1998).

The third stage could be seen as the contemporary study on trauma, which focuses on the excavation of trauma from multi-angles. It was not until the women’s liberation movement in 1970s that the public began to realize that the most common post-traumatic victims were those women in daily life. They surprisingly found that just like the survivors of war, raped victims, battered women and sexual abused children were wounded soldiers. Since then, the research objects were no longer confined to individual experiences but shifted to vulnerable groups which were ignored before. The study on trauma penetrated into culture, history, literature and many other fields. In this period, many excellent works which combine trauma theory with text analysis came out.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (1996: 11). She believes that people

could react to catastrophic events normally, while this response would be delayed because of trauma, which makes them get stuck with the uncontrollable repetitive appearance of the reaction. Besides, she has made great contribution to exploring the relationship between trauma theory and the study of literary criticism. Based on clinical medicine, she holds that trauma is so hurtful that the brain could not deal with the information at that time, and the painful memory may be out of mind. Although the survivors recall what has happened, they cannot describe them in words. Therefore, she tries to recover those which are forgotten, and she concludes that the literary texts could be regarded as a form to record traumatic experience. For literary criticism, trauma theory provides a new research perspective and innovative methods to literary texts analysis, and reveals that the psychological trauma has done great harm to victims far beyond people's imagination.

After Caruth applied trauma theory to the study of literary criticism, more and more scholars combined it with other disciplines. Among them, Judith Herman, regarded as one of the most significant psychological trauma theorist after Freud, has made a huge contribution to the contemporary trauma theory. She puts forward the way to recover from trauma in detail, which offers theoretical basis to the clinical treatment of trauma and the traumatic analysis of literary works.

1.3.2 Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery Theory

Born in 1942, Judith Herman, an American psychiatrist, mainly studies the treatment of incest and traumatic stress. She is a professor of clinical psychiatry at Harvard University Medical School, and a founding member of the Women's Mental Health Collective. Herman has made distinctive contributions to the traumatic analysis of abused children and the possibility of recovery from trauma.

Herman's second book *Trauma and Recovery*, widely read around the world, was published in 1992. Her trauma and recovery theory gives the individual experience a broader political sense, arguing that only in a social context could psychological trauma be fully understood. In this book, she has made a breakthrough in the dissection of the cause and symptoms of psychological trauma, and the three stages of

recovery.

Herman classified the symptoms of traumatic disorders into three main categories, which are “hyperarousal”, “intrusion” and “constriction”. As the first primary symptom, hyperarousal is a persistent feeling of insecurity, which means that the self-preservation system is disturbed by traumatic experiences as if the danger may return at any time. Being tortured physically as well as mentally, patients suffer from the generalized anxiety symptoms and specific fears, which make them always on the alert for danger. Intrusion refers to the reoccurring of the traumatic memories as time goes by. Even if the danger has passed, the painful memory prevents traumatized people from getting back to the normal lives. Unlike ordinary memories, traumatic memories have a lot of qualities, such as frozenness and wordlessness. These memories cannot be simply described by verbal narrative and they lack context, but they are preserved in the forms of vivid sensations and images. The third main symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder is constriction, the numbing reaction of powerless surrender. Traumatized people try to avoid any situation which may bring back memories of traumatic experiences, or any actions involving future plans or challenges. It seems that this is a way for the patients to establish the sense of security, but they have to pay a high price for the protection they have made.

Since the process of treatment for psychological trauma cannot be done at one kick, Herman puts forward the three stages of recovery, which have been widely cited in psychological and other fields. The three stages are establishing the sense of safety, retelling the traumatic events and reconnecting with the outside world. The establishment of safety begins with the control of the body and gradually moves to the control of the environment. In this stage, the victims need to protect themselves from getting injured again, and learn to take care of their own bodies. After successfully accomplishing the task of first stage, the patients can get ready for the next stage. The victims must courageously confront their miserable past and analyze its cause in depth so as to reconstruct the story of traumatic events by retelling the process. The reconstructing of the trauma story should not only analyze the consequences but also begin with the review of patients’ life before the traumatic events. In this stage,

however, victims tend to selectively narrate because of the lack of courage to face some hurtful memories, which goes against the recovery from trauma. Once the traumatized people speak out their traumatic experiences, they can face up to the pain they have suffered, which means they have reconnected with the outside world by their own words, and the process of recovery has come to the very key stage. In the third stage, the patients rebuild their new life by gaining the possession of themselves. Herman holds that the recreation of an ideal self involves the willingness of developing deeper relationship with others, the positive attitude towards life and engaging in social activities.

Besides, the abused children have been analyzed in this book in detail, which gives great inspiration and help to the author of this paper. Herman holds that “repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality” (Herman; 1992: 96), which will trigger physical and mental symptoms with a great possibility. Living in the indifferent family environment day after day, the abused children have to cheat themselves that the abuse does not really happen to preserve their primary attachment to their parents. Once they realize it is impossible to avoid the abuse, they must build a system to justify it. On the one hand, the children victims are always rageful and aggressive, and take the evil of abuser into themselves. On the other hand, they often become superb performer to calm the abuser’s anger, which forms the contradictory identities, a debased and noble one, of abused children.

Generally speaking, trauma theory is quite important in clinical medicine and psychology, and it also permeates into many other fields. Applying trauma theory to the analysis of literary works provides a new researching angle, which can reveal some deeper problems behind the text. In this thesis, the application of trauma theory and Herman’s trauma and recovery theory offer a new theoretical framework to study the childhood trauma and its recovery in *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*.

Chapter 2 Causes of Trauma in *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*

Traumatic events, different from misfortunes in daily life, often cause the threats to bodies and mind, or even directly lead to violence and death, which will produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition and memory. Unlike the physical wound which can be healed by some therapeutic approaches, it is hard to cure the psychological trauma with usual treatments since the wound inflicted on mind is more complicated. Hence, digging out and analyzing the traumatic events are the primary steps to treat psychological trauma.

With Morrison's keen insight into American history and culture, she reveals the brutal living conditions by the interpretation of traumatic events of African Americans. The traumatic experiences of the leading characters can be reflected in both *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*. In *The Bluest Eye*, the 11-year-old black girl, Pecola, who lives in a society which is dominated by white aesthetics and culture, suffers a series of miserable strikes and finally goes insane and falls into the abyss. *God Help the Child* tells a story of how the heroine and hero struggle to overcome childhood trauma when they grow up. The severity of traumatic events, however, cannot be simply measured from any single dimension since it is meaningless to quantify trauma, so it cannot be concluded who has suffered the most severe trauma in the two books. Although the endings of the two novels are totally different, there are some similarities in the traumatic experiences that the main characters have suffered. Besides, some differences in personal experiences still exist because they live in different eras. This chapter is going to compare and analyze the causes of trauma in *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child*.

2.1 Traumatic Experiences in *The Bluest Eye*

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is definitely the embodiment of tragedy. Being isolated from the white group and black community and living in a misshapen family, she

yearns for a pair of blue eyes which belongs to the white people. After getting raped by her father, Pecola gradually goes insane and loses herself. The stifling suffering of Pecola has shown the living conditions of black people under the white-dominated culture at that time. Furthermore, her miserable childhood experiences reveal the mental abuse and cultural repression that the white have imposed on the black. In this part, the causes of Pecola's psychological trauma will be discussed from the angles of culture, family and society.

2.1.1 Cultural Roots of Trauma: Impact of White Supremacy

Although the traditional forms of slavery were abolished in 1865 in America, the living conditions of black people were not greatly improved and the racial discrimination was still a big problem in the society in the twentieth century. The famous civil rights activist Du Bois once said: "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line" (1903: 19). Regarded as second-class citizen, the black people were treated unfairly in many ways. In residential district, there was a clear distinction between the black and the white. In railway stations, restaurants or shops, there were some special area divided only for the blacks. What is more, the whites employed all forms of mass media to impose their supremacy on the blacks, and to internalize their concepts and notions. This kind of phenomenon is clearly shown in *The Bluest Eye*.

Colson comments that *The Bluest Eye* "explores the effects of racial self-hatred and is a story about a community searching for self-acceptance within a larger society in which white beauty is dominant" (2007: 8). Usually, the culture that occupies a dominant position often discriminates against and despises the weak culture, and it can be reflected in *The Bluest Eye*. The story was set in the 1940s when the dominant culture of the whites permeated every corner of the society. Consumer goods, films and advertisements instilled the aesthetics of the whites into the blacks. The advertising messages linked beauty to whitening and implied that light skin meant charming and wealthy while dark skin was ugly and stood for poverty. This kind of aesthetic standard permeated the heart of blacks due to the large-scale consumption

culture, which not only made them blindly idolatry the white culture and develop a sense of inferiority, but also left psychological trauma which was hard to cure in a short period of time. In a word, the whites enjoyed their cultural supremacy, while the blacks gradually accepted the white culture and their standard of beauty, and looked down upon themselves.

In the novel, beauty was regarded as white skin, blond hair and blue eyes, while dark skin, curly hair and full lips were considered to be ugly. The public had gradually accepted the aesthetical standard of “white is beauty”. Living under the abnormal evaluation criteria, it was difficult for the younger generation to recognize their own merits. Instead, they lost themselves in the process of getting close to the white culture. The pain Pecola had suffered in her childhood did not make her stronger, but pushed her to the fringe of black culture. In addition to Pecola, her parents, brother and many folks in the black community, all firmly believed the concept of “white is beauty”, and took it for granted that they were excluded by the white culture and suffered unfair treatments because of their dark skin and ugly appearance.

The permeation of white culture was also embodied and reflected in mass media such as TV or movie. The whites on the screen always acted positive characters, but the black people often played the roles of fools, servants or rascals, with comical appearance and clownish movement. In *The Bluest Eye*, when Pecola’s mother got pregnant, what pleased her most was watching films to kill time in the cinema. She was addicted to the life style of the white people in the film and even went to the theatre with the same hairstyle of Jean Harlow, the heroine in the movie. There was another scene that when Pecola introduced herself to Maureen, the transfer student, the name of Pecola reminded her of the name of a girl in the movie *Imitation of Life*, in which the girl hates her mother because she is black and ugly. The conversation seemed to be common, but it revealed how the media brought the white-dominated culture to every corner of the society. The distinct images of the white and the black were propagated by mass media, which “reinforced the fake superiority of the whites and the inferiority of the blacks, exerting a negative impact on the African-Americans” (Wang & Wu; 1999: 36).

The beauty of the whites was deeply rooted in Pecola's heart by the dissemination of mass media. The most popular child star at that time was Shirley Temple, the highest paid child actor who made a great contribution to American economy with the commercial income of millions of dollars. Her sweet dimples, blonde wavy hair and shining blue eyes made her the idol in every child's heart. Her beautiful face was printed everywhere—the records, caps, dresses, cards, posters and stuff. When Pecola got some milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup, she always took a long time with the milk and stared at Temple's dimpled face. What is more, she took every opportunity to drink milk with that cup for sake of seeing sweet Shirley's face. In addition to Shirley Temple, Pecola was also fascinated with Mary Jane, whose picture was on the wrapper of candy. She was fond of Mary Jane's smiling white face, blond hair and blue eyes, and even thought that "to eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane" (Morrison, 50). Surrounded by those images, Pecola gradually ignored her natural beauty.

Apparently, the girls who were white or light-skinned were beloved and welcomed, but those with dark skin might be treated as ugly children at home. They were mocked in the school and ignored by the whites. As for a little girl, beauty not only means the approval of appearance of the others, but also stands for love and happiness. However, in the world where the whites defined the beauty dominantly, Pecola could not receive the acceptance of the whites. When she looked into the mirror, she could only get full disapproval from white cultural awareness. Due to the loss of self-consciousness, the sound personality could not be formed, and the girl in the mirror was not the real "Pecola", but a fragmented and lost one.

When some black people could not gain acceptance in the society, they began to shape themselves with the features of the whites. Furthermore, those who were with lighter skin felt like that they could be accepted by the white-dominant culture more easily, so they showed a sense of superiority and looked down upon the dark-skinned. In the novel, the ubiquitous white supremacy not only hurt Pecola's immature mind directly, but also hurt her in an indirect way by influencing the people around her unconsciously.

Maureen Peal was a transfer student in Pecola's class. She was so beautiful that she always attracted people's attention wherever she went. Occasionally, witnessing Pecola's being bullied in school, Maureen acted like her close friend and helped her out of the predicament. When she heard of Pecola's name, she blurted out that it was the name of a girl who is black and ugly in a movie. Although she added "she was pretty" (Morrison, 68), it cannot cover up Pecola's inferiority deep inside her heart. Then Maureen mocked at Pecola, and called her father as "old black daddy" (Morrison, 73). She taunted as she ran, "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!" (Morrison, 73). In fact, Maureen was a mixed-race girl with black blood, but she connected the "black" with "ugly", which indicated that the invasion of white culture had almost influenced everyone in American society. There was no direct description of Pecola's reaction here, but the humiliating language and Maureen's insincerity had already stung her heart imperceptibly.

Geraldine, another light-skinned character in the novel, was highly educated and obsessed with the standards of white culture. Imitating and complying with the white culture blindly, she felt ashamed to show the appearance features of the blacks. In her daily life, she kept a distance from the blacks deliberately. She did not allow her son to play with niggers because they were "dirty and loud" (Morrison, 87), and she explained to him "the difference between colored people and niggers" (Morrison, 87). Gradually Junior came to agree with his mother and thought the blacks were not "good enough for him" (Morrison, 87). Because of the lack of emotional connection, the close relationship between mother and son had no longer in existence. As Junior grew up, he realized his mother's different attitude towards him and her cat, so he became violent and tried to seek comfort from abusing the cat and bullying girls. One day, when Junior saw "ugly" Pecola was alone, he deceived Pecola to his house and regarded her as his prisoner, throwing the cat in her face in spite of her tears. The cat was finally dead with his violent act, but Pecola had become the scapegoat for the cat's death when Geraldine came back home. Although she let Pecola get out of her house, the indifferent attitude and insulting words hurt her and undoubtedly exacerbated the tragedy of Pecola.

In Pecola's family, both her parents had been influenced by the white-dominated culture, leading to indirect harm to Pecola. With the permeation of white supremacy, Pecola's father, Cholly had gradually accepted white-dominated culture. He took it for granted that the world was unfair to the blacks and they were in the bottom of the society. Meanwhile, the hatred towards society rooted in his mind. The way for him to relieve the pain was to indulge in excessive drinking and fight with his wife. He became lazy, and even burnt the house after getting drunk, made the whole family homeless. It was obvious that he could not take the responsibility of taking care of Pecola. What is more, he ravished her, resulting in severe harm to her mentally and physically. Likewise, Pecola's mother could not play the role of a qualified mother. Influenced by the white supremacy, she believed that the white culture was superior. She worked in the home of a white family, taking good care of their children but ignored her own children. When Pecola was raped by her father and tried to ask help from her, she shut her eyes and doubted the truth, which definitely deepened Pecola's mental injury. Suppressed by the white culture, Pecola's parents could not gain acceptance from the society, falling into fractured personalities. They cannot love and care for their own daughter to guarantee her healthy personality. In other words, the white-dominated society deprived them of the right to love.

The novel shows that if the blacks blindly accept the standards set by the whites, they will definitely lose themselves. As the white-dominated culture spreads out in every corner of American society, nobody can escape from its influence. As for the whites, they enjoy the high social status caused by the white supremacy, and impose their ideas on the blacks by mass media. For the blacks, they gradually accept the white culture which permeates everywhere in their daily life, and forget to remain their traditional culture. Pecola has to bear the psychological trauma directly and indirectly caused by the invasion of white culture. Her strong desire for having a pair of blue eyes seems to be absurd, but it indicates that the inferiority based on the external characteristic is the manifestation of weakness. Thus, Morrison holds that only when the blacks treat the cultural conflicts with the guidance of their traditional black culture can they survive in the society.

2.1.2 Familial Roots of Trauma: Parental Injuries

There is an old saying that all happy families are happy alike, while all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way. The harsh familial environment, for example, the death of family members, poor living conditions or endless quarrels, will leave psychological shadow to children or even have a profound impact on them. Pecola, who was greatly affected by the white-dominated culture, could not feel love in her family. Her indifferent mother put her heart and soul into working as a servant in a white family, and her father, who finally destroyed her, did not shoulder the responsibility of taking care of the family. In this part, the author will explore the cause of Pecola's miserable suffering from the lack of maternal love and the distortion of father's love.

2.1.2.1 Lack of Maternal Love

Maternal love is great and selfless, and children can grow up confidently and happily only with the love and nurturance of their mother. However, the black little girl, Pecola, cannot get maternal love, but indifference, aversion and violence from her mother Pauline. Under the internalization of the whites' aesthetic, Pauline became a faithful servant of the whites, and the maternal love—the good nature of a woman—had gradually vanished.

Pauline, living in a big family when she was young, was the ninth of eleven children. Although the slight disabled on her foot made her suspicious and sensitive, she could find joy in her own way under the care of her family. As she started looking forward to love, Cholly went to her with whistle. The days they fell in love with each other was full of color and light. Being with Cholly, Pauline was “secure and grateful” (Morrison, 116) because Cholly “was kind and lively” (Morrison, 116).

Just like the majority of young people, Cholly and Pauline moved to the far north, the melting pot of different races on the border of America. However, everything had changed. The whites were everywhere—“next door, downstairs, all over the streets” (Morrison, 117) and it was hard to get to know people there. Out of loneliness and boredom, Pauline turned to her husband for dependence and entertainment to fill the

vacant places in her mind, which made Cholly tired and apathetic. After Pauline's getting pregnant, she spent time watching films in cinemas, where she could fancy romantic love and beautiful outlook of the white people. Because of the immersion of the white culture, she was no longer simple and unadorned. It was at that time that the seeds of hate began to sprout. When Pecola came to the world, Pauline looked at the black baby with soft and wet eyes which was "between a puppy and a dying man" (Morrison, 126) and exclaimed "Lord she was ugly" (Morrison, 126).

Pauline longed for the acceptance of the white value but failed every time, and her personal value and identity had not realized until she worked as a servant in a white family—the Fishers. Working in the Fishers, she enjoyed peace, quiet, power, praise, and luxury. She was regarded as "the ideal servant" (Morrison, 128) for her capabilities in cooking and putting everything in order. Under the continuous oppression of white culture, Pauline was always neglected and forgotten, but she could gain power and strength in the Fishers. The psychological satisfaction made her reluctant to take care of her own family. Consequently, her son had a loud desire to run away from the family, and Pecola responded to grow-ups and strangers with fear.

It was cruel for Pecola that her mother was indifferent to her but cared about the little girl in the Fisher's family. The day Pecola went to Fisher's home to get the wash from Pauline, nervously and awkwardly, she knocked over the plate, the hot juice on which splashed on Pecola's legs. She was painful and then cried out, while Pauline knocked her on the floor without giving her the opportunity to explain. Instead, she took great care of the white little girl and said softly, "Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don't cry no more. Polly will change it" (Morrison, 109). It is not easy for children to learn to share something with others, let alone share the love and care of their parents. Pecola had never got love from her mother, but witnessed that Pauline dedicated her maternal gentleness to a white girl, leaving anger and indifference to her.

Pauline's indifferent attitude hurt Pecola directly, and the frequent conflicts between her and Cholly did harm to Pecola indirectly. As Cholly began to indulge in excessive drinking and became violent, Pauline totally despaired of him. She never

realized the influence of the behaviors and words of a mother on her children and she never avoided quarreling in front of them. Once they had a bitter argument, she rubbished Cholly in front of Pecola and taught her not to be like her father. From that time on, the wish of getting a pair of blue eyes was planted in Pecola's heart, and she began to upbraid herself for her ugly appearance and regard it as the cause of the misfortune of her family. Pecola, who had never felt the warmth and happiness of family under the day-to-day quarrel, was the victim in the cracks.

Different from Pecola's mother, Claudia's mother Ms. MacTeer always tried her best to provide care and love for her kids. Although life was hard and cold, maternal love, like the sunshine in winter, could give warmth to the children. When Claudia had cold, Ms. MacTeer blamed her for her carelessness, and rubbed the salve on her chest at the same time. She rebuked Claudia for her throwing up, but simultaneously put another towel instead. It's obvious that mother plays a significant role in the growth of a child because the child can gain a huge sense of security and build healthy personality from his mother.

In addition to raising children, black mothers should teach them to protect themselves under the racial and gender discrimination and to challenge racism. Pauline, deeply affected by the white-dominated culture and aesthetics, did not take the responsibility as an African-American mother, but intensified the bending of Pecola's distorted belief. On the contrary, Claudia's mother influences, encourages and takes good care of her two children with self-esteem and self-respect. The great comparison reflects that the responsibilities of black mothers are not only to take care of the growth of their children, but also to develop the traditional African culture by guiding them with correct values and teaching them to respect themselves.

2.1.2.2 The Distortion of Father's Love

Because of Pauline's indifference, Pecola became sensitive and self-contemptuous. What is worse, her father Cholly did great harm both physically and mentally to Pecola. Instead of protecting Pecola from the damage from the outside world, Cholly played the role of an inflictor, pushing Pecola into the depths of

despair.

It is obvious that Cholly is notorious in the neighborhood and an irresponsible husband and father at the beginning of the story. Pecola had to live in the Claudia's family, because her father who was called an "old Dog" (Morrison, 16) by his neighbors had burned his house and punched the head of his wife, which made the whole family "to be put outdoors" (Morrison, 17). Actually, there was a bitter suffering of being discriminated and affronted in the process of Cholly's growth. He was abandoned by his mother four days after his birth, and was brought up by his great aunt. After the death of his aunt, he found his father, but his father was busy dicing and responded him rudely. When he was young, he met a girl in private, but his first sexual experience was interrupted by two white men with mock and humiliation. In Cholly's mind, he was too weak to contend against the whites who were tall and strong. Only by transferring the sufferings to those who were weaker than him can he relieve the pain. Hence, when faced with the humiliation from the two white men, he would rather detest the girl he was dating because his powerlessness and helplessness were reflected on her.

After Cholly got married, he moved to another city with his family and was passionate about their future. It was pretty hard for the black men to find a job at that time, even if they could find one, they could not get respect from their friends and family due to the menial job, and they had to confront racial discrimination from society, which made them self-abased. Besides, the employment rate of a black woman was higher than that of a man. The black men usually felt ashamed in front of their families because of the unemployment. Thus, the stress and boredom of life drove Cholly to despair. He sat around all day and spent too much time drinking. When other fathers spent more time with their children, he would rather stay with others than getting home early. At the same time, the relationship between him and his wife had been strained—they began to quarrel and fight with each other in front of the two kids. Then, Pecola's brother, Sammy always cursed for a while, or left house, or even joined the battle. Restricted by youth and gender, Pecola had to grin and bear it and even attributed the misfortune and inharmony in her family to her ugliness. As a

father, Cholly could not keep out wind and rain for Pecola, but exposed his laziness and irresponsibility to her.

To some extent, Cholly is the victim of the internalization of the white-dominated culture, but he is the inflictor who destroys Pecola physically and mentally at the same time. With the absence of father's love, Cholly could not understand the significance of being a responsible father and did not exactly know how to take care of his kids. It was on a Saturday afternoon that Cholly saw Pecola washing dishes in the kitchen. He was discomfort and confused when he saw the unhappiness and hopelessness from her daughter, but the following feeling of hatred overwhelmed him. The humiliating sexual experience at his young age emerged to his mind. Revulsion, discomfort, guilt, pity, and love mingled and filled in his heart, which made him mix up love and appetite, tenderness and violence, father and lover. When he could not clear the ambivalent thoughts, the distorted feeling pushed him to rape her daughter. After that, he raped Pecola more than once until she got pregnant. It is obvious that Cholly is the executioner who inflicts crushing and devastating blows on Pecola.

Family should have been the shelter for children to protect them from the injuries from the outside world. However, in *The Bluest Eye*, family has become the place where the nightmare begins. Under the invasion of white culture, the indifferent mother, Pauline, did not take care of and love Pecola. At the same time, her father caused great hurt to her both physically and mentally. Unloved and ignored, Pecola finally became insane with split personalities and fell into the abyss of misery.

2.1.3 Social Roots of Trauma: Disregard in Black Community

The black community is of great significance to the growth and liberation of black individuals. Wang Jiaxiang points out that "The problems that the blacks are faced with in American society are not only individual problems but also collective issues caused by racial discrimination. It needs to take personal efforts to solve the problems, but the personal efforts could never be relied on solely" (430). Hence, the blacks need to get united to fight against the discrimination and protect themselves.

They have to build a strong sense of responsibility for each other, which is the bond to connect the black individuals and community. However, some blacks are not aware of the importance of the community, and they also lack sense of responsibility. They cannot offer necessary help to those who are in need, and worse still, some even close the door to them. Pecola was just in such a situation. Being disgusted and hurt by her parents, community became the last straw for her. But unfortunately, the black people around her could not help her go through the trouble, and some even pushed her off the cliff.

When Cholly burned the house and made the family homeless, it was Claudia's family that took in Pecola. She was taken good care of in Claudia's family. The sisters were friendly to her, and shared food with her. Although sometimes Claudia's mother blamed Pecola for her drinking too much milk, she treated her with patience and love as if she was her own child. However, living in poverty, Claudia's parents were busy in making a living to support their family. It was hard for them to perceive Pecola's predicament. Meanwhile, the sisters were sympathetic to her, but they could do nothing except helplessly watching the destruction on Pecola.

For the three whores, they were not the reliable persons to take Pecola out of misery, even if she was always relaxed when she stayed with them. Different from those self-abandoned whores in the traditional literature, they were free and easy, and dared to love and hate. Nevertheless, they could not help Pecola to build the sound personality. They told breezy and rough stories to Pecola even if she was a child, and they were as free as they were with each other when Pecola stayed with them. Although they treated Pecola as their friends without prejudice and gave her temporary relaxation, they never cared what their "friend" had suffered, and ignored her psychological pain. They did not know even they did not want to know what she needed most.

School was also a hell for Pecola. She had to endure teasing and bullying in school. A crowd of black boys gathered around her, harassed her with a verse made up by themselves, "Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo..." (Morrison, 65). They sneered and insulted her, but forgot that they had got the same

black skin as Pecola's. As the members in the black community, they were too young to understand the destructive power of their behaviors. What they did eventually aggravated the pain Pecola had suffered. Getting used to the indifference and ignorance from the outside world, Pecola did not know how to resist, but silently bore the pain and fear.

When Pecola was pregnant, nobody seemed to share the sorrow and care about the poor little girl except Claudia and her sister. Instead, the neighbors "disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited" (Morrison, 190) by the story. The blacks mocked at her tragic experiences and kept a distance from her intentionally. After the premature birth and death of Pecola's baby, she looked very sad, but the grown-ups turned a blind eye to her and those kids who were not frightened by her laughed at her aloud. Pecola was bound to fade away with the collapse of the last shelter. The indifference and irresponsibility of the black community put her in despair, which ultimately led to her tragic ending.

In the 1940s, although the blacks had obtained some rights after a long bitter struggle, their voice, idea and rights were controlled by the whites to some extent. The black community was incomplete and deficient, so it could not play its role appropriately. Though Pecola could get the most basic survival guarantee with the help of some neighbors, she could not receive love and care. Gradually, she was ignored and hurt by the people around. By depicting the response of black community to Pecola's suffering, Morrison emphasizes the significance and necessity of keeping the unity of the black community.

2.2 Traumatic Experiences in *God Help the Child*

Traumatic events generally threaten life or bodily integrity of the victims, and evoke the responses of imminent catastrophe. In *God Help the Child*, the characters have been psychologically damaged to different degrees in their childhood, and the miserable past have affected them seriously in their growth. Unlike *The Bluest Eye*, in which Morrison mainly describes the trauma the main character has suffered in her

childhood, in *God Help the Child*, almost every character has experienced or had some connections with childhood trauma.

2.2.1 Cultural Roots of Trauma: Discrimination

Differing from Morrison's other works, the background of *God Help the Child* is set in the current age, when the racial problems exist in a subtle form during the rapid development of economy and society. In the novel, the racial problems mainly come from the invasion of white culture. On the one hand, the white culture and its aesthetics spread in every corner of the society by the dissemination of mass media, which leads to the sense of superiority of the whites. They despise the blacks, treat them unfairly and keep distance from them intentionally. As a result, the blacks have a feeling of inferiority. On the other hand, influenced by the white culture, some blacks especially those light-skinned look down upon their traditional culture and blindly pursue the whites' aesthetics. Meanwhile, they detest those who get dark skin color and dissociate themselves from black groups. Hence, the influence of white culture on *Bride* can be reflected on two aspects: the indirect harm caused by the racism from the whites that *Bride's* mother has suffered, and the direct harm caused by the colorism in black community.

2.2.1.1 Racism from the Whites

Bride was born in the 1990s, when the legal system was well established to eliminate racial discrimination with the efforts of several generations. However, racial prejudice still existed in America even though the human civilization had highly developed. It was pretty hard for black people to live in the white supreme society. In the story, Morrison does not directly depict how the racial discrimination hurts *Bride*, but shows the indirect damage to *Bride* caused by the way her mother treated her, who was deeply affected by racism.

At the beginning of the novel, readers can learn of the hard living situation of the blacks from her mother Sweetness's narration. They had to give the whole sidewalk to the whites as they walked, were charged for a paper bag which was free to white customers, and took the risk of being spit on in a drugstore. When Sweetness's mother

and father went to the courthouse to get married, they could only put their hands on the Bible which reserved for Negroes only. In contrast, those who got the lighter skin would be better treated in clubs, churches, neighborhoods or even colored schools. Under such social background, Sweetness gradually despised and hated the black skin.

After the birth of Bride, she and Sweetness were abandoned by her father Louis, and they had to find another place to live. Although there was a law against the landlords who rejected to rent their house out of discrimination, many of them still kept the blacks away by all kinds of reasons. Hence, Sweetness did not take Bride with her when she applied to landlords. When she got one house from Mr. Leigh with the rents of seven dollars upped, she did not mind such unfair treatment, but felt she was “lucky” (Morrison, 6). For many blacks, the world is a place where they are “the last one hired and the first one fired” (Morrison, 41). They had to tolerantly live in the world which belonged to the whites, without rebellion. Actually, oppressed by the white culture, Sweetness had buried the seeds of hatred for a long time. Once she saw a girl as dark as her daughter being bullied by a group of white boys, she called them “white trash” (Morrison, 41) in mind. Apart from inward hatred, the racial discrimination towards Sweetness had warped her mind, which affected the way she treated Bride.

When Bride was eight, she testified against Sofia Huxley, a white young teacher who was innocent about her molestations to kids. After that, Bride had suffered a lot mental anguish for her giving false testimony. The reason why Bride lied was that her mother would hold her hands and looked at her with proud eyes. After the trail, Sweetness had changed her attitude greatly, and became a kind of motherlike. The shifting attitude seemed weird because Bride’s skin color was still as black as tar, for which her mother detested her. The answer could be easily found in Sweetness’s narration. She admitted that she was so proud of Bride because it was rare that “a little black girl take down some evil whites” (Morrison, 42). It can be seen that Sweetness has gradually lost her ability to distinguish between the right and the wrong. Hence, it is difficult for her to educate her child properly.

Although Sweetness has accepted the aesthetic standards of the whites, the hostility and hatred towards the white have been rooted in her mind. Under the long-time influence of racial discrimination, her maternal love has been distorted and become abnormal. She could not treat and love her daughter in a normal way, which has brought about great pain and misery to Bride.

2.2.1.2 Colorism in Black Community

As for black people, the discrimination they have suffered not only comes from the whites, but also from the black community. The blacks who are light-skinned may be treated well in the society and enjoy skin privileges due to their close-to-white skin. Alice Walker, the famous African-American woman writer has defined colorism that it is “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (Walker; 2005: 290). She also believes that colorism is like colonialism, sexism and racism, which impedes the development of human civilization.

Sweetness had emphasized the superiorities of light-skinned blacks—“the lighter, the better” (Morrison, 4). They would be treated well than those with dark skin in public places. Because of the light skin of her parents, her mother could try on hats or use ladies’ room, and her father could try on shoes in the front part of the store instead of in a black room. They felt a strong sense of superiority by the distinct treatments, and neither of them would drink from a “colored only” fountain even if they were dying of thirst. Sweetness’s grandmother was proud of her light skin, and even passed for the white. Influenced by the family environment, Sweetness was ashamed of her daughter Bride’s midnight black skin color, which resulted in Bride’s psychological trauma in her childhood.

Unlike other mothers who looked forward to the birth of their babies, Sweetness was embarrassed with the terrible color of Bride, and even thought of putting her to death and abandoning her for a minute. In her eyes, her skin color “is a cross she will always carry” (Morrison, 7). When her husband Louis saw the baby for the first time, he “looked at her like she was from the planet Jupiter” (Morrison, 5), and then left the family. Bride, the girl with dark skin, could not obtain love, care and dignity from her

family because of the colorism from her parents, leading to her miserable childhood.

Although Bride had made a great success in her career because of her skin color, she was deeply hurt due to her blackness when she was a child. The pain was so deep in her heart that it could hardly get erased even when she grew up. As for Bride, the colorism from black community brought more harm than racism. Under the oppression of both racism and colorism, many black parents like Sweetness and Louis have abandoned their traditional culture and get lost. They do not know the proper way to treat their children, which affects the growth of the next generation.

2.2.2 Familial Roots of Trauma: Mother's Misinterpretation of Love

Different from *The Bluest Eye*, in which Pecola suffers a lot from both her mother and father, *God Help the Child* mainly depicts Sweetness's influence on Bride in her childhood. Because of the misinterpretation of maternal love, the mother does incurable harm to her daughter. Readers can see the different mental activities of the mother and daughter towards a same thing from the changing narrative perspective. For Bride, her mother was so indifferent and strict that she could hardly feel the maternal love when she was a child. However, in Sweetness's opinion, she treated Bride in such brutal way out of love and protection as a mother.

When Bride was born, Sweetness was embarrassed and ashamed because of her "midnight black and Sudanese black" (Morrison, 3) skin color. She told Bride to call her name "Sweetness" instead of "mother" in case others "mistook" their relationship. As for Bride, the desire to feel her mother's touch was so strong, because Sweetness did not like touching her, and she always had the impression that distaste was all over Sweetness's face all the time. She even made little mistakes deliberately to feel the touch from her mother when she got punishment.

Driven by the keen desire, Bride gave false testimony to a white young teacher of sexual assault. So pleased with Bride's performance in the court, Sweetness held her hands to get her ears pierced, and bought her a pair of earrings and a new dress. It was after the trial that Bride thought Sweetness was like a mother who really cared for her. However, the false testimony had become a big secret which tortured Bride as she

grew up.

It can be seen from the very beginning of the novel—"it's not my fault" (Morrison, 3)—that Sweetness regarded the dark skin of her daughter as a "fault". In order to make it up, she determined to be very careful in the way she raised her, and be very strict. As for Sweetness who had endured the hardship caused by racial discrimination, the best way to live in the world was to swallow the pain. So she taught Bride to keep her head down and not to make any trouble. Sweetness firmly believed that she never made any mistakes because all she had done was to protect Bride from the brutal society in which the hierarchy was ranked by the skin color.

Being strictly treated by Sweetness, Bride learned that obedience was "the only survival choice" (Morrison, 32) and was good at hiding her feelings to gain the acceptance and approval of her mother. Gradually losing the sense of belonging, Bride lived nervously and gingerly in her family and never knew the right thing to do or say. When Bride stained the bed sheet with her first menstrual blood, Sweetness slapped her and then cleaned it with a tub of cold water instead of caring about her. In spatial meaning, the family has become a house which only provides a place for Bride to live in. The lack of care and love from mother in the childhood has undoubtedly overshadowed Bride's growth.

When Bride was six, she saw the landlord Mr. Leigh molesting a boy down below the apartment and then she told it to her mother. But Sweetness was furious and asked her to button up her lip, "don't you say a word about it. Not to anybody, you hear me, Lula? Forget it. Not a single word" (Morrison, 54). Sweetness realized that the price for informing the police against the landlord was losing the apartment they lived in, so she had to be very careful and avoid making any trouble. Scared and disappointed, Bride did not tell the rest part of the story that she had been noticed and got insulted by Mr. Leigh. After that, even though being humiliated and laughed at by classmates in school, Bride did not tell anybody nor complain to the teacher for the same reason Sweetness cautioned her about Mr. Leigh. Unlike other children at her age, Bride had learned to bear everything and buried the bitterness and misery at the bottom of her heart.

As Bride grew up, she became independent and changed her name “Lula Ann” into “Ann Bride”. Sweetness gradually realized and admitted that she had hurt Bride and was tough on her when she was little, but she still insisted that she was not a bad mother because what she had done was to “protect her” (Morrison, 43). It is obvious that the self-justification of Sweetness was pale because what she had done did harm to Bride irreparably. When Bride was capable of living alone, she chose to move out of her family and began to pursue her dream.

The black parents need to realize that as the guardians and heirs of traditional culture, they are obligated to protect their children from mental harm. However, with the deeply rooted skin privileges, Sweetness did not take the responsibility of being a qualified African-American mother and gradually lost herself. At the same time, she misinterpreted maternal love as indifference and cruelty and regarded them as a kind of protection to her daughter. The good time Bride should have enjoyed in her childhood was taken away and the relationship between her and Sweetness had been destroyed, which left great harm to Bride’s childhood.

2.2.3 Social Roots of Trauma: Child Sexual Abuse

Except for the racial and familial factors which cause childhood trauma, child molestation, the increasingly serious social problem in America, has been revealed and involved in *God Help the Child*. In fact, sexual abuse has done deep harm both physically and mentally to children, but usually it is difficult to catch the perpetrators because most of them are acquaintances or even family members. Besides, many children who get sexual abuse choose to keep the secret out of fear or the menace of the offenders. In the novel, most characters have some connections with the sexual abuse in their childhood. Morrison tries to arouse public attention to the social issue and reveal its damage to children by the description of child molestation.

2.2.3.1 The Influence of Others’ Sexual Abuse Experiences

In *God Help the Child*, both the heroine Bride and the hero Booker are the victims of child sexual abuse although they did not experience it directly. It left indelible memories in their path of growth and had severe impact on their normal life.

At the age of six, Bride accidentally saw her landlord Mr. Leigh molesting a boy, and she was shocked by what she had seen. Maybe she was too young to understand what happened in front of her, but she knew it was something “dirty”. Scared and frightened, Bride told what she had seen to her mother, but Sweetness was wrathful and cautioned her not to tell anybody or even a single word. The rest part of the event she did not tell her mother was that she was noticed and insulted by the sexual offender Mr. Leigh, “Hey, little nigger cunt! Close that window and get the fuck outta there” (Morrison, 55). Bride was so young that she did not understand what “nigger” and “cunt” refer to, but she could feel the hostility and hate from the monster. She thought her parent would fix it if she had any trouble and asked her mother for help, but Sweetness’s reaction deeply hurt her. As Bride grew up, she began to blame herself for the boy’s suffering. One day when Bride told her boyfriend Booker about the event, she laughed and pretended the whole thing was funny, but the tears flew freely. Although the scene had become hazy with age, the spread and curled fingers of the victim had been engraved on her mind.

The miserable past that Booker had burdened came from his elder brother Adam’s death caused by sexual abuse. Being raised in a large and tight family, Booker lived happily until the incident happened. Every member in the family had got enriched with books, radio and newspapers every single day. Booker was fond of the time when all the family members gathered every Saturday morning. Among all the siblings, he worshipped Adam most, his two-years-older brother, and regarded him as his twin brother. One day, Adam was missing suddenly, and several days later his dead body was found in a culvert beyond recognition. It was six years later that the perpetrator, a retired auto mechanic, was caught, convicted of sexually stimulated slaughter of six boys including Adam. The murderer was called the nicest man in the world for he was easygoing, kind-hearted and full of smile all the time, but the means of crime was cruel and bloody. Undoubtedly, Adam’s death heartbroke Booker greatly, “following Adam’s murder, Booker had no companion. Both were dead” (Morrison, 115).

Even though the murderer had been arrested, Booker suffered from mental

torturing and could not relieve the pain. He was bitterly disappointed when he found that his family life was back to normal after Adam's funeral. He could not help thinking that why the family pretended the event of Adam's death was over and continued their life. During college, Booker had rebelled for a short time, and then returned to loneliness and even despair. As time went by, his feeling towards Adam did not fade away. He proposed to establish a scholarship in the name of Adam but it was rejected by his parents. Later, he even had a big fight with his family when he found the bedroom he once shared with Adam had changed into another look.

Although Adam had been dead for over ten years, the deep scar in Booker's heart once being touched, it still caused great pain to him. The days Booker stayed with Bride were quiet, peaceful but happy. Bride would like to share everything happening in her daily life while Booker chose to keep his past in his heart. It seemed that Booker had got out of the shadow of losing his brother. One day, when Bride told to him that she was going to visit a child molester, the gentle and good-tempered boy was in a big rage. He did not give a chance for Bride to explain, and finally left her without any words.

The two leading characters do not suffer sexual abuse directly, but they are actually the victims of the sexual assaults. At the same time, Morrison tries to reveal that the serious social issue can cause huge and long-term harm not only to the victims, but also to their loved ones, friends and even strangers.

2.2.3.2 Personal Experiences of Sexual Abuse

The child sexual abuse has done great harm to the witness and victim's family, let alone those who experience it themselves. In the novel, there are two characters suffering severe trauma caused by their personal experiences of sexual abuse in childhood. Brooklyn, Bride's friend, had suffered sexual assault when she was a child. When her uncle put his fingers between her legs, she pretended having stomachache to wake her drunken mother. Because of her mother's long-term alcohol abuse, she knew she was the only one who can help herself. Although she was only fourteen, she had learned to sense "what people want and how to please them" (Morrison, 139),

which explained why she was good at ingratiating herself with Bride even though she did not like her at all. One day she even tried to seduce Bride's boyfriend but failed. Kind and innocent, Bride was deceived by Brooklyn's sweet words all the time. She thought Brooklyn was the one she could completely trust and regarded her as a good friend. Readers may dislike and despise the pseudo-personality of Brooklyn at the very beginning, but they could realize that Brooklyn's personality had some connection with her experience of sexual abuse in childhood with the changing narrative perspective.

The other character who has suffered sexual assault in childhood is Rain. On the way Bride went to find her boyfriend, she had a severe car accident and was saved by a family. The days she spent there was relaxed and happy, and she got along well with Rain, a white girl who was picked up by the family. Rain's mother forced her into prostitution to make money. One day Rain was thrown outside by her mother for the reason that her revolt provoked a regular guest who stuck his pee in her mouth. The street life was hard for a little girl. She had to find where the public toilet was, a safe place to sleep, and be on the alert all the time because "anybody would turn you in or hurt you" (Morrison, 103).

The scene the tough little girl giggled as she spoke out her miserable sufferings made Bride heartbroken. Rain had met all kinds of men in this trade: some guys did not pay, some hurt them for fun and some policemen asked them for service before arresting them. Living in such an environment for a long time, Rain had held hostility to men. She confessed to Bride that men scared her and "made her feel sick" (Morrison, 103). When she recalled her mother, she said she could not forgive her, and even would like to "chop her head off" (Morrison, 102). According to Judith Herman, abused children are often wrathful and sometimes aggressive. In general, sexual assault does greater harm to those children who are at the younger age or suffer from long-lasting abuse. It can be seen from Rain's response that sexual assault happening to her has transferred to the tendency of violence.

The novel has exposed a sensitive social issue by the description of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse does great harm not only to the victims, but also to their families,

friends and even some strangers. Happening in the dark, the incidents are usually hard to be exposed in the public due to its particularity. As for children, their unformed personalities might be warped because of the traumatic experiences, and the psychological trauma is hard to heal.

Chapter 3 Different Results from Childhood Trauma

Trauma sometimes comes from one's own experience, while some is indirectly caused by what one has seen and heard. In Cathy Caruth's opinion, trauma is an invisible wound with hysteresis. The one who has experienced the traumatic events seems to be unaffected, but its influence on him would be delayed. As for abused children, traumatic experiences do severe harm to their undeveloped mind, which influence their unformed personalities, social functions, mental health, emotion and cognition.

The main characters in *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child* all have miserable and painful childhood, but the endings are totally different. Pecola drops into the abyss of misery before she grows up, while Bride and Booker grow up with the burden of painful memories in childhood but finally go through the dark. In this chapter, the author is going to compare and analyze the contrasting results in the two novels.

3.1 Aftereffects of Childhood Trauma in *The Bluest Eye*

According to Pierre Janet, the damage of traumatic events is so enormous and abrupt that the victim could not understand it with his inherent ability of cognizance. The American psychiatrists admitted the universality of trauma and called it "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) in 1980. The symptoms of PTSD are various because of the difference of the subjects, reasons and degrees of traumatic events, but there are some similarities among them, such as emotional anesthesia, hyperarousal, flashback, intrusion and personality disorder.

Suffering from cultural, familial and social trauma which have a profound and lasting impact on physiological arousal, emotion, cognition and memory, Pecola is impossible to resist or escape from the dilemma. Subsequently the changed state of consciousness will cause massive symptoms physically and mentally. There is no doubt that the traumatic events in childhood have brought psychological and

physiological trauma to Pecola. The author is going to analyze the aftereffects of her childhood trauma from two aspects: Pecola's loss of identity and her abnormality of personality.

3.1.1 Loss of Identity

Although the slavery had been abolished for a long time, there was a deeply rooted prejudice against the blacks in America. Because of the unceasing invasion of the white culture, the traditional black culture had been buried and thus the blacks gradually lost their identities. The blacks could not be free from the identity of "inferior race", so many of them began to put on the mask of the white people. They tried to follow the whites' way of life, expressions and dressing to narrow the gap between the whites and them. As we know, there is neither lowliness nor nobleness in culture, but the weak culture may get lost under the trend of consumption led by the dominant culture and the bombing of mass media. After suffering from a series of psychological trauma, Pecola began to lose her black identity, which resulted in her tragic life.

The American dominant culture had been virtually disseminated through films, newspapers, advertisements and so forth. Thus, the white norms of beauty which were defined as white skin and blue eyes had imperceptibly influenced and were accepted by those blacks at the very bottom of society. On Christmas day, a big, blue-eyed baby doll was regarded as the most precious and special gift for children. The packing of drinks and candies were printed with blue-eyed and golden-haired child star. As for Pauline, the best way to forget the troubles of life was to wear a hair which was popular among the white women and then went to see a movie, in which the whites' houses were light and spacious and the white men behaved gently. All of this suggested Pecola that the white culture was noble, and golden hair and blue eyes symbolized beauty.

It always took Pecola a long time to drink milk, since she was fond of gazing at Shirley Temple's dimpled face printed on the cup. She numbed herself by drinking the three quarts of milk and wished to be the white little girl on the cup. The same thing

happened when Pecola bought candies from a white storekeeper. The picture of Mary Jane was printed on each clean wrapper, with smiling face, blond hair and blue eyes. To Pecola, it seemed that eating the candy could somehow be Mary Jane. She accepted and firmly believed the conclusion that the blacks were ugly, which came from the overwhelming advertisements, films, books and posters in the consumer culture. During the process, she was looking for her black shadow from the whites' eyes. Surrounded by the white aesthetics, Pecola was getting confused and felt inferior about her own culture.

In the white culture, the aesthetic concept is based on the physiological characteristics of the white people, and the blacks, standing on the opposite of beauty, are always discriminated and denied. Sometimes Pecola sat in front of the mirror for long hours and tried to find the reason for her not being popular—got ignored and despised by her family, teachers and classmates. She hated her ugliness and attributed all the misfortunes to it. It had occurred to her sometimes that it was because of her dark skin and lack of a pair of blue eyes. Since then, she began to doubt her appearance and even prayed for blue eyes every night. In fact, what she had done was a kind of rejection to her blackness. In a word, Pecola had gradually lost herself in the society which was filled with white culture and finally lost the black identity when she longed for the blue eyes.

3.1.2 Abnormality of Personality

Modern psychoanalysis believes that the occurrence of trauma is unexpected and cannot be anticipated in advance, and it has a great impact on the spirit of human beings after its occurrence. Although the victim survives, his body, emotion and psychology has suffered a heavy blow from the trauma itself. The victim's mind is corroded by trauma, which causes post-traumatic stress disorder. The disorder, however, is caused not only by the war, but also by any horrible events. Because of the subjects, reasons and degrees of traumatic events are different, the symptoms are also various. For example, some traumatized people are frightened easily, react irascibly to small provocation and sleep poorly. Some may suffer constant panic after

the event, which recall the miserable experience to them. Something happening in everyday life can make the victims remind of the painful memories, reliving the traumatic experience repetitively. In the novel, Pecola has suffered the distortion of personality such as insanity, split personality and schizophrenia.

Lack of love and care from the family, Pecola sometimes witnessed the fight between her parents. At that time, the sick feeling came to her and “the desire to heave” (Morrison, 45) surged as always. With the physiological reaction, she closed her eyes and prayed to God for disappearance. Unlike Sammy who always ran away from the place, Pecola had nothing to do but fantasize that she had vanished from the world. She could feel that every part of her body faded away one after another except her tight eyes. From the perspective of psychology, the symptom of delusions means slightly mental ill. It is difficult for the patients with insanity to deal with information because of the lack of the ability of logical reasoning. They might be anxious and combustible, some with withdrawal behavior, and have the tendency of paranoid thinking. With the absurd thoughts, Pecola was mentally disturbed under the depressed family environment for a long period.

On the way Pecola went to a small grocery store to buy the candy, she thought the dandelions at the base of the telephone pole were pretty. But when Pecola saw those dandelions again after she got the candies and left the store, her attitude towards them had changed. She began to take pity on them, but the feeling did not last for a long while, and then turned to a kind of hatred—she thought they were all ugly weeds. Later, the storekeeper’s eyes and voice surged to Pecola’s mind, which made her fall into the painful memories. The repeated traumatic memory aggravated Pecola’s psychological trauma and the only thing to relieve her pain was the candies she had just bought. Pecola firmly believed that when she ate the candy, she was not that black girl who was despised by the white shopkeeper, but Mary Jane who was with blue eyes. The weird idea predicated the psychological problem reflected on Pecola, and the nine candies seemed to give the very chance to split her personality.

In the end, Pecola was delirious and she was unable to distinguish reality and hallucination. There was a long conversation between Pecola and her “friend” at the

end of the novel. When Pecola's "friend" asked her whether she got raped by Cholly, Pecola anxiously denied it, but then admitted. It is obvious for the readers to learn that the "friend" is another "Pecola" fantasized by her, which means there are two different "Pecola" hidden in her body: one has suffered all the traumatic events; the other one is well-protected. In the conversation, Pecola constantly asked her "friend" whether her eyes were blue and pretty, and confirmed. During the process of "ask-and-confirm", Pecola finally went insane.

From the beginning of the novel, Pecola had a keen desire for a pair of blue eyes. In her mind, blue eyes not only meant beauty, but also carried the dream that she could be freed from the trauma. Nevertheless, she could only own a pair of blue eyes in her split personalities. Suffering from cultural, familial and social trauma, she could not find any help and support from the outside. Poor as Pecola was, she gradually lost her identity and became insane and schizophrenic.

3.2 Resilience from Childhood Traumatic Experiences in *God Help the Child*

According to some longitudinal studies, not all the abused children would suffer the terrible consequence predicted by the theory of etiology. Although some children have experienced long-time pressure in adversity with psychological trauma, they still have "a good adaptive ability to reconcile physical condition with the adverse external environment" (Xu Xizheng, 2014). They are able to overcome various psychological problems caused by the traumatic experiences in their daily lives, and then recover to normal mental health.

In recent years, scholars have paid attention to the physiological mechanism of psychological resilience. From the perspective of cognitive neuroscience, they have discussed the effects of genes, temperament, emotion regulation, cognition, early experience and other protective factors on individual resilience, and have made many achievements. In *God Help the Child*, Bride had suffered from the disdain of her mother, the abandonment of her father, racism and colorism from the outside world

and psychological shadow out of the witnessing of a sexual abuse event, but she gradually became independent and confident as she grew up and finally recovered from the psychological wound. Likewise, Booker eventually put aside the painful past with the help of his aunt and Bride. Bride's pregnancy brought hope to their new life.

3.2.1 Being Independent and Confident

Being independent, in its true sense, refers to getting independence in economy and personality. Children who get abused or injured in a family without care and love have to bear and endure the pain because they are too young to live independently. Bride, however, did not need to rely on anybody for material support anymore due to the economic independence. Even if she had taken business courses in a community university, it was hard for her to find a job at first. She changed her style of dressing with the help of her friend Jeri, which made her catch others' eyes and make a big success in her career. Thereupon, she was able to afford the big apartment, hire a maid, drive her limousine wherever she wanted to go and sometimes enjoy shopping. Although Bride was hurt by Sweetness when she was a child, she still arranged her to a nursing home and sent money for her regularly.

The independence in personality means that the will of a person cannot be easily affected by others, and that he has a strong ability to put forward and implement some plans. Bride felt self-condemned and guilty for years because of false testimony she had given when she was eight, so she made the decision herself to visit Sofia the day she was released on parole. Bride went there all alone for she knew her own mind that she had to take upon herself the consequences and make it up. Even though the prosecutor could feel how scared Bride was, she faced up to all the possibilities bravely.

According to the psychology, independence is often accompanied by courage, confidence, conscientiousness, concentration, responsibility and the spirit of facing the difficulty without fear. On the way Bride healed her psychological trauma, she became more and more brave. Booker was angry and left Bride when he heard that she was going to visit a parolee who had abused children sexually. Getting confused

and lost for a long period of time, Bride decided to go to his place to ask him directly. Although the wound which was beaten up by the parolee had not been healed yet, she firmly stepped on the way alone.

After Booker's leaving without a word, Bride had sunk into the depth of misery. One day, she picked the shaving brush and razor from the things which Booker had left in her house. Every time Bride got nervous and upset, she would like to touch the brush and finger it, which made her calm and peaceful. Even though on the way she went to find Booker, she did not forget to pack the shaving brush and razor in the trumpet case. It was obvious that for Bride, the shaving brush was a substitute for the absence of her boyfriend, more than spiritual ballast that she could depend on. Finally, under the encouragement of Queen, she stood bravely in front of Booker, and told him "you don't have to love me but you damn well have to respect me" (Morrison, 154), which reflects the change of her understanding towards love. From this moment, she did not rely on Booker to fill the absence of love in her childhood as before, but began to love him and herself as an independent person.

Unlike other children, Bride had a miserable childhood, but she did not despise herself like Pecola as she grew up. Instead, she became more confident and made achievements in her career. When Bride was born, Sweetness thought Bride would suffer a lot due to her skin color, but the world has changed so fast that "blue blacks are all over TV, in fashion magazines, commercials, even starring on movies" (Morrison, 176). Bride's friend Jeri, a designer, was always satisfied with her black skin when he was asked for some advice of wearing matching. With the change of aesthetic standards and the encouragement of her friend, Bride made a bold attempt on clothing and apparel, insisting on white-only clothes. She got used to being praised in different occasions, and her personal life had always changed. The first time Booker saw Bride, he was dumbstruck by her beauty, "her blackness thrilled him" (Morrison, 133). Disgusted by Sweetness, Bride's black skin conformed to the modern aesthetic standard, which not only made her attractive and confident, but also helped her career a great success.

In a broad sense, confidence itself is a kind of initiative, and it is the positive

attitude of self evaluation. Bride's confidence mainly comes from the shift of aesthetic standards with the change of time. Meanwhile, by the comparison between the two distinct aesthetic standards at different time in American society, Morrison explores the aesthetic value in today's society, leaving a space for readers to think about the demarcation of "beauty" and "ugliness".

3.2.2 Integration into White and Black Community

As for children, family is the warmest and most reliable shelter which can bring happiness, comfort and sense of security to them. Being abandoned by father, Bride had not received love and care from Sweetness who despised her dark skin and always kept distance from her. Her classmates treated her like a freak in school, humiliating her by imitating monkeys or putting bananas on her desk. In order to gain attention and praise from her mother, she gave false testimony to a white teacher, which gave her a twenty-five-year sentence. Although Bride had successfully got praised from Sweetness after the trial, the incident was the psychological burden as she grew up. Fifteen years later, she won a bright future in cosmetics industry, but the interpersonal relationship was in a complete mess. Except for her boyfriend Booker and the "pseudo-friend" (Morrison, 134) Brooklyn, she did not have any intimate friends. As for Bride, Booker and Brooklyn were her spiritual support, who encouraged her when she was depressed and frustrated. Hence, Booker's departure had undoubtedly put her in the depth of misery.

On the way Bride went to find Booker, she had a serious car accident. She was scared and desperate at first, and began to cry out of the hurt from her leg and hopelessness in her mind. Fortunately, she was saved by a kind-hearted white couple, Steve and Evelyn. Steve insisted to send her to the clinic and Evelyn took good care of her with meals and baths. Bride was surprised that the couple helped her without any hesitation, and asked for nothing in return even though they had a frugal life. They treated her like "a stray cat or a dog with a broken leg that they felt sorry for" (Morrison, 90). Staying with the family, Bride gradually felt like at home that was full of warmth and care. Sometimes Evelyn's singing recalled Bride the bitter memory of

Sweetness, but she fell asleep quietly with the songs instead of being obsessed by the painful past. With the sincere and self-giving help of the white couple, Bride gradually opened her mind to embrace the outside world, and finally she was integrated with the white people.

For Booker, the trauma he had suffered in her childhood made him solitary and isolated from the outside. He locked himself and held his tongue even to his girlfriend. When lived with Bride, he acted as a listener, never mentioned his miserable past. Not interested in social activities, Booker preferred to stay alone as Bride went to work, mail to his aunt Queen or visit the library. After leaving Bride, Booker went back to the countryside and lived alone near his aunt Queen. Finally, Bride found Queen's house according to the address on the letter. Queen treated her warmly, showed the letters Booker sent to her, and told her his poor suffering in his childhood. When she heard Bride was going to give up, she encouraged her with a song. At the same time, Queen persuaded Booker to forget the painful past and grasped the present. Finally, the misunderstanding between Bride and Booker cleared up and their relationship had eventually restored. In the end, Queen's life was at stake, it was Bride and Booker who accompanied her till the end of her life. After they scattered Queen's ashes, they began to plan their future, and welcome the incoming new family member.

Apparently, the way to recover from trauma for the hero and heroine is not smooth. During the process, both of them walked out of the shadow of childhood trauma, gradually integrating into black and white community. Although racial discrimination still exists in the American society, Morrison expresses her strong wishes that people from different ethnic groups can live in harmony.

Chapter 4 Reasons of Different Results

In the two novels, traumatic events have had great impact on the life of the characters, and there are two common grounds. Firstly, they all happen in their childhood. Secondly, those traumas cannot be healed naturally. Because of the different settings of background, personalities and surroundings, the endings of the characters are totally different. In *The Bluest Eye*, suffering from a series of physical and mental injuries, Pecola sinks into the depth of misery in the end, getting lost and insane. However, in *God Help the Child*, Bride and Booker have overcome their sorrow and pain, getting back to normal life. This chapter is going to analyze the reasons of the two entirely different endings.

4.1 Failure to Heal Childhood Trauma in *The Bluest Eye*

Pecola could have had the opportunities to get out of the trauma and rebuild herself, but she did not seize them. When she was sent for Claudia's family because of her house getting burned, she felt the long-lost love and care there. But soon, she had to go back to her own family, which interrupted the process of connecting with the outside world. Although Pecola spent much time staying with the three whores who did not despise her, they could not guide Pecola in a proper way. The religious belief, Pecola's last chance, was helpless, as the fraud Soaphead Church blocked the way she redeemed herself. In a word, the failure of the three ways of healing ultimately leads to Pecola's tragic life.

4.1.1 Being Unable to Connect with the Outside World

After Cholly burned the house, Pecola was sent to MacTeer's family, a poor family as Pecola's. Living in the society full of rampant white culture, the MacTeers were neither haughty nor humble, but kept an optimistic attitude towards life. They loved and cared for their children and tried their best to protect them. Although they had been affected by the white culture to some extent, they held to the bottom line all

the time—the traditional black culture.

Pecola was taken good care of when she lived with the MacTeers. Frieda and Claudia were friendly to her, trying their best to keep her from feeling outdoors. They played the clown to make Pecola laugh and shared their crackers and milk with her. When Claudia's mother, Mrs. MacTeer, a frank and outspoken but kind-hearted black woman, found three quarts of milk were drunk by Pecola, she chattered for hours indirectly and insultingly. But soon she forgave Pecola in her sweet singing. The first time Pecola menstruated, Mrs. MacTeer helped clean Pecola's body in the bathroom, with the music of her laughter. It can be seen from the tiny things in everyday life that Mrs. MacTeer had almost replaced the role of mother to give the maternal love which Pecola had never received. During the time Pecola stayed with the MacTeers, she felt being accepted and loved in the harmonious family.

Living in such warm family, Pecola initially established safety, but the safety, care and love are temporary because she could not stay there for long. According to Herman, the immediate task for traumatized person is to find and secure a safe refuge. "Securing a safe environment requires attention not only to the patient's psychological capacity to protect herself but also the realities of power in her social situation" (Herman, 171). However, Pecola has to go back to her family, when the safe environment and the relationship between her and others are still not fully established. With the treatment being interrupted, the previous efforts go up in smoke, and Pecola has to face the pain alone in her own family. Losing the opportunity of connecting with the outside world, Pecola cannot control her life and protect herself any more.

4.1.2 Wrong Guidance of Listeners

Pecola could not get warm in her family, but there is a place bringing her a moment of happiness. She always visited the three whores who lived in the apartment above her home. Different from some prostitutes created in traditional literature, the three whores dared to love and hate and enjoyed life regardless of others' thoughts. They were enthusiastic and friendly, teasing each other and telling coarse jokes even in front of Pecola. After leaving the MacTeers, the three whores' apartment was

another refuge for Pecola. Pecola liked to stay with them because they did not despise her, just like her friends she could trust and rely on. With a strong sense of being, Pecola had found the medicine to relieve the psychological pain. She was so relaxed and delighted that she sometimes doubted whether the three women were real or not when she stared at them.

It seemed that the three whores were free and independent, but they had to make a living by selling their bodies. They did not protect and care innocent girls, neither did they respect women. There was nothing disappointing happen in their life, but there was no hope either. Although it was precious for the three to defy authority and pursue sincerity, they could not take in children in their world and take care of them whole-heartedly. For them, what they cared most was to make a living and enjoying life. They never thought of what Pecola needed most.

In the process of trauma recovery, reconstructing of traumatic story is an inevitable stage. When the survivor tells the story of the trauma, she could feel the connection with the listener at some point, and thus starts to rebuild the connection with the outside world. If the listener can properly guide the speaker in the process and help her to correctly evaluate the trauma, the survivor can have a better understanding of the trauma happening to her, so as to establish the correct concept. Pecola had initially established the sense of security when she stayed with the three whores, but she could never connect with the outside world and reevaluate her trauma. The whores could give genuine love to Pecola, providing a harbor for her in her hardest time, but they could not help her shape perfect personality due to the specificity of their jobs.

As the victims in the society, the three whores did not own healthy personalities. Surviving hard in the cracks between the blacks and the whites, they could not listen to Pecola's trauma story patiently or establish healthy personality by providing proper guidance. What they could do for Pecola was to comfort her sometimes instead of giving her guidance and helping her to heal the psychological wound.

4.1.3 Misinterpretation of Religion

In the novel, almost all the characters have some connections with religious belief: Pecola prayed to God each night; her mother Pauline joined a church and even the white storekeeper Mr. Yacobowski hung “Virgin Mary” in the mouth. It seems that Christianity has permeated into people’s life in the town. When Cholly was a child, he thought God was a nice old white man, with long white hair white beard and blue eyes, because the black figures were related to ugliness, evil or someone inferior in his mind. However, under the influence of strong white culture and the oppression of the whites, Cholly began to doubt God’s kindness and felt antipathy against the “white” God, but he dared not revolt God and white culture. Instead, he gave full vent to humiliation and anger on the weaker. Thus, Pecola became the poor victim with his misunderstanding towards God.

Under the impact of the dominant culture of the whites, Pecola began to despise and loathe herself with the distorted mind. She felt confused about her future without the support, encouragement and care from her family, friends or community. When she found people around her could not give a hand, she began to pin her hope on her beliefs in God. She fantasized that the God could give her a pair of blue eyes. The desire was so strong that she prayed to God without fail every night. God, in Pecola’s eyes, is like a spiritual support of her morbid desire.

After Pecola’s being bullied by Junior, Geraldine did not punish her naughty son, nor did she comfort Pecola, but threw her out with rude words. Pecola saw “Jesus looking down at her with sad and unsurprised eyes” (Morrison, 92) as she got out of the room. The Jesus seemed to tell Pecola that he could do nothing but watch the unfair treatment happening to her. In the eyes of Pecola, God did not punish the guilty or help those in trouble. Finally, she had to shift her hope to the priest, expecting that he could help her.

The Soaphead Church, Elihue, had been reared in a family proud of its mixed blood. After suffering a series of strike from his marriage and life, Elihue finally settled and passed himself as a minister, accepting the name Soaphead Church. He

blamed God for the awry life, and thought he could have done better than God. To some extent, Soaphead Church, mentally distorted by the influence of his family environment, treated the job as the tool of making a living with the wrong interpretation of God.

Getting raped by Cholly, Pecola had not received love and care from her mother and neighborhood, and could not go to school anymore. Out of desperation, she asked Soaphead Church for help to turn her eyes into blue. Although Soaphead, the unqualified church, knew he could do nothing for her, he asked Pecola to take the meat which was poisoned to the old dog he hated. Pecola touched the dog's head gently, feeding it with hope. Witnessing the dog's dying in front of her, Pecola ran out of the yard. The dog's death indicated that her hope had vanished—nobody could save her even God. In Pecola's mind, God was no longer the grandfatherly old man helping people in distress.

According to Herman, the recovery of the trauma has three stages, but no single process of recovery follow the three stages in a linear sequence. Each stage is quite important and necessary to the patients, which means the recovery will fail if any of the steps are not completed. As for Pecola, she could not gain safety from her own family and she could not tell her traumatic story to her friends or neighbors either. Then she was unable to build the connection with the outside world. Finally, her beliefs collapsed due to the misinterpretation of religion. During the process, she gradually lost herself and fell into the abyss of suffering.

4.2 Recovery from Childhood Trauma in *God Help the Child*

Judith Herman (1992) points out that the recovery of trauma unfolds three stages, and the prime task in the first stage is to establish safety. In the first stage, the victims need to protect themselves from getting injured again, and learn to take care of their bodies. Only when they try to control their own life can they get into the next stage of recovery, which is retelling the traumatic events. In this stage, the victims must courageously confront their miserable past and analyze its cause in depth by retelling

their sufferings and feelings. Trauma has destroyed the old self of the survivors, so in the third stage, they should connect with the outside world with a positive attitude towards life to build a new self. Although some observers divide the stage of recovery into five or eight, there is a rough congruence in these processes.

Childhood trauma is so hurt that even an adult could not easily escape from the painful past. In *God Help the Child*, Bride and Booker who have suffered severe childhood trauma are both successfully cured from it. Although the process of recovery is filled with twists and turns, each stage is crucial and indispensable.

4.2.1 Establishing the Sense of Safety

Traumatic events would destroy the victims' fundamental recognition about the safety which is regarded as the cornerstone of one's relationship and faith. If the sense of safety gets shattered, the traumatized people will lose her basic sense of self. Therefore, the establishment of safety is the basic and first task of the process of recovery. As for those who have suffered psychological trauma in their childhood, the initial stage often lasts a long period of time since they may confront with some difficulty in trust, recognition, autonomy, initiative and so forth.

Because of colorism, Bride was abandoned by her father and treated indifferently by Sweetness when she was a child. At the age of six, Bride had witnessed her landlord sexual abusing a child, which made her frightened. Instead of giving comfort to her, her mother responded with anger and cautioned Bride that she must keep the secret. Later when Bride was at school, her classmates humiliated and insulted her due to her race. Being afraid of complaining to her mother and teacher, she learned to endure it in silence. At home, Bride was like an outsider more than a daughter. Whenever possible, her mother always avoided physical contact with her even when she helped Bride to take a bath. As for Bride, home was not the safe place to protect her from stormy weather, but the place where she "never knew the right thing to do or say or remember what the rules were" (Morrison, 78). As Bride grew up, she moved out from the house that she had lived gingerly and in fear. Although she lived alone and had to take good care of herself, it was a good start for her recovery.

It was not until the appearance of Booker that Bride gradually had the sense of belonging and felt safe. Living together, Bride enjoyed their lovemaking and his complete understanding of her. She did not care his occupation or his life experience, but was deeply attracted by him. With the establishment of trust, Bride described her childhood to him which she had never told anyone. However, the preliminarily established safety had collapsed with Booker's left.

After Booker's leaving, Bride was absent-minded every day, indulging herself in the happy memories she spent with him. She trashed out all the things he left in her house except for his shaving brush and razor. Every time Bride felt bad and nervous, she fingered it, which comforted her as a substitute of her boyfriend. Afterwards, she was saved by a white couple after a car accident on the way she went to find Booker. Bride stayed there with them until her leg injury was cured under the good care of them. During the six difficult weeks, Bride felt the warmth and love of home, which she had never experienced when she stayed with her mother. Finally, she sent the shaving brush as she left there, which symbolized that she had regained the sense of safety.

The process of establishing safety is gradual and occurs in fits and starts. At this time, the victims have confidence in protecting themselves and know how to control the fragile feelings and whom to rely on. Booker, who had suffered the grief of his brother's death, left his family for the reason that he was disappointed and angry about their response. He chose to hide it in mind even though to his girlfriend because she was an "outsider". Although Booker always acted as a "listener" when he was with Bride, he could forget the miserable memories temporarily and felt "the disintegration of the hurt and gloom in which for years Adam's death had clouded him" (Morrison, 132) with her company. In a sense, the mutual company helps the hero and heroine to build up a sense of security, which has laid a good foundation for the successful recovery from trauma of Bride and Booker.

4.2.2 Speaking out the Traumatic Experiences

Judith Herman believes that traumatic events have severe impact on the victims

because they “breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community” (51) and “shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others” (51). Children who have suffered traumatic events are pressed for therapy to relieve the pain. Even though they grow up, it is difficult for them to escape from the miserable memories. In the novel, the importance and necessity of retelling the traumatic experience have been emphasized. According to Dori Laub, “the survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive” (1995: 63).

In fact, the process that Bride speaks out the traumatic events is full of complications. In her childhood, she could not get love and care from her parents. There was no one she could tell her grievances and trouble to, and she was self-contemptuous and ashamed of her traumatic past. After witnessing her landlord sexual abusing a boy, Bride was cautioned to hold her tongue by her mother. Hence, even though got humiliated by her classmates, Brides never complained to anyone. Besides, giving false testimony to an innocent white young teacher had been Bride’s guilt along with her growth. Fifteen years later, she still lived under the pressure of perjuring. Although she made a huge success in her career, her interpersonal relationship was in a complete mess, which was like “Diet Coke—deceptively sweet minus nutrition” (Morrison, 36). Brooklyn, considered by Bride as her good friend and the only one she could trust, was actually a two-faced pseudo who could not be the right listener.

Being in love with Booker, Bride opened her mind and told him almost everything including her childhood sufferings which she had never described to others. As Bride said, “memory is the worst thing about healing” (Morrison, 29), which revealed that anyone who wanted to get rid of trauma had to face the painful past directly instead of escaping. As Bride told Booker about her witnessing of landlord’s sexual assault, Booker’s comfort made her feel relieved, curried, safe and owned since the incidents had brought tremendous pain and guilt to her for a dozen years.

However, concentrated too much on the telling about herself, Bride ignored Booker, who had a painful past in childhood as well. It was not until his leaving that

Bride realized their relationship was unbalanced for she knew nothing about him at all, “I spilled my heart to him; he told me nothing about himself. I talked, he listened” (Morrison, 62). After she lost her only listener in life, she began to hallucinate that her weight was lost fast, her pubic hair and ear-holes were gone, and the chest was flat like a little girl. Finally, when Bride found Booker, they quarreled and fight aggressively. Then the secret she buried in her heart escaped her lips, “I lied! I lied! I lied! She was innocent. I helped convict her but she didn’t do any of that. I wanted to make amends but she beat the crap out of me and I deserved it” (Morrison, 153). After pouring the ashamed sins, Bride felt “newly born” (Morrison, 162) and her “childish body” had sprung to life, becoming more attractive than before.

Likewise, Booker who had suffered severe trauma in his childhood urgently needed to tell his traumatic experiences to relieve his pain. Adam to him was more than a brother, but the one who had an insight into Booker’s thinking and feeling, the one “who loved each of his siblings but especially Booker” (Morrison, 116). Because of Adam’s death, Booker became sensitive and irritable, and paid great attention to those children who got injured. Every time he saw those who were abusing children, he would fight against them without hesitation. Although he loved Bride deeply, he always kept his painful past in his mind. After Bride told him the secret that she lied on the court, he finally opened his mind, and spoke out the story buried for years. In the end, getting out of the dark, they kissed each other and began to imagine their bright future.

According to Bakhtin, “any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere” (91), which indicates the importance of utterance. In the novel, when Bride told Booker that she had witnessed a sexual assault towards a child, Booker asked her whether she told this to others and he believed that it would be better if more people knew about it, which reveals that narration can help to cope with stress and relieve the pain. It can be seen that Bride and Booker have obtained physical and mental relief through narration. Speaking out the traumatic experiences finally helps them recover from trauma and gain the inner peace in their mind.

4.2.3 Finding a Good Listener

Out of fear or shame, it is hard for the traumatized people to speak out the painful memories. When they try to retell the story, it means they are ready to face the pain directly and embrace new life. Hence, the listener has played an important role in the process of their recovery. As for traumatized people, their weakness and fragility are exposed in front of the listener when they begin to pour out the ashamed and miserable past, so the listener should be the one they trust. In a word, they do not need a “passive” listener, but the one with “response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth” (Bakhtin, 1986:69).

The witnessing of landlord’s sexual abuse towards a boy had become Bride’s dark memory with growth. She buried it in the bottom of her heart and never mentioned it to anyone until one day she told to Booker. Hiding the rage at the moment he heard someone had hurt her, Booker comforted her with gentle words and kisses. Booker was not a passive listener, but enlightened Bride actively with delighted and thought-provoking words. “Come on, baby, you’re not responsible for other folks’ evil” (Morrison, 55). “Correct what you can; learn from what you can’t” (Morrison, 56). After the conversation, Bride was relieved, as if a heavy load had been taken off her mind, and gained the sense of belonging and safety.

Booker poured out his secret in quarrels with Bride and he also told his worry to his aunt Queen, who was “the single person he trusted” (Morrison, 160). Then Queen responded with a series of questions which made Booker deep in thoughts. “You need a noble reason to fail, don’t you?” (Morrison, 156) “Don’t you think he’s tired?” (Morrison, 156) “Did you ever feel free of him?” (Morrison, 157) Being left alone with a word “fool” (Morrison, 157) by his aunt, Booker gradually realized that it was he who lashed the pain to fill in his brain, and finally admitted that he felt good when he stayed with Bride. After Queen’s open criticism to him, Booker began to examine and chastise himself that no one was flawless like an angel. Thus, the correct guidance of listener can lead to profound changes of self and interpersonal relationship.

The importance of finding a good listener can be seen from another character, the

little girl Rain. Rain had suffered a miserable childhood of being forced as a child prostitute. Although she was adopted and taken good care of by the couple, Steve and Evelyn, they were not willing to listen to Rain's painful past. If Rain said something about how it was like in her mother's house, they "frown or look away" (Morrison, 104), so Rain always felt distressed that she did not know who she could talk to. Out of moral discomfort, the foster parents prevented the kid from speaking out the ashamed past, but it was hard for the little girl to relieve her feeling until they bought her a cat. Rain treated the cat as her friend and told everything to it.

Although the cat could act as an emotional sustenance, it could not give any response with words when Rain talked to it. After Bride's arrival, Rain eventually had a listener and got a chance to talk. "My black lady listens to me how it was" (Morrison, 104). Bride was shocked when she heard the cruel treatment towards the child by her own mother. Then she "took Rain's hand and led her gently to the stone" (Morrison, 102) and encouraged Rain by putting her hand on Rain's knee. With the similar childhood traumatic experiences, Bride's broken heart had resonated with the girl. She felt a kind of companionship that was free of envy, just like close friends in school. Later, Bride stood in front of Rain to protect her when some boys teased Rain and shot her with birdshot. This was the first time that Rain felt love since "nobody had done that before" (Morrison, 105). Under the appeasing and encouragement of Bride, Rain confided the filthy past which she could not spoke out before, and that she would rather have a sister like Bride than her substitute mother Evelyn. Although the description of Rain and the couple came to an end, in author's opinion, she would overcome the trouble and embrace bright future.

Although Bride and Booker have recovered from their psychological trauma suffered in childhood, the process is full of stumbling blocks. Lucky as they are, the background and aesthetic standard of "black is beauty" at that time makes the recovery of trauma possible. Under the encouragement and care of friends and folks, they build up sense of safety which is the basic step for the therapy. What is more, they are not ashamed of speaking out the traumatic story and gradually relieve the pain. Besides, the listeners have played important roles on their way to recovery since

they do not listen passively, but provide correct guidance. At the end of the story, the forthcoming baby of the two characters has also conveyed Morrison's best wishes for life and the whole society.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

By depicting the traumatic experiences of black people, Morrison has portrayed the distinct images of the blacks at different periods of time in her works, which reflects the difficult situation of African-Americans under the oppression of discrimination and the white-dominated culture. She tries to call the worldwide attention to the miserable sufferings of the blacks, and help them to be freed from all kinds of oppression. As a sensitive social topic, childhood trauma reflects the problems that need to be of concern in today's society, such as racial conflicts, violence, school bullying, interpersonal relationship and so forth. Different from Morrison's other works focusing on the blacks who live in the white-dominated society and exploring their cultural identities, her two novels *The Bluest Eye* and *God Help the Child* depict that childhood trauma has brought endless pain and trouble to personal growth. However, being created in different times, the two novels have two totally opposite endings and they have revealed different social and cultural problems in American at that time, provoking readers to think over human nature.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola has suffered hardship from culture, family and society. Living in the white-dominated society, she has been discriminated by the whites and gradually assimilated into the white culture. In the family, her mother's indifference and the deformity of paternal love give Pecola another heavy blow. Besides, the black community does not give a hand to her when she needs help and care most. After suffering from a series of trauma, massive mental symptoms have been reflected on Pecola, such as the loss of her black identity and the distortion of personality. In Pecola's tragic life, she could have relieved the pain if the opportunity had been seized. However, due to some factors, she fails to connect with the outside world and find the good listeners. In the end, the last straw of religious belief that she can rely on is broken. Unfortunately, Pecola finally goes insane and falls into the abyss of misery.

Similarly, childhood trauma is the main and important theme in Morrison's latest novel *God Help the Child*. Although the characters have suffered cultural, familial and

social trauma, their experiences are different from Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*. Despite the miserable childhood, Bride and Booker have gradually established safety with the help of their lovers, relatives and friends. Under the encouragements of people in the white and black community, they pour out the traumatic stories and finally get recovered. In stark contrast to the female images in Morrison's previous works, the heroine Bride becomes confident and independent as she grows up, and pursues her own happiness at any risk.

It can be seen from the thesis that the traumatized person has to seek out the ways to recover if he wants to survive in the society. The foremost step is to build up the sense of safety, and then retell the traumatic story to appropriate listeners who can provide correct guidance. The process of recovery may not follow the linear sequence of Judith Herman's three steps for trauma recovery, but each step is essential and important. In the two works, Morrison shows her care for children and good wishes to human beings far from the trauma. Meanwhile, it can be reflected that Morrison's concern for the growth of children is no longer limited to the blacks, but to the children of different races, which indicates that her understanding towards children growth and trauma become more optimistic and mature.

The Bluest Eye reflects Morrison's exploration and concern about racial discrimination, traditional cultural, ethical problems and the growth of children. In *God Help the Child*, except for race, love and human nature which have been embodied in her previous works, Morrison tries to interpret the contemporary world, calling attention to the issues exposed in the society. By comparing Morrison's two novels, the author believes that the key to the survival of the blacks is to preserve and develop their traditional culture. As the inheritors of traditional culture, black parents should take the responsibilities of teaching their children to respect themselves and guiding them with sound values. As for the blacks, blindly pursuing and accepting the white value will lead to the loss of self, while only by taking right attitude towards different culture can they survive in society.

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