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In Search of a Residence for Body and Soul
—An Analysis of the Trauma Recovery in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

寻找身心的栖息地
——对托尼·莫里森《天佑孩童》中创伤复原的探究

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By

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Abstract

As the first American black woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, Toni Morrison (1931-) is now acclaimed as one of the most important and innovative contemporary novelists in the world. Morrison conveys her deep concern for the living condition and the psychological state of human beings in many of her masterpieces, among which *God Help the Child* (2015) is the representative one. Unlike the gloomy atmosphere in her other works, this novel presents a relatively brighter picture. In this novel, Morrison proposes possible ways of how some traumatized children may get out of their physical and psychological predicaments in the crisis-ridden society.

There is no doubt that Morrison has gained more popularity among Chinese readers and scholars in recent years. However, scholars mainly focus on some of Morrison's early works such as *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Beloved* (1987), while few of them pay attention to *God Help the Child*. So far, there is no Chinese version of *God Help the Child*. Very few academic researches based on this novel have been published. By analyzing the physical predicaments, psychological predicaments, and the salvation of the characters, this thesis intends to fill in the gap and promote the research of the growth of traumatized children.

The novel mainly focuses on three characters: the brave, black young lady Bride, her depressed boyfriend Booker and her little white girlfriend Rain. These characters experience similar life courses. They grow up, but try not to get stuck in predicaments. With the combination of Donald Woods Winnicott's concept of transitional object and Judith Lewis Herman's trauma recovery theory, this thesis intends to make a deeper study of the novel. Besides the Introduction and Conclusion, this thesis consists of three chapters.

The Introduction presents a brief sketch of Morrison's life experience as well as the primary plot of the novel. Then follows the detailed literature review of this novel. In addition, the theoretical framework and the significance in exploring the novel from the perspective of Winnicott's concept of transitional object and Herman's trauma recovery theory are elaborated in this section.

Chapter One explores the physical predicaments of these three characters. Their bodies suffer injury in broken families and violent society. Bride bears the cross of being a dark skin girl, and she has experienced the abandonment of his father, the maltreatment of his mother and the hostility of strangers in society. Rain loses the control of her body, and she is forced to be a child prostitute by her biological mother and forced to be adopted by his adoptive parents. Booker was alienated by his family members and friends after his brother died of sexual abuse. They are stuck in the physical predicament of skin color, of physical abuse, of violence.

Chapter Two probes into the representation and the root of psychological predicaments of the three characters in *God Help the Child*. They can be analyzed with the help of trauma theory. They suffer from traumatic events in both childhood and adulthood. Bride sustains the emotional neglect from her mother, and is abandoned by his boyfriend without any reason. As the witness of traumatic event, Booker suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Rain not only needs to bear the bitterness of being a tool of making money for her mother, but also needs to sustain the isolation with no one to talk to. Due to the stimulation of the long-term influence of traumatic events and alienated relationships, the three characters finally bounce back, and commence the journey of salvation.

Chapter Three analyzes the attempts and the final salvation of these three characters. At first, they tend to escape from their original families and gain comforts from transitional objects. Such attempts only alleviate their painful feelings in physical predicaments.

Eventually, they get out of physical and psychological predicaments by establishing the sense of safety, remembering and mourning for the past traumatic experience and reconnect with the ordinary life. With the establishment of safety, the three gradually restore the control of their body and soul; moreover, they encounter beloved lover, genuine friend and also try to understand their relatives. Through the remembrance and mourning, they make peace with trauma and tolerate the traumatic past. By reconnecting with ordinary life they take pleasure in their lives and engage fully in relationships with others.

Based on the analysis above, the Conclusion points out that the salvation of the three characters serves as a caution and an encouragement to children who might have been suffering physical and psychological predicaments. It symbolizes Morrison's prospect for the future of children. With the assistance of Winnicott's concept of transitional object and Herman's trauma recovery theory, this thesis intends to contribute a new perspective on Morrison's works, and it also holds certain practical value, which is to remind children who are involved in predicaments that the only way to achieve salvation is to confront the predicaments bravely with proper methods.

Key words: Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child*, trauma recovery, predicament

摘要

托尼·莫里森（1931-）是第一位被授予诺贝尔文学奖的美国黑人女性作家。她众多杰出的文学作品以独特的叙事手法和精炼的文字，体现了她对黑人乃至全人类的生存状态和精神状态的深刻关怀。她最新的作品《天佑孩童》（2015）就是其中具有代表性的一部。在这部小说中，莫里森的笔触不再像以前那样悲伤绝望，她携带着希望，生动地描绘了一群倍受创伤折磨的孩童如何在危机四伏的现代社会中走出他们的身体困境和精神困境。

莫里森在中国读者和学者中的影响力毋庸置疑，但读者和学者们的注意力大都集中在莫里森的早期作品，如《最蓝的眼睛》（1970）、《所罗门之子》（1987）、《宠儿》（1987），对其它的作品如《天佑孩童》则关注度不够。迄今为止，《天佑孩童》还未有中文译本，关于这部作品的学术论文更屈指可数。通过分析小说中人物的身体困境和精神困境，以及他们走出困境的方法，本论文旨在填补对这部小说的研究空缺，同时推动国内对儿童创伤性成长的研究。

论文主要关注小说中的三个人物，分别是愈挫愈勇的黑人女孩布莱德，她颓废的男朋友布克及她真诚的朋友瑞恩。小说中的这三个人物，有着相似的人生轨迹。他们在困境中成长，却不囿于困境；他们积极地消解困境，以获得救赎。借助唐纳德·温尼科特的过渡客体理论，以及朱迪斯·路易斯·赫尔曼的创伤复原理论中的一些概念，本文尝试分析三个人物的身体和精神困境，他们为救赎身体和精神困境做出的尝试，以及最终获得救赎的途径。除引言和结论外，论文共由三章组成。

引言部分除对作者莫里森的生平做简要的介绍之外，也简略地介绍了小说的主要情节，然后详细地分析了这部小说的国内外研究现状，论文的理论框架，以及借助温尼科特的过渡客体理论和赫尔曼的创伤复原理论研究这部小说的意义。

第一章详细分析三个人物的身体困境。他们的身体在破碎的家庭和暴戾的社会遭受了多重伤害。布莱德无辜地背负着深肤色的创伤，经历了父亲的遗弃，母亲的虐待和社会中陌生人的侮辱、蔑视。瑞恩深陷于身体困境，她被亲生母亲逼迫做雏妓，被陌生夫妇强行收养，她失去了对自己身体的控制权。布克在经历他的哥哥被性侵谋杀的创伤事件后，在家庭生活和社会生活中都被异化。他们处于肤色之困、身体之困和

暴力之困，在冷漠的家庭和暴力横行的社会中成长，他们的躯体备受折磨。

第二章主要探索人物的精神困境以及困境的根源。他们的精神世界无论在童年时期还是在成人期间都充斥着多重创伤。布莱德遭受母亲的情感忽视，成年后被男友随意地抛弃。布克作为创伤事件的见证者，罹患创伤后应激障碍症，而他的家人和朋友未曾伸出援手。瑞恩不仅承受着被妈妈当做赚钱工具的痛苦，还得忍受她无人可倾诉的孤独处境。他们的童年创伤还未得到治愈，新的创伤就已来临。他们被亲人、朋友孤立，也被内心的自我孤立。在痛苦的创伤经历和异化的人际关系影响下，三个人物终于触底反弹，踏上了救赎之路。

第三章主要探索人物如何尝试获得救赎和如何赢得最终的救赎。他们三人做出的尝试是相似的，首先他们都选择在地域上远离家庭，以获得身体的解放，这样的行为暂时缓解了他们的痛苦。其次，他们都携带着过渡客体，以获得精神上的些微慰藉。最后，这三个人物通过建立安全感，回顾和哀悼，以及重建与日常生活的联系逐渐摆脱了精神困境。通过建立安全感，他们不再藏身于自己的创伤，而是逐渐与他人建立起可沟通的、可信赖的良好关系。通过回顾和哀悼，他们将创伤经历和盘托出，与创伤和解。通过重建与日常生活的联系，他们不再困于过往，而是拥抱真正意义上的新生活。

基于以上分析，结论部分指出，三个人物获得的救赎是对很多身陷身体困境和精神困境的儿童们的慰勉，体现了莫里森对现代儿童生存状态和精神状态的深挚关怀以及她对儿童能拥有一个美好未来的期盼。结合温尼科特的过渡客体理论以及赫尔曼的创伤复原理论，本论文试图为莫里森小说的研究增添新内容，提供新视角，同时具有一定现实意义，即启迪深陷身体困境和精神困境中的人，获得救赎的唯一方式是直面困境，积极行动。

关键词：托尼·莫里森；《天佑孩童》；创伤复原；困境

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Introduction

0.1 Toni Morrison and *God Help the Child*

As the first black woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, Toni Morrison(1932-) is now acclaimed as one of the most important and innovative contemporary novelists in the world. Her Nobel Prize citation reads: Toni Morrison, “who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality.” So far, she has published eleven novels which bring her numerous awards. Her latest novel *God Help the Child* (2015) can be regarded as completely new and creative, which differs from her previous novels. *God Help the Child* represents a departure from Morrison’s clipped titling operation, from the gloomy atmosphere in her other works, from the tragic ending. In this novel, by setting the background of the story in present-day America, Morrison presents a relatively bright and hopeful future, and provides possible ways for the physical and psychological recovery of children who suffered from multi-trauma.

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford, in Lorain, Ohio on February 18th, 1931. She is the second oldest of four children in a black working-class family. Her parents George and Ramah Wofford moved to Ohio in early 1900s to escape southern racism and to look for a better way of life. Although life was not easy for a black family, Morrison’s family was not bleak. Her family was filled with music, reading and storytelling which lay a solid foundation for Morrison’s writing career. Morrison’s mother Ramah Wofford was in the church choir, and she was always singing jazz, blues, and gospel music around the house. Morrison’s grandfather played the violin which supported this family with his melody. With the nourishment of music from childhood, it is easy to understand the musicality which

Morrison usually employs in her works.

Reading also laid a foundation for Morrison's writing career. Ramah Wofford belonged to a book club, and she taught Morrison that books were to be treasured. Thus Morrison had the chance to read widely at an early age. Later she was the only child who could already read at the beginning of the school year. When Morrison attended Lorain High School, she started to read all the excellent Russian and French novels as well as novels by English writer Jane Austen and American novelists Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather and William Faulkner (Kramer 13). Although these books are not that easy for an African-American teenager to comprehend, Morrison still loved them because they were so well written.

African-American culture that Morrison learned from her grandparents and parents is an important form of education for her. They taught her about African-American folklore, myths, signs and visitations which provide her valuable resources for writing. Morrison remembered that "My father's were the best, the scariest. We were always begging him to repeat the stories that terrified us most" (Dowling 42). Fortunately, Morrison had such kind of nice and close family which provided her various sources to receive a relatively good education.

With growing interest in literature, in 1949 Morrison started her study at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and chose English as her major. She became the first woman in her family to go to college. During her college years, Morrison did enjoy the activity in the theater group called Howard University Players. Four years later she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a minor in the classics. In 1955, she continued her study to earn a Master of Arts from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Her Master's thesis was "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated". After graduation, she spent a year and a half at Texas Southern University in Houston as an English teacher, and returned to Howard University to teach English in 1957. The next year she

married Harold Morrison, an architect from Jamaica. This marriage did not last long. They later got a divorce. Toni Morrison remained with a small son, a baby on the way, and no job.

Bad days are finally gone when Morrison grasped the opportunity to be an editor in *The New York Review of Books*. In 1965, she and her sons moved to Syracuse where she began to take writing seriously. Morrison said, “I had two small children in a strange place and I was very lonely, writing was something for me to do in the evenings, after the children were asleep.” (Dowling 48) She remembered the story about the African-American girl who longed for blue eyes, then began expanding it into a novel. In 1970, Morrison published her first novel *The Bluest Eye*. In 1975, her second novel *Sula* was nominated for the National Book Award. Her third novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), brought her national attention and won the National Book Critics Circle Award. *Beloved* was released in 1987. This novel became a critical success and won Morrison three important awards including the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, the American Book Award (1988) and an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award (1988). In 1993, Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature which is tiptop glory for a writer. From then on, numerous awards were brought to Morrison. However, she was not overwhelmed by these honors, she still insisted on writing.

Due to the influence of black family and social experience as a black woman in American society, Morrison usually explores themes such as the history, the fate and the spiritual world of black people. She especially tends to put her emphasis on the portrait of black female characters. As always, in *God Help the Child*, Morrison chooses a black lady as her protagonist to reveal the black family's trauma and spiritual predicament, but Morrison pays close attention to white children's predicament as well. She still uses the technique of tracing the growth of the children to develop the plot. However, unlike the gloomy atmosphere in her other works, in this novel Morrison not only depicts characters' trauma and predicament, but also proposes possible ways for their self-salvation. Although not all the

characters achieve salvation, the attention that Morrison puts on children's growth is everlasting. In this sense, *God Help the Child* is a typical representative of Morrison's deep concern for children. Like most of Morrison's works, this novel also deals with themes such as racial discrimination, intergenerational relationship, and violence. However, unlike the tragic and gloomy narrative in her previous works for instance *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*, *God Help the Child* presents a relatively brighter picture by which Morrison's "loving attention to textures and sounds of words" (Walker 21) is revealed.

Released in 2015 by Alfred A. Knopf, Morrison's 11th novel, *God Help the Child* immediately became a hit and aroused the attention of many scholars. It is highly praised by *Library Journal* "In her latest book, Nobel laureate Morrison shows us how we hold onto our pain and let it define us, pulling back on her often liquidly lyric style to offer powerful portraits in lean prose" (Hoffert 94).

God Help the Child is Toni Morrison's first novel which is set in the present. This novel tells stories about how some children who suffer from trauma achieve the physical and spiritual salvation in the violent modern American society. The protagonist, Bride, with blue-black skin is a beautiful young lady. She is neglected and abused by her light skinned parents who are shamed of her. Her childhood is filled with such kind of neglect and violence. Therefore, when she grows up, she chooses to work in New York which is far away from the city where her mother lives. However, Bride's boyfriend Booker breaks up with her because she plans to visit Sofia, the criminal of child abuse. Bride is totally shocked because her boyfriend just dumped her like the trash. Later, having dealt with the complex matters of Sofia, Bride starts out the journey to find Booker and herself. On the way to the town where Booker possibly resides, a terrible traffic accident occurs to Bride. She is saved by a white girl named Rain and Rain's adoptive father. In Bride's recovery process at Rain's home, they two develop a firm friendship. Bride describes their relationship in this way, "Listening to this

tough little girl who wasted no time on self-pity, she felt a companionship that was surprisingly free of envy. Like the closeness of schoolgirls” (Morrison 104)¹.

Bride, Booker, and Rain get through similar life experience which mainly consists of three processes. At first, they involve themselves in their physical and psychological predicament by traumatic events in the childhood and adulthood, and then they try to escape from the serious situation, but it does not help and even worsens their predicaments. Finally through their positive actions, they achieve their salvation. In this novel, Morrison reveals many social problems such as violence, child abuse, and race discrimination which make children live in a helpless and dangerous society; moreover she puts forward many possible solutions by the remedial function of transitional object, the construction of safety, remembering and mourning, recollection with ordinary life. Morrison’s humanistic concern on children and her hopeful prospect for the future in this novel make it worthy of intensive study.

0.2 Literature Review

As a Nobel Prize winner and a prolific black female writer, Toni Morrison’s works have attracted the attention of numerous scholars at home and abroad. In 1975, five years after the publication of *The Bluest Eye* and almost two years after the publication of *Sula*, the first important academic article on Morrison was published by Joan Bischoff, entitled “The Novels of Toni Morrison: studies in thwarted sensitivity”, which analyzes the themes of *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. Although there has been few critical and academic articles based on her first two works, since the publication of *Song of Solomon* in 1977, criticism of her works has witnessed a constant growth. There are several monographs concerning Toni Morrison’s works such as *New Dimensions of Spiritually: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the*

¹ Subsequent quotations from the same book (*God Help the Child*, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 2015) will only be noted with page number.

Novels of Toni Morrison (1987) by Kala Holloway and Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, *The Voice of Toni Morrison* (1991) by Barbara Hill Rigney, *The Dilemma of "Double-Consciousness": Toni Morrison's Novels* (1993) by Denise Heinze, *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels* (1995) by Philip Page, *The Identifying fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* (2000) by John N. Duvall, and *Narrative Conventions and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2009) by Jennifer Lee Jordan Heinert, and countless others.

To conclude, since 1990s, the researches which focus on Morrison's works have reached to the prosperity and present various perspectives and methods, which mean that criticism on Morrison's works in the literary circle has stepped into a brand new era. In addition to the perspective of feminism, black folklore and comparison which were the traditional research angles, perspectives of narratology, psychoanalysis, post modernism and post colonialism emerge at this period.

The variety and the amount of academic works prove that Morrison's work are worth further reading and analyzing. Most of her novels are analyzed with perspectives mentioned above. But her latest works such as *God Help the Child* have not received enough academic attention yet. There is still considerable room for further interpretations of Morrison's latest works.

Trauma theory is developed in the 1990s in America, and it probes into the trauma culture and the ethical connotation. This theory is widely applied to war novels, Jewish literature, and ethnic literature. The publication of J. Brooks Bouson's *Quiet as It's Kept: Shame, Trauma and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2000) symbolizes the beginning of applying trauma theory into Morrison's works. This monograph especially emphasizes the types and reasons of the sense of shame which belong to African-Americans, but stresses less on the trauma theory. Another monograph which applies trauma theory is Evelyn Jaffe

Schreiber's *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2010). Schreiber's monograph is a relatively comprehensive, concrete and important research of Toni Morrison's novels, which combines trauma theory and the text closely, and reveals the remedial function of home for the black's trauma. However, Schreiber mainly explores the trauma from the perspective of race and analyzes the negative influence of slavery history, which makes this research appear single-angled.

Apart from these two monographs, there are nine doctoral dissertations treating trauma in Morrison's *Beloved* as a research object to illustrate their thesis. For instance, Kathleen Laura MacArthur's "The Things We Carry: Trauma and the Aesthetic in the contemporary US Novels" (2005), Matthew L. Miller's "Literary Witnessing: Working Through Trauma in Toni Morrison, Nuruddin Farah, Wilson Harris, and Chang-Rae Lee" (2005), and other four dissertations which analyze *Beloved* from the perspective of post modernism, post colonialism, African literature and other American literary works in the 20th century. All these dissertations mentioned above do not focus on the varieties of trauma in Morrison's novels, but just explore the trauma in *Beloved* from the comparative perspective. There are three more doctoral dissertations concerning Morrison's *Paradise*, *Sula*, *A Mercy*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Bluest Eye*. However, once again these three dissertations deal with Morrison's works as a comparative object to analyze cultural trauma. Although the doctoral dissertations overseas enrich the trauma study of Morrison's novels, the research which employs comparative method can not illustrate the general characteristics of trauma in her works. Thus, there is still room for the followers to analyze Morrison's works from the perspective of trauma.

God Help the Child has won the attention of readers and critics abroad since its publication in 2015. It is easy to find various book reviews and introductory articles on the internet in influential social medias. Though these articles present mixed views toward *God Help the Child*, generally speaking, most of the views are positive. For instance, Michiko

Kakutani praises the book as “Powerful. . . . A tale that is as forceful as it is affecting, as fierce as it is resonant” (Kakutani 4) in *The New York Times*, a reviewer from *The Atlantic* states that “A tragicomic jazz opera played out in four parts...Morrison makes art from the cadences of human heartbreak” (Muyumba 3) and *The Guardian* states that “Magnificent...Morrison remains an incredibly powerful writer who commands attention no matter the story she is telling” (Gay 7). Except for this positive attitude, Ron Charles writing for *The Washington Post* compared the novel unfavorably to Morrison’s debut novel *The Bluest Eye* criticizing the characters in her latest work as people with “no interior life”². Similarly the review for *The Independent* complained that the characters are “too didactic on the page: prototypes for an idea rather than real people.” To conclude, various perspectives are involved to explore different aspects of this novel, such as, the theme, the textual features and its style.

Apart from book reviews, there are several interviews and articles concerning this novel, such as “The New Black” published in *Mother Jones*. In this interview Morrison shared her views on fashion, magic realism and childhood trauma. There are some articles on journals, such as “The Deliberate Message of Toni Morrison” by Sam Sacks in *Wall Street Journal*, this article mainly focuses on motivation (psychology) and self-evidence (logic). *Toronto Star* published Leslie Scrivener’s “Misguide Motherhood” which analyzes the mother Sweetness’ hellish treatment to Bride. These interviews and articles are useful resources concerning the studies of the novel.

To sum up, even though *God Help the Child* attracts numerous attention abroad, to some degree the researches on it lack authority and depth. Compared with the criticism in the West, researches on Morrison at home are relatively weaker. As is shown from the statistics on

² From: https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/toni-morrisons-familiar-flawed-god-help-the-child/2015/04/14/6cde0cfe-dec6-11e4-a500-1c5bb1d8ff6a_story.html?utm_term=.8f82b381e3f6[2017.01.02]

China National Knowledge Infrastructure, before 1993, there was a void in the research on Morrison. Not until 1993 when Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize, were researches on her carried out in high gear. So far, there have been 25 doctoral dissertations, 748 master dissertations and 801 academic articles taking Morrison's works as research objects. In the year of 1999, Wang Shouren and Wu Xinyun's *Gender, Race, Culture: Toni Morrison and African-American literature in 20th Century* was published, and it is the first monograph on Morrison in China. From then on, 20 monographs have been published at home. For instance, Zhu Rongjie's *Pain and Healing: A Study of Maternal Love in Toni Morrison's Fiction from a Cultural Perspective* (2004), Jiao Xiaoting's *Dream of Dreams, Quilting Aesthetics and Toni Morrison's Artistic Appeal* (2008), and Hu Ni's *A Study of Spatial Narrative in Toni Morrison's fiction* (2010), and so on.

Since the publication of English version of *God Help the Child*, the book immediately gained popularity among Chinese scholars. Casual book reviews were scattered on the Internet and newspapers, but academic research of this novel is still at the starting point. There are few articles concerning on this novel in China, let alone monographs. The novel merely appears in some introductory articles or being cited as examples of the Nobel Prize winner's latest work in some articles. Till now, there is only one selected Chinese translation of *God Help the Child* in *YANHE* (2015), but no Chinese version of *God Help the Child* published in China.

There are only three academic articles concerning this novel in CNKI. Wang Shouren and Wu Xinyun's "Childhood Trauma, Freedom and Peace of Mind in *God Help the Child*" (2016), published in *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, can be regarded as the first academic article in which they probe into the issue of childhood trauma by investigating the impact of dark skin on family relationships and personal life, examining sexual violence against children of different ethnic backgrounds, and gauging the remedial function of utterance that

facilitates the attainment of freedom and peace of mind.

Yang Yan's "An Analysis of the Mother and Daughter Relationship in Morrison's *God Help the Child* from the perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism", published in *Journal of Kaifeng Institute of Education* and Hao Suling's "Trauma, Child and Future—A Brief Introduction of Morrison's *God Help the Child*", published in *New Perspective on World Literature* are two articles exploring the novel's themes.

The articles mentioned above mainly introduce the novel or just pay some attention to children's trauma, the family relationship, and Morrison's hopeful attitude in the novel. The causes of trauma and remedial methods are rarely mentioned. There is still room for a variety of interpretations of Toni Morrison and *God Help the Child*. With the help of trauma theory, Donald Woods Winnicott's concept of transitional object and Herman Judith's trauma recovery theory, this thesis tries to make a detailed analysis of the novel for the purposes of filling in the gap and promoting the popularity and studies of Morrison's works at home.

0.3 Theoretical Framework

Trauma theory, Winnicott's concept of transitional object and Herman Judith's trauma recovery theory both focus on the physical and psychological state of human beings, which makes it possible to combine them together in analyzing *God Help the Child*.

The word "trauma" firstly appeared as a medical term which means an injury. With the development of society and culture, it now gains various connotations. For example, it means a mental condition caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time. The development of trauma theory can be divided into four phases, the Freudian psychological trauma theory, the Post-Freudian psychological trauma theory, race/gender trauma theory and trauma culture theory (Tao Jiajun 160). The origin of trauma theory can be traced back to 1880s, when French psychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), Pierre Janet

(1895-1947) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) began to try to observe, classify, analyze and cure the hysteria of women. In the following years, psychiatrists began to pay attention to war trauma which belonged to the soldiers and veterans who were involved in the First World War and the Second World War. Then in 1970s, American government and the public started to face with the moral bankruptcy and war trauma due to the anti-Vietnam-war protests. The feminist movement in the 1960s made the American public begin to notice the trauma of abused children and battered women. When “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” was collected as a term in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1980) published by the American Psychiatric Association, it is a sign of the beginning of contemporary trauma study which focuses on the cultural and social factors that may lead to traumatic sufferings. Jeffrey C. Alexander (1947-), Cathy Caruth (1955-) and Judith Lewis Herman (1970-) are the representatives of contemporary trauma study. For the next decades, trauma study has developed gradually under many scholars’ everlasting efforts. Trauma has become one of the most popular paradigms in western political discourse. It was widely applied in the fields of sociology, history, and literature, in which this theory is frequently used to analysis the physical and spiritual predicament of characters.

Some of Donald Woods Winnicott’s concepts are also applied to the analysis *God Help the Child*. Donald Woods Winnicott (1896-1971) is an important English psychoanalyst and paediatrician who explored child development in the fields of object relations theory. He developed several concepts and theories that helped shape the way in which psychoanalysis is practiced today. His object relations theories focus on child psychoanalysis whose kernel is the mother-infant relationship. His main theories include good-enough mother and facilitating environment, transitional objects and transitional phenomena, true self and false self. Winnicott has published several essays and books interpreting his ideas about the importance of environment. For instance, in *Transitional object and transitional phenomena in playing*

and reality (1971), he pointed out that transitional object plays an important role in the independence of child.

Judith Lewis Herman (1942-) is a professor of clinical psychiatry in Medical School at Harvard University and is well known for her unique contributions to the understanding of trauma and its victims. In her second book *Trauma and Recovery: the aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror* (1997), Herman elaborated the influential opinions as followings, and she proposed a three-stage method of trauma treatment and recovery. “Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life” (Herman 110). According to Herman, the first stage encompassed regaining a sense of safety, whether through various interpersonal relationships, medication, relaxation exercises or a combination of all three. The second phase included active actions upon the trauma, fostered by that secure base, and applying various of psychological techniques. The final stage was represented by an advance to a new post-traumatic life, possibly broadened by the experience of surviving the trauma and all it involved (Marzillier 256).

The physical and psychological predicament, the attempts on salvation and the final salvation in *God Help the Child* can be thoroughly analyzed with the help of trauma theory, Winnicott’s concept of transitional object and Herman’s trauma recovery theory. The three characters’ physical psychological predicament can be interpreted with the help of trauma theory. Winnicott’s concept of transitional object provides a possible way to analyze characters’ attempts on salvation. Then in light of Herman’s trauma recovery theory, it is possible to analyze how the three characters successfully get rid of their predicaments and win salvation.

0.4 Significance of the Study

Toni Morrison is one of the most important contemporary female writers who has won numerous awards and has attracted the attention of many scholars. However, scholars at home and abroad mainly focus on her previous novels like *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and *The Bluest Eye*. Little attention is paid on her latest works. *God Help the Child* which receives mixed reviews does not gain enough academic attention in China. Through the data in CNKI, only three articles devoted to this novel. Thus, by analyzing this novel, this thesis tries to promote the study of Morrison's latest works at home.

This thesis attempts to apply trauma theory, Winnicott's concepts of transitional object and Herman's trauma recovery theory into the analysis to explore the physical and psychological predicaments, the process and ways of the cure of trauma in *God Help the Child*. The four main characters Bride, Booker, Rain and Sofia have the similar trauma experience and recovery, so they can be analyzed together. Firstly, they are all hurt by their family members when they were little children, then they try to escape from their home, which only makes their body far from the torture but can not achieve the psychological salvation. At last, with the help of true and frank communication they begin their new life through inner heart. Trauma theory can help to explain their physical and mental predicament. Winnicott's concepts are used to analyze characters' immature attempts on salvation. Finally, with the help of the remedial function of utterance and the trauma recovery theory, the characters' ultimate salvation can be illustrated in a better way. All in all, through the combination of these theories, this dissertation may provide a understanding of Morrison's deep concern on children in this novel and may offer possible ways for the recovery of trauma.

This thesis also provides a hopeful prospect for children who have traumatic experience. By taking characters in *God Help the Child* as an example, this thesis analyzes the serious

living situation which modern children are faced with and the right methods to cure trauma. Confronted with both physical and mental predicament, the society should reflect on whether the social protection for children is safe enough; parents should reflect on whether they give enough love and patience to their children; children should make peace with the trauma and try to get out of the predicaments. Only in this way can trauma be healed successfully. In this regard, the application of these theories can help children who lived in violent and modern world to face with trauma bravely.

Chapter One Physical Predicaments in *God Help the Child*

Charles Ruas once had a conversation with Toni Morrison before she had won the Nobel Prize, and in the interview he discussed with Morrison about child abuse as a consistent theme in Morrison's novels. Morrison explained this phenomenon with agreement, and she felt that the living condition for children nowadays was really harsh and dangerous. No one loves children, especially black children (Ruas 56). Children in *God Help the Child* are the typical examples of painful children who suffer from child maltreatment in family and society. They live in unsafe home and violent society, enduring the traumatic events alone without any help of others. To some degree, Bride, Booker, and Rain can be regarded as representatives of modern children who lives in the physical and psychological predicament.

One prominent theme of *God Help the Child* is child maltreatment. Children in this novel are the victims of child abuse no matter they are white or black children, no matter their families are poor or wealthy. Though the definitions of child maltreatment vary among countries, professionals and across time, "Child maltreatment includes both acts of commission and acts of omission on the part of parents or caregivers that cause actual or threatened harm to a child" (McCoy and Keen 3). According to the World Health Organization, there are four types of child maltreatment which are physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological abuse and neglect. Due to the different focalization of child maltreatment, chapter one will mainly discuss the physical predicament caused by physical abuse and sexual abuse.

According to Tao Jiajun, "trauma is the product of the violence of modernity and characterized by three essential features of intrusion, belatedness and compulsive repetition, is the symptom of the violent essence of modern civilization" (Tao Jiajun 117). In this definition,

Tao Jiajun points out the essence and characteristics of trauma.

When people have experienced, or witnessed a traumatic event, they may go through the physical damage or mental illness. There is no definite definitions of physical predicament, this thesis tries to give an explanation of physical predicament on the level of textual meaning of this novel. In this thesis, physical predicament refers to the situation that children's body is being abused in broken family and violent society.

1.1 Physical Abuse in Broken Family

In this novel, Bride, Booker and Rain all live in unhappy and broken families. Bride is abandoned by her father and ignored by her mother. Booker feels alienated from his family since his brother's death. Rain is forced to become a child prostitute by her natural mother. Generally speaking, families should provide relatively safe environment for children, so that they can form a relatively stable and consistent understanding of themselves and interpersonal relationships. However, in *God Help the Child* most characters are not only severely hurt by several traumatic experiences at home, but also suffer from physical abuse in their family. Physical abuse does not usually occur in isolation, but as part of a series of behaviors including “authoritarian control, anxiety-provoking behavior, and a lack of parental warmth”³.

For Bride, her abnormal mother-daughter relationship with Sweetness is the main source leading to her trauma. She grew up in a single-parent family because her father Louis abandoned her due to her dark blue skin when she was born. Bride's mother Sweetness remembered that “We had three good years together but when she was born he blamed me and treated Lula Ann like she was a stranger—more than that, an enemy” (2). Generally speaking, losing her father's love does not mean that Bride can not enjoy her mother's love. However, Sweetness raises Bride in an extremely “strict” way, which in fact can be

³ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/law/crime-and-law-enforcement/corporal-punishment#3045300461>
[2017.02.06]

categorized to child abuse. “Very careful in how I raised her. I had to be strict, very strict. Lula Ann needed to learn how to behave, how to keep her head down and not to make trouble” (3). Due to the negative effects of strict education, Bride is an obedient daughter who suffers traumatic experiences and does not dare to challenge her mother’s authority in most cases. Thus beaten by Mrs. Huxley, Bride recalled that “Maybe I’m just mad more at myself than at Mrs. Huxley. I reverted to the Lula Ann who never fought back. Ever. I just lay there while she beat the shit out of me” (32), from which the negative effects of Bride mother’s so-called strict education in Bride’s younger years is revealed. From Sweetness’ confession and Bride’s memory, it is obvious that Bride received much physical punishment when she was a child. Sweetness later confesses that “I wasn’t a bad mother, you have to know that, but I may have done some hurtful things to my only child because I had to protect her. Had to. All because of skin privileges” (43). However, Sweetness can not take skin privileges as a pretext then escape from her irresponsibility in Bride’s growth.

Another important traumatic event at home which extremely influences Bride is her mother’s hatred to her and ignorance of her needs of touch. Sweetness confesses that she was embarrassed when Bride’s skin gradually became blue-black, then she went crazy for a minute, and even tried to suffocate Bride by holding a blanket over her face. Sweetness hates her daughter’s skin color, thus she tries not to touch Bride as far as possible. For instance, Sweetness said that “All I know is that for me, nursing her was like having a pickaninny sucking my teat. I went to bottle-feeding soon as I got home” (2). From the infant period to youth, Bride never enjoys her mother’s tender touch.

Sweetness’ unwillingness of touching Bride can be traced back to Sweetness’ transgenerational phantom, a term in trauma theory, which refers to a type of trauma that haunts the next generation and forces the next generation’s ego to split into two parts. One part exists in the real world, while the other part exists in a hidden world. Transgenerational

trauma appears in the next generation's spiritual space and may lead to the disorder and loss of self-identity (Shi Qijia 56). Sweetness suffers skin discrimination from her parents, because her grandmother has passed and cut off all the touches with her mother. It is reasonable for readers to guess what kind of family Sweetness lives in that foster her cruel characteristics. Thus, as a victim of transgenerational trauma, Sweetness brings her anxiety of skin color to Bride and forces Bride to behave according to her requirements. Such behavior of having no physical contact behavior is not good for Bride's growth, because mother's care is extremely important to child. In want of mother's touch, Bride even makes mistakes deliberately and prays that Sweetness would slap her face or spank her (Morrison 70). For Bride, Sweetness' ignorance of her wants of physical touch is an traumatic event which leads Bride to perjure herself and keep the inner-heart inferiority in the future.

Rain is a little white girl who helps Bride out of a heavy traffic accident which occurs to Bride when she sets foot on the journey of finding Booker. At first, Bride regards Rain as a beloved and happy girl who can have equally easy conversation with her parents. However, with the development of the friendship between the two girls, Bride begins to understand Rain's miserable experience at her original home. Traumatized by her mother's brutal violence, Rain is forced to be a child prostitute at home under the control of her mom. "Sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act aimed toward the physical gratification or the financial profit of the person committing the act" (Theoklitou, Kabitsis and Kabitis 64). Rain's mother is so evil that she destroyed Rain's physical and psychological health, so abominable that Rain wants to "chop her head off" (102). Rain's body is extremely maltreated during her childhood. Rain is badly hurt by an old guy, one of her mother's client, she bleeds but her mother shows no care. Another time when she bites her mother's client, she is thrown out of home by her mother. In the mind of Rain's mother, her daughter's body health can not compared with the money she earned. As a consequence, Rain lives her life

alone in the street, and shows the symptom of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), that is she avoids and fears of intimacy.

From above description, it is easy to find out that child abuse at home is the main factor which leads children's physical predicament. Actually, except for Bride and Rain, other characters also endure physical predicament at home. For example, Brooklyn is violated by her uncle's indecent act like putting his fingers between her legs, however her alcoholic mother did not wake from her drunken nap to tend her until she hid or ran or screamed with a fake stomachache. (Morrison 55) Sofia also encounters physical predicament at home, her mother often punishes her for standing in the corner with blue-and-white wallpaper due to the mistakes that every child may make. As a result, Sofia could not wait to get out her mother's house and marry the first man who asked. Instead of getting new warm home, the two years with her husband just the same with her mother, "obedience, silence, a bigger blue-and-white corner" (76). Queen's daughter Hannah complains to Queen that her father fondles her, but "Queen refused to believe it" (170).

For children, home should be the wonderful paradise for their growth and the safest place in the world. However, in this novel, represented by Bride, Rain, Sofia and Hannah, almost all the children characters live under violence in broken families, and are tortured by their family members, which make them grow up with bitterness. A prominent phenomenon of broken families in this novel is the absence of children characters' fathers, Bride's father abandons her and her mother, Rain does not know who is her father, Sofia's father exists as nobody at her home, Hannah has lots of stepfathers. These children grow up without the love of their fathers but with the strict requirements, violence or neglect of their mothers. Without the protection of family members, their journey to society is full of wretchedness.

1.2 Child Sexual Abuse in Society

Apart from the physical abuse at home, the three characters also suffer cruel treatments and encounter traumatic events in the hard and unfriendly society. They try their best to adjust themselves to different kinds of predicaments, but their parents fail to protect them from the cruel society. Amy Frykholm expressed her opinion towards child sexual abuse in *God Help the Child*, she wrote in this way “Child sexual abuse touches every person of every color in this novel and is perhaps its most important marker for the utter failure of adults to feel the pain of children” (Frykholm 22). Both their and their parents’ efforts tend to be in vain well because it seems that the violence pervades all around the society.

As a black girl, Bride’s deep skin color is the main cause of her physical predicament and she suffers racial traumatic experience through her life. Except for her parents’ detestation for her blue-black skin, Bride bears many hostile insults in society due to her skin. At the beginning of her life, Bride suffers racial discrimination, for instance, when Sweetness pushes Bride in the baby carriage and takes her outside, friends and strangers would lean down and peek in to say something nice and then give a start or jump back before frowning. Such kind of reaction hurts Sweetness’ dignity, therefore she does not want to admit that she is Bride’s mother and does not want to take Bride outside to have a walk anymore. Thus, Bride’s body is stocked by people’s judgments. For instance, Bride’s ex-boyfriends are typecast, they treat Bride as “a shiny quiet testimony to their prowess” (37). One date in particular, a medical student takes Bride to his parents’ house up north in order to terrorize his family by such a racist joke. The boy’s parents pretend to be nice and charm, however faked. Bride clearly understand that this boy just utilizes her skin as a threat to the old white couple. Growing up with so many hostile attitudes towards her skin, Bride tries to do all the things she can do to get rid of such racial discrimination at any risks, which lays the motivation for

Bride to give false testimony later.

Rain's physical predicament is the worst of the three characters. Expelled from her home by her mother, the poor little girl wanders around the streets and goes through a rather miserable street life in society. Without any protection and social care, she begins her bitter homeless adventure by her own. There is no harborage for Rain, she has to "find out where the public toilets were, to avoid children's service, police, to escape drunks, dope heads" (102). There is no place for Rain to sleep, to have food, to escape from her cruel mother. Rain deliberately makes no friend of any kind, because she thinks that anybody could turn her in and hurt her (Morrison 2015). It is so sad that there is no one or no institution in the whole society lends a helping hand. Rain's living condition and physical state get no better until Evelyn and Steve take her away. Even though the adoption is illegal, fortunately the new home is "the best place" (101) for Rain, besides there's no other place for her to go.

Booker's brother Adam involves in a gruesome murder by a despicable criminal and Adam's body is cruelly treated. After the long-time disappearance of Adam, the police finds out Adam's fragmentary dead body in the gutter. Without proper protection and alertness, Adam is entirely naïve and gullible. As a result, being seduced by the "nicest man in the world" (118), Adam bears sexual abuse and is murdered. Moreover, this nicest man in the world committed the sexually stimulated murder of six boys. "Experiencing or witnessing of a stressor event involving death, serious injury or such threat to the self or others in a situation in which the individual felt intense fear, horror, or powerlessness" (Fullerton, Ursano and Wang). For Booker, he witnesses the incomplete corpse of Adam, this is a serious threat to Booker that he feels intense horror and powerlessness.

Before imprisonment, Sofia is a teacher who has a quiet life. However, with Bride and other children's wrong testimony, she loses her freedom and stays in prison for fifteen years. Life in prison which called Decagon is hard for Sofia, because she is innocent but no one

believes her. Sentenced for child abuse, Sofia says that she is “at the bottom of the heap of murderers, arsonists, drug dealers, bomb-throwing revolutionaries and the mentally ill” (66). Sofia is “cursed and spit on, and the guards tosses her cell every now and then” (66). The fifteen years imprisonment is a great blow to Sofia because it almost ruins her life. When she is paroled, she is not allowed to be near children and lives her life under the watch of parole officer. The experience of being treat unjustly brings both physical and mental damage to Sofia.

Morrison employs the technique of irony like the verbal irony, the cosmic irony, and tragic irony in this novel to reveal her deep concern and worry for children’s physical predicament. For instance, both Bride and Sweetness are black females, while Sweetness behaves like the pot calling the kettle black by criticizing Bride for her dark skin; the murder who kills six children is called the nicest man in the world; the innocent Sofia is put behind the bars for fifteen years, etc. The most obvious verbal irony in this novel expresses Morrison’s understanding of the harsh environment in modern world from multiple perspective. Verbal irony refers to “a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed” (Abrams 270). “Hurting little children was their idea of the lowest of the low—which is a hoot since the drug dealers could care less about who they poison or how old they were and the arsonists didn’t separate the children from the families they burned. And bomb throwers are not selective or known for precision” (66). Here Morrison tries to satire the violent world, hurting little child certainly is a severe crime, but the other criminals like drug dealers, arsonists, and boob throwers hurt children too. The pervasive violent elements in the whole word contribute to the form of an unstable society.

Due to the physical predicaments at home and in society, the three characters suffer psychological predicaments for a rather long time. As a victim of racial trauma and child

neglect, Bride always feels unsafe in relationships with others and experiences all kinds of loss. Traumatized by the loss of beloved brother and the dreadful scene of Adam's remains, Booker always feels alienated from his family members and other friends in society. To Rain, the experience of being forced to be a child prostitute by her own mother casts gloomy shadows that are hard to shake off. As the bad influence of physical predicaments, the psychological predicaments of the three characters will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Two Psychological Predicaments in *God Help the Child*

In *God Help the Child*, it is impossible to find out one child who grows up in a facilitate environment and turns out to be an adult with healthy personality. Apart from the physical predicaments which have been analyzed in chapter one, Bride, Booker, Rain and Sofia also encounter seriously psychological predicaments. They go through traumatic events which are mainly caused by family members at home and other people in society. Bride bears the burden of her race and receives prejudice from her light-skin parents and unfriendly strangers. Booker carries the agony of his brother's death and endures the ignorance of his parents. Rain is forced to be a prostitute by her mother and has no chance to share her sorrows with others.

Generally speaking, childhood trauma can be divided into two categories, which are physical damage and mental damage. Since physical abuse which has been analyzed above can lead to both psychological and emotional problems, this section will try to explore the characters' psychological predicaments from the perspective of psychological abuse and emotional neglect with the help of trauma theory, especially childhood trauma theory. Childhood trauma refers to the physical and mental symptoms when a child is exposed to traumatic events. Here the exposure does not only mean that the child must experience the traumatic events himself, it also means that the child may hear or witness traumatic events. For children, the possible traumatic events include serious/long-term child abuse, ignorance, violence, all kinds of natural disasters, accident, serious illness, war, and the sudden death of close family members and friends. Traumatic events can result in children's anxiety and depression which may last for several days or months, and can also damage children's ability of study and communication at school.

2.1 Psychological Trauma in Childhood

In *God Help the Child*, the three characters not only experience traumatic events themselves but also witness the occurrence of traumatic events. The traumatic events are related with child neglect at home and deficiency of sincere communication. Bride lives with her mother who ignores her emotional needs of touching. Booker suffers from his brother's death and his family members' misunderstanding. Rain is forbidden to share her miserable experience with her new adoptive parents. They are hurt by some emotional neglect in childhood. Emotional neglect refers to the failure of giving emotional support such as encouragement and sense of security. Neglected children are at risk of developing lifelong social, emotional and health problems. Emotional neglect is failing to provide emotional support such as emotional security and encouragement. *God Help the Child* also explores the mother-child relationship especially, but the relationship is warped under the circumstance of violence around the world. The incorrect ways of showing mothers' love to children lead to the misunderstanding of children to their mothers' love.

For Bride, her relationship with her mother Sweetness, her skin-color and Sweetness' extremely strict ways of raising her are the sources resulting in her emotional trauma. From the day when Bride was born, Sweetness consistently ignores Bride's emotional needs of being tenderly treated by her mother. There is no doubt that mother's tender touch plays an important role in children's growth. However, Bride can not enjoy her mother's touch because her "blue-black" skin is the source for her light-color skinned parents' detestation. Bride does not feel her mother's love since she was born, because her skin is "Midnight black, Sudanese black" (1) according to Sweetness' description. Apart from the hatred of her mother, Bride is immediately abandoned by her father when he finds out that his daughter's skin color. Although Sweetness decides to bring up Bride alone, she pays little patience to Bride and will

never touch Bride as possible as she can. In want of mother's love so eagerly, Bride does everything she can do to win the heart of her mother. But she does not always do the right thing. In order to get prized by her mother, Bride even puts an innocent woman, Sofia behind the bars. She irritates Sweetness on purpose, because only in this way will Sweetness touch her by slapping her face. In order to feel Sweetness' touch, Bride even tries to make mistake deliberately and prays her mother will punish her. Bride confesses that "I always knew she didn't like touching me. I could tell. Distaste was all over her face when I was little and she had to bathe me... I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch" (31).

As a black woman and a mother of a black child, Sweetness even expresses her opinion that Bride's "color is a cross she will always carry" (7). When Bride goes to school, curses and nick-name calling shouted at her. For example, "Coon. Topsy. Clinkertop. Sambo. Ooga booga" (56). However, she can not fight back, because Sweetness cautions her that if she complains to the teacher, "she might get suspended or even expelled" (56). So Bride just let the name-calling, the good thing is she built up immunity so tough that not being a "nigger girl" was all she needed to win.

Sweetness' strict way of raising Bride is another form of mother's ignorance of child's emotional need. Strict education is necessary for children, but if the standard of strict education goes too far, strict education turns into the education which neglects children's emotion needs. Sweetness confides that she is not a bad mother, she may have done some hurtful things to her only child because she had to protect her. "All because of skin privileges" (43). For instance, when Bride is six years old, one day she looks down through the window of her house and suddenly finds out that Mr. Leigh, her landlord is molesting a little white boy. Then she tells Sweetness what she'd seen because she is scared by this dirty scene and feels sad for the crying boy. However, as a mother, as the only parent in Bride's

family, she does not try to comfort her child but becomes furious about Bride's spreading of the story. The only words she said to Bride are "Don't you say a word about it. Not to anybody, you hear me, Lula? Forget it. Not a single word" (54). On one hand, it is so pathetic that Sweetness does not give any concern to this little boy who is a victim. On the other hand, Bride is a little girl who is not able to forget this dirty event by herself quickly, thus she keeps this unforgettable scary scene which can not be shared with anybody in her memory in her later lives.

Due to the traumatic memories of keeping silent, Bride gradually loses the ability to have sincere conversations with her friends and her mother, instead, she often tells lies to conceal the real thoughts in her mind. Thus, when she breaks up with Booker, and Booker says that "you not the woman I want", Bride answers back with "Neither am I" (8). However Bride later confesses that she still does not know why she said that, because actually at the bottom of her heart she wants to be with Booker in the rest of her life. Bride just can not express her real wishes in a right and sincere way, from which the negative effects of her traumatic experiences in her childhood can be totally revealed.

Another traumatic event in childhood which deeply influences Bride is that she gives false testimony when she is eight years old. She confesses that she does all the giving false testimony stuff just because she wants her mother to hold her hand, to look at her with proud eyes, even to let her mother like her. The psychological mechanism behind Bride's wrong doings lies in that Bride compensates "for the failures of adult care and protection with the only means at her disposal" (Herman 70). Bride remembers that "As we walked down the courthouse steps she held my hand, my hand. She never did that before and it surprised me as much as it pleased me because I always knew she didn't like touching me" (31). Such wrong behavior helps Bride win Sweetness affection temporarily, however, Bride's false testimony makes Sofia, an innocent kindergarten teacher is accused of child abuse and stay in the prison

for fifteen years. The imprisonment takes all Sofia's life away and makes Bride feel regretful from the day when Sofia's sentence is carried. Thus, when Sofia is paroled, Bride goes to the Decagon to visit Sofia with three gifts as compensation and confesses her guilt. However, all of a sudden, Sofia gives Bride a good beating and throws all the gifts outside the door. As a result, once again, Bride suffers both physical and psychological predicaments. She says "I'll never forget it, and even if I tried to, the scars, let alone the shame, wouldn't let me" (29). From Bride's confession, it is easy to understand that the shame as a traumatic source will remain in Bride's memory.

According to the definition of Shi QiJia, experiencing the death of beloved ones or witnessing the traumatic events can lead to trauma(Shi QiJia, 10). For Booker, the death of Adam, his brother, is a traumatic event in his childhood which almost destroys Booker's life. Adam is two years older than Booker and his closest sibling. They two have a very close and sincere relationship since they go to school together everyday. "Adam was the brother he worshipped, two years older and sweet as cane" (115). It is Adam who accompanies him and cares him after Booker knows the death of his twin brother. "He was the one who knew what Booker was thinking, feeling, whose humor was both raucous and instructive but never cruel, the smartest one who loved each of his siblings but especially Booker" (116). Thus, when Adam abruptly dies because of sexually stimulated slaughter, Booker feels that he has no companion any more. What's more, Booker goes to a culvert with his father to identify Adam's remains which is "filthy, rat-gnawed, with a single open eye socket" (114). Booker experiences survivor's guilt for remaining alive while other people died. The death of Adam gives Booker a heavy blow, while seeing Adam's broken corpse worsen it.

After the funeral of Adam, Booker distances himself from the his parents and siblings because he holds the opinion that the family members pretend to forget Adam's death and insist that life should go on. While Booker can not understand that "How could they pretend it

was over? How could they forget and just go on? Who and where was the murderer?” (117). Fortunately, six years later, the murder is caught and the public demands justice. Generally speaking, the act of arresting of the murder can sugar the living and quiet the dead. However, all this can not partly ease the pain and temporarily heal the trauma in Booker’s heart. He is not satisfied with the result of the trial. Because Booker does not want to end with the murder’s death, but wants the man to live with endless pain and despair. Instead of the public clamor which means this tragedy appears in radios, in newspaper headlines and in neighborhood gossip, Booker wants the calamity to be private and “belonging to the two brothers” (120). Then, in order to have his special way of mourning Adam, Booker finally “had a small rose tattooed on his left shoulder” (120). But such resentment towards his close family members, such dissatisfaction, and such tattoo actually worsen his psychological situation and make him feel alienated from others.

Different from Bride and Booker, Rain’s psychological trauma is much more serious than they two. Rain has to go through the dreadful experience that she is forced into prostitution by her own mother “in her mother’s house” (she never regards her mother’s house as her home), and has to bear the sadness of being dislodged from her home. Knowing Rain’s miserable experience, Bride says that “Even Sweetness, who for years couldn’t bear to look at or touch her, never threw her out”(101). Thus, it is easy to understand Rain’s poor living conditions and the lack of spiritual guidance. “Former prostituted children often deal with psychological trauma, including depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) ”(Clark, Freeman Clark & Adamec 68). Rain shows the symptom of depression, because before she gets a little kitten, she wants to kill her original mother, kill Evelyn and Steve, even to kill everybody. These unspeakable harrowing memories lead Rain to seek violence as her outlet for her childhood trauma.

The characters are trapped in an abusive environment. They must find ways to “preserve

a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness” (Herman 70). For Bride, Booker and Rain, they experience the repeated trauma in childhood which “forms and deforms the personality” (Herman 70). Without healthy personalities, it is so hard for them to go through the adult lives which are beset with difficulties.

2.2 Psychological Trauma in Adulthood

Apart from the psychological trauma in childhood, Bride and Booker endure some traumatic experiences when they become adults. They try their best to get rid of the childhood trauma, however the PTSD is uncured and the tortures goes on. They try their best to overcome the bad influence of their childhood trauma, to keep themselves from traumatic events. However, adult life is not easy for them. Since Rain is a little girl in *God Help the Child*, she does not experience adult life, this section will skip the analysis of Rain’s psychological trauma in adulthood.

“Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community” (Herman 37). Both Bride and Booker are faced with difficulties of dealing with the relationship of family, of friendship, of love. They two truly love each other, but break up. They two lose the bondage of family and have no sincere friends. “Traumatic events shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others, violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis” (Herman 37).

For Bride, the breakup of the intimate relationship between her and Booker is a prominent traumatic event in her adulthood. The direct cause of their break-up is that Booker does not understand why Bride determines to help a child abuse criminal, Sofia Huxley. They

ends with Booker's words, "you not the woman I want"(9), then Bride scared, because Booker's words rattles her and she agrees with him. On the one hand, Booker is not one of the guys who Bride just fools around with, she loves Booker and wants to spend the rest of her life with him. At the bottom of Bride's heart, though they two had not mentioned marriage, but she really thinks she has found her guy. "You not the woman" is the last thing she expected to hear. On the other hand, Bride can not find her self-identity excepts of being a successful and hot black beauty. As a regional manager who controls a cosmetic line in a company, Bride thinks herself is a hot and successful girl. She says, "How about that, Lula Ann? Did you ever believe you would grow up to be this hot, or this successful?" (11). However, being successful and being hot are not the solid foundation for long-term love which needs patience and sincere communication. Then Morrison uses magic realism to depict Bride's unbelievable predicaments. For instance, Bride feels like she is "melting away" (8), her pubic hair is gone, her earlobe hole is gone, her breasts shrinks, her menstrual period delays. All these visible and invisible body changes show the heavy blow that the breakup gives to her. Later, in the process of finding Booker, she realizes that "the body changes began not simply after he left, but because he left" (93). Thus, this break-up is an influential traumatic event she encounters in her adult life.

In psychology field, there is a term named "loss". It refers to the situation that people lose what originally belongs to him/her and what will not belong to him/her (Shi Qijia, 225). As for Bride, the loss of a wonderful boyfriend and the loss of an ideal would-be husband is a double torture. Actually, from a little black girl to a graceful lady, Bride always experiences the sense of losing, she loses her father when she was born, loses the tender love of her mother, loses the beloved Booker. She must feel isolated at home and in society.

The traumatic event in Booker's adulthood is his big quarrel with his family and the death of Queen. When Booker assures his master's degree, he goes back home alone for

celebratory dinner. Everything goes very well before he goes upstairs and finds out that the room which he and Adam once shared has been transformed totally. He then has a quarrel with Carole, their fight escalates and disturbs the whole family until Mr. Starbarn shut it down. “Stop it, Booker! You not the only one grieving. Folks mourn in different ways” (123). His father’s voice is like the steel of a knife’s edge. Booker does not receive any support from his family members, because Adam died when his younger siblings are babies, so his siblings can not understand Adam’s special significance to Booker. Since Booker’s childhood trauma is never healed, Carole’s inappropriate behavior becomes the trigger of Booker’s traumatic memories. Booker was already feels a poisonous vein of disapproval from his younger siblings as well. The other siblings think that Booker wants a statue of a brother who died when they were babies, then they rolled their eyes at his arrogance”. “What Booker understood as family loyalty, the others saw as manipulation—as trying to control them—outfathering their father” (125). After the quarrel, he runs away from home and loses touch with his family.

In all types of loss, the loss of family member brings people grief and makes people experience a sense of abandonment. Bereavement is a process of repairing the psychological trauma after somebody’s death. However, individuals’ time span and ways of bereavement differs from each other (Shi 227). People usually feels guilt, anxious and angry after the death of relatives. However, in all the emotions, anger is not easy for people to deal with. For Booker, his mourning time is longer than his family members, his mourning ways are different from his parents and siblings. So, he always feels depressed about his emotions on Adam’s death. Being accepted into college, Booker thinks it is a relief and distraction, because “To him it was a riveting intellectual journey that policed his anger, caged it ...” (122). He wants the family members to establish a foundation, a memorial, or something in his brother’s name. They are not interested at all, his father even responses with “We can’t waste any money like

that and we can't waste time raising it" (124). Since Booker's family members do nothing to help him to relieve his anger, their emotional gap becomes so huge that they lose contact at the end.

Due to the far-reaching consequences of traumatic events which occur at home and in society in the characters' childhood, they consistently endure the psychological trauma and spiritual predicaments in adulthood. Traumatized by the emotional neglect and racial prejudice, Bride always feels alienated from others, experiences the loss and receives discrimination. As a witness of traumatic events, Booker is haunted by Adam's death ,always carries the sorrow of losing the beloved brother and loses contact with his family. To Rain, the memories of being forced to be a child prostitute by her mother are really hard to forget. Luckily, the characters are not the passive ones who do nothing but wait for the destiny. They stand up and attempt to get out of psychical and psychological predicament.

Chapter Three Salvation

After going through the severe physical and psychological predicaments, the three characters finally choose to fight back and get out of the predicaments. Morrison once explained her standard of choosing characters in an interview. She said that the characters come into her mind themselves. She is interested in writing a black girl's growth with trauma and the consequences of trauma. She also said that Bride is worthy of exploration and is one of her favorite characters. People can learn a lot from Bride's independence, freedom, pragmatism and boldness (Jiao Xiaoting and Morrison 4). Certainly, living in the violent society nowadays, human beings grow up with various kinds of trauma and they must learn the right way to deal with trauma. This is one theme of *God Help the Child*, which the three characters take positive actions to overcome the bad influence of trauma.

In the following paragraphs, this thesis will mainly explore how the three characters try to go through psychical and psychological predicaments with tears and efforts. At first, they try to escape from their original families to be away from the physical predicament. Bride lives far away from the city which Sweetness lives in, Rain is adopted by a new family and Booker runs away from his home. They also try to use transitional objects to gain the comforts temporarily, for example, Bride's shaving brush, Booker's trumpet and Rain's little kitten.

3.1 Attempts on Salvation

In *God Help the Child*, Bride, Booker and Rain do not give up the will to live a life, to love and to believe in others, even though they have experienced various trauma and predicaments. However, at first, they can not find the right ways to achieve salvation. In order

to live a normal life, they try to hide the traumatic memories, escape from their original families and use transitional objects to comfort themselves. “Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery” (Herman 141).

3.1.1 Escape from the Original Families

“Many abused children cling to the hope that growing up will bring escape and freedom” (Herman, 80). However, the personalities formed in an environment of coercive control are not suitable for adult life. The traumatic victims are left with fundamental problems in basic trust, autonomy, and initiative. While, what they can do to quickly be away from the place where trauma happens is to leave their families as soon as they can.

Firstly, they distance themselves from the original families in order to receive temporarily salvation, which partly saves them from the physical and psychological predicaments. For Bride, her mother’s detestation of her skin color is the main source of her trauma in childhood. Thus, being away from Sweetness can comfort her to some extent. When Bride grows up, she gets a job in California where is far away from Sweetness. But she does not call or visit Sweetness anymore, only sends her mother money and stuff every now and then. Sweetness confesses that “What you do to children matters. And they might never forget. I ain’t seen her in I don’t know how long” (43). Going through many hardships, Bride finds Booker’s residence. However, after reading the notes written by Booker, she is not sure whether she should meet Booker, once again, she wants to escape. Because she begins to aware beauty’s shallowness and her own cowardice. It is Queen who encourages Bride with the rhetoric question, “You come all this way and just turn around and leave?” (152). “Damn!” Bride slapped the table. “You’re absolutely right! Totally right! This is about me, not him. Me!” (152).

As for Booker, just like his aunt Queen expresses, “Oh he’s a leaver, all right. Left his own family. All except me” (146). After Adam’s death, Booker escapes from his family’s ritual (Saturday conferences) for trumpet lessons, so that he can dampen “his budding intolerance for his siblings” (117). When Booker’s proposal of setting a foundation is turned down by his father, he runs away from hostile home. Due to Bride’s visit to a child abuse criminal, again Booker escapes from this relationship even though he loves Bride. He just ran around blaming everybody, but does not try to make up to someone he ruined.

For Rain, luckily, she encounters Mr. and Mrs. Steve who adopts her when she is drenched in a heavy rain in a street corner. From then on, she gradually lives in a normal family where she does not need to be a child prostitute under her biological mother’s violence any more. However, the improvement of living condition can not cure Rain’s trauma, because her foster parents refuse to listen to her. Just like Rain’s confession, she regards her new family as an ok but fake family. Rain says that “We’re a fake family—okay but fake” (104).

Bride, Booker and Rain all leave their original families for temporarily physical release. However, they are still prisoners of their childhood. When they attempt to create new lives, they reencounter the trauma which they have experienced in childhood and in adulthood. They are well on the way to independence and intimacy, the capacity to form stable relationships and the courage to make peace with traumatic past.

3.1.2 Comforts from the Transitional Objects

Since the escape can not heal the trauma fundamentally, Bride, Booker, Rain and Sofia turn to the transitional objects for comforts. The concept of transitional objects is introduced by Donald Woods Winnicott. It usually refers to a physical object, which takes the place of the mother-child bond. Later in his research, Winnicott explains that, transitional object does

not only exist as the replacement of mother, it also suits for love, for the origins and loss of a strong emotion. In *God Help the Child*, Bride, Booker and Rain own their transitional objects to help them out of the predicament.

After breaking up with Booker, Rain chooses the shaving brush which Booker leaves as a transitional object. One reason for her choice is that she enjoys the feeling of being touched and the other reason is that this shaving brush can be regarded as a replacement of Booker. From the day when Bride finds this shaving brush in a trash can, she takes it to many places as a companion. She thinks that the shaving, calms her and she is so grateful that she begins to think of “other places that might need this little delight” (53). For instance, she goes out for a walk with it, and she puts it in the trunk when she starts the journey of finding Booker, and so on. Bride thinks that the shaving brush can make her ease, and she says “I can hardly wait for the brushing and then the razor, the combination that both excites and soothes me. Lets me imagine without grief times when I was made fun of and hurt” (35). When Bride is making up for a party, she suddenly finds out that her earlobe hole is gone. She is so scared and immediately says that “I am trembling. I need the shaving brush...I get the brush out and stroke it lightly at my cleavage. It makes me dizzy” (51). From above examples, to Bride, it is clear that this shaving brush exists as a transitional object which receives her warmly welcome and bears her fear. This shaving brush gives Bride the feeling of being touched, makes her calm down, and makes her feel safe and curried.

Later, Bride sends this shaving brush to Rain as a gift when she left Rain’s family. This behavior symbolize that Bride gradually becomes independent and possesses the ability of loving others. It is Rain who calls Steve to save Bride from the serious traffic accident. From that moment on, there is an emotional connection between the Bride and Rain. By chance, they two have a walk together. During this walk, Rain shares her painful past with Bride. Listening to this tough little girl (Rain) who wastes no time on self-pity, Bride “felt a

companionship that was surprisingly free of envy. Like the closeness of schoolgirls” (103). On the way back home, Bride puts her self in danger to save Rain from the birdshot. Thus, Bride wishes that this shaving brush which smoothes her a lot will company and comfort Rain to go through the traumatic memories.

The trumpet plays the role of a transitional object in Booker’s life since Adam’s death. When Adam is missing, Booker’s father refuses to play jazzy records in which includes Booker’s favorite singer Satchmo (the nick name of Louis Armstrong). For Booker, “it was one thing to lose a brother—that broke his heart—but a world without Louis Armstrong’s trumpet crushed it” (114), from which readers can see trumpet’s remedial function towards Booker. After Adam’s funeral, in order to save himself from the anger of his family members, Booker begins to take trumpet lessons. Even though Booker’s trumpet talent “was adequate but not exceptional” (130), he practices a lot and enjoys being a trumpet player. This trumpet accompanies him to taste the sorrow which Adam’s death left on him, to relieve his anger of being misunderstood by his siblings, and to romantically encounter Bride in the Rain. As a necessity in Booker’s life, this trumpet gives Booker a musical way to express his emotions. In the last part of this novel, Bride takes this trumpet to meet Booker. Booker is so surprised that his “smile traveled from his lips to his eyes. The joy in his face was infantile” (164). He even shouts “I love you!” and ran outside quickly to pick up his trumpet. But such happiness does not exist long, his aunt Queen suddenly died because of fire.

In order to honor his beloved aunt, Booker insists on performing the rites alone without Bride. However, this funeral ceremony is awkward, because “the ashes were difficult to toss, and his musical tribute was off-key and uninspired” (173). Then, out of the sadness, Booker throws his trumpet into the gray water as though “the trumpet had failed him rather than he had failed it” (173). According to Winnicott, transitional object which exists as a defense against anxiety is important to the owner’s psychological state and can not be changed unless

the owner wants to (Xi Haoli 28). Thus, it is Booker who determines to throw the trumpet which he had so intensely loved. This ritual shows that Booker wants to get rid of shadow which brings by Adam's death and give up the trumpet which is a replacement of Adam's companion.

For the little white girl Rain, her transition object is her little kitten. Living with a cruel mother in a broken family, Rain's life is more miserable than Bride's and Booker's. Though Bride and Booker receive emotional neglects in their original family, they do have the right to go to school, to have a home. However, Rain has been forced to be a child prostitute by her own mother, and she does not go to school and can not read. When Bride newly comes into Steve and Evelyn family, she wants to kill everybody, until they bring her a kitten. Transitional object should provide warmth or do something to illustrate its energy. For Rain, this little kitten just like a dear friend whom she can confide in, is an important transition object which can share all Rain's love and hatred in her childhood. Rain said that this little kitten is a cat now and she "tell her everything" (104). As time goes on, most transitional objects gradually lose their remedial functions, but they will not be completely forgotten by their owners (Xi Haoli 28). For instance, Bride and Booker already get rid of their dependence on transitional objects. Readers have the reason to believe that one day in the future Rain will embrace her new life with or without this cat.

3.2 Final Salvation

The characters' attempts on salvation can not help them get out of the predicament totally, because escape and transitional objects are the temporarily methods to alleviate their sufferings. The final recovery from trauma relies on the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, reconnection with ordinary life. Judith Herman (1942-) is well known for her unique contributions to the understanding of trauma and its victims. In her second book

Trauma and Recovery (1997) she elaborates the opinions as followings, “Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life” (Herman 110).

As the above-mentioned analysis, Bride, Booker and Rain, tortured by their multi-trauma, tend to lose the sense of safety, involve themselves in long-term remembrance and mourning, and lose the reconnection with ordinary life. They are alienated from the family and friends. However, when they three encounters each other, they becomes intimate friends.

3.2.1 The Establishment of Safety

Safety refers to the state of being safe and protected from danger or harm, which includes the safety of body, of environment, of psychology. In general, safety is the sources of happiness for human beings. However, for trauma victims, “Trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control”, thus, “the guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor” (Herman 113). The first step of recovery is to establish the victim’s safety. This step takes precedence over all others, for no other therapeutic work will possibly succeed if safety has not been adequately secured.

“Establishing safety begins by focusing on control of the body and gradually moves outward toward control of the environment” (Herman 113). Before Bride stands up to confront Booker, she almost loses the control of her body and her life. In her childhood, she has no right to control her body, because she has to lives with Sweetness who detests her skin color and raises her strictly. She has to be a obedient child who follows Sweetness’ instruction whether she agrees or disagrees. Like what she has put, she is “too weak, too scared to defy Sweetness, or the landlord, or Sofia Huxley” (79). The time when Bride grows up to be an attractive black beauty who does extremely well in career and changes her name from Lula

Ann Bridewell into Ann Bride, she gradually begins to restore her control of her body and her life. She successfully changed her dark skin color which used to be the cause of her trauma into an advantage. She said that “I sold my elegant blackness to all those childhood ghosts and now they pay me for it. I have to say, forcing those tormentors—the real ones and others like them—to drool with envy when they seem is more than payback. It’s glory” (57). When she consults Jeri for a makeover for her second interview at Sylvia, Inc., she takes Jeri’s advice that she should “always wear white” (33) and it works. Bride says that from then on, “everywhere I went I got double takes but not like the faintly disgusted ones I used to get as a kid. These were adoring looks, stunned but hungry” (33). By her own efforts, she can control her body by her will without other’s contempt.

In adulthood, it is lucky that Bride finds Booker who “she once trusted, who made her feel safe, colonized somehow” (78). The world without Booker is “more than confusing—shallow, cold, deliberately hostile” (78). For trauma victims, their intimate relationships generally are driven by “the hunger for protection and care and are haunted by the fear of abandonment or exploitation” (Herman 80). However, she is abandoned by Booker. This time she thinks that “there was nothing in the world left to do but stand up for herself finally and confront the first man she had bared her soul to, unaware that he was mocking her. “Booker was the one person she was able to confront—which was the same as confronting herself, standing up for herself” (98). Acknowledging the reality of her condition, Bride finally takes steps to challenge it. Taking action to foster recovery is signs of strength, not weakness; initiative, not passivity.(Herman 112)

Compared with Bride, Rain’s and Booker’s establishment of safety is relatively passive because Rain’s safety is based on the accidental adoption of Steve and Evelyn and Booker’s establishment of safety relies on Bride’s helps.

According to trauma theory, “once the traumatized person has established a refuge, she

can progress toward a widening sphere of engagement in the world.” (Herman 114) Rain’s childhood trauma is so serious and her original family is so hostile that she wants to kill everyone. However, adopting by Steve and Evelyn, Rain at least owns a safe family which has no threat to her body to live a life, though her spiritual needs can not be satisfied. Steve and Evelyn takes Rain out of the bad living conditions, but no one actually gives Rain the spiritual care and guidance, which are extremely important to the mental health of a child who suffers trauma. Fortunately, Rain takes her first step in her trauma recovery process in the village that far from the city. Bride’s appearance is the real turning point in Rain’s life. From then on, a sincere and safe relationship is formed between them. Through the narration from Rain’s point of view, Rain calls Bride as “my black lady”, and uses this address for eight times. She expresses her love to Bride in this way, “My heart was beating fast because nobody had done that before. I mean Steve and Evelyn took me in and all but nobody put their own self in danger to save me. Save my life. But that’s what my black lady did without even thinking about it” (106).

After Adam’s death, Booker’s emotions usually goes out of control, and he also feels unsafe in relation to other people. Thus, a relatively safe relationship is what Booker needs. He is so lucky that he meets Bride who is more brave than him and tries her best to build a relatively safe relationship between them.

According to Herman, there is no single and dramatic event which mark the completion of the first stage, “the transition is gradual, occurring in fits and starts” (Herman 124). Step by step, the traumatized children regain some rudimentary sense of safety in his or her life. They find, once again, that they can count on themselves. Though they may be far more wary and less trusting than they were before the trauma, and though they may still avoid intimacy, they no longer feel totally vulnerable or isolated. They have some confidence in their abilities to protect themselves; they know how to control their disturbing symptoms, and they know

whom they can rely on for support. The victims of chronic trauma begin to believe not only that they can take good care of themselves but that they deserve no less. In their relationships with others, they have learned to be both appropriately trusting and self-protective.

3.2.2 Remembrance and Mourning

In the second stage of recovery, the trauma victims tell the stories of the trauma. They tell it completely in detail and in depth. This way of telling actually transforms the traumatic memory so that it can be integrated into the trauma victim's life story. Generally speaking, normal memory can be described as "the action of telling a story," while the traumatic memory is static and wordless. Bride, Booker and Rain all experienced the process of transforming the traumatic memory into the normal memory in daily life. The basic principle of the second stage of recovery is that it is the trauma victims who have the rights to decide whether they choose to confront the horrible memories of the past or not. In *God Help the Child*, Bride, Booker and Rain tell their traumatic memories in a wordless way at the beginning, but when they determines to get rid of predicament, they narrate the trauma experience in detail.

Bride and Rain tend to tell the traumatic memory to the people who they believe in, because they want their close relatives and friends will play the roles of witnesses and allies who they can "speak of the unspeakable" (Herman, 125). Actually, it is not easy for them to find suitable audients. After visiting Sofia, Bride is invited by Brooklyn to have dinner together in a restaurant. Their conversation goes to that Brooklyn insists Bride should see a rape therapist. Meanwhile, Bride is so tired and so sick of this. What she needs is to be able to have an honest conversation with her closest friend. However, the wish for an honest conversation comes to nowhere. Not only because Bride is not ready to tell Brooklyn all her trauma memories, but also because Brooklyn is not her close friend in essence. In contrast,

Booker is a qualified listener, and he can comfort and enlighten Bride. For instance, when Bride complains about Sweetness who hated her due to her black skin, Booker responds, ““It’s just a color, a genetic trait—not a flaw, not a curse, not a blessing nor a sin” (143). His words are rational and soothing. When Bride tells Booker that she witnessed her landlord molesting a white boy but she does nothing to save him, Booker told Bride, “Correct what you can; learn from what you can’t” (40). Bride answers that she does not “always know what to correct” (40). Booker goes on persuading her that she does know, because no matter how she tries to ignore it, “the minds always knows truth and wants clarity” (40). Bride says that this conversation is one of the best talks they ever had, and she felt “relief, curried, safe, owned” (40). After the confessing Lula Ann’s crime to Booker, Bride felt newly born. “No longer forced to relive, no, outlive the disdain of her mother and the abandonment of her father” (162).

For Rain, it is more difficult to find people whom she can share her traumatic memories with, because except for her adoptive parents, she has no other friends at all. Evelyn and Steve are really good to Rain, but they “frown or look away” (104) if Rain says stuff about how it was in her mother’s house. By chance, Bride and Rain has a walk outside, according to Bride’s sincere quest, Rain shares her traumatic memories in detail and in depth. Rain tells Bride why she is forced to leave her mother’s house, how she is treated by the disgusting whoremaster, and what is needed for street life. Rain’s “emerald eyes sometimes sparkling wide other times narrowed to dark olive slits as she described the savvy, the perfect memory” (65). Telling the traumatic experience to Bride, Rain can relieve the sadness in her heart. She feels so sad because she’s gone. She does not know who she can talk to now.

Different from Bride and Rain, Booker tends to bury the traumatic memory in his own heart. “Trauma inevitably brings loss” (Herman 134). Booker can not get rid of the shadow and loss which are brought by Adam’s death. He faces a new void in his relationships with

family, friends, and community. “Since so many of the losses are invisible or unrecognized, the customary rituals of mourning provide little consolation” (Herman 134). A funeral can not console Booker, and the death of the Murder can not sooth Booker. Therefore, he chooses to tattoo a yellow rose on his shoulder to memorize his brother, and he tries to persuade his parents to set a scholarship as a remembrance. Then he writes some trumpet notes to mourn Adam. Expressing the traumatic experience in spoken form and written form are the remedial actions for trauma. At first, Booker is unwilling to tell other’s about his traumatic experience. He keeps the sadness in his heart. “He began trying to shape unpunctuated sentences into musical language that expressed his questions about or results of his thinking. Most of these he trashed; a few he kept” (123). When he spends a night in a holding cell because he tries to save a little girl from two crackheads in the streets, his ex-girlfriend asks why he behaves like this, he does not explain too much. But Bride is the one who changes him and his music. Through sharing it with Bride and Queen, writing it in music and notes, Booker releases himself and finally get rid of the shadows that Adam’s death left on him. He writes,

I don’t miss you anymore adam rather i miss the emotion that your dying produced a feeling so strong it defined me while it erased you leaving only your absence for me to live in like the silence of the japanese gong that is more thrilling than whatever sound may follow. I apologize for enslaving you in order to chain myself to the illusion of control and the cheap seduction of power. No slave owner could have done it better. (161)

Booker reflects his love towards Adam when Queen opposes his long-term mourn. Adam is innocent, pure, and easy to love. If Adam had lived, grown up to have flaws and human failings like deception, foolishness and ignorance, would Booker still loves Adam? “What kind of love is it that requires an angel and only an angel for its commitment” (160).

He thinks that Bride knows more about love than him because Bride tends to figure it out, risk something and do something.

The works of the second stage of recovery are almost accomplished by three characters' various ways and efforts. The telling of the trauma stories may inevitably plunge trauma victims into profound grief. However, the traumatic memories truly becomes a part of the past when the "action of telling a story" has come to its end. Luckily, Bride, Booker and Rain finally find the one who they can share their traumatic memories without reservation. At this turning point, they three face the tasks of rebuilding their lives in the present and pursuing their aspirations for the future.

3.2.3 Reconnection with Ordinary Life

Compromising on the traumatic past, the trauma victims face the new task of creating a future. They have mourned the old selves that the trauma destroyed; they must develop a new selves now. Their relationships have been changed and twisted by the trauma. Now they must develop new relationships. These are the main tasks of the third stage of recovery.

Bride is the most courageous protagonist in this novel. She is the model of the trauma victims, because she is brave enough to face with the important traumatic events directly. Before starting the journey of finding Booker, Bride is beaten by Sofia so seriously that her face is almost ruined. However, at that time, Bride's response to physical attack was as cowardly as her reaction to the sudden breakup between Booker and her. "The first produced tears; the second a flip 'Yeah, so?'" (78). These responses confirm Bride's helplessness when she needs to confounding cruelty. Through Bride's efforts, she behaves totally different from what she used to at the end of this novel. Bride finally finds Booker in the Town named Whiskey, but when she appears in Booker's house, Booker demands her to get out. This time, Bride is no longer the coward girl who does not know to fight back. She runs quick steps

forward and slaps Booker's face as hard as she could, and then Booker knocks her down. Bride scrambles up, grabs a bottle and breaks it over Booker's head. Still Booker does not answer Bride why he walks out on her without a word. Bride says, "You don't have to love me but you damn well have to respect me" (154). Till then, She has begun to take more initiative in her life and is in the process of creating a new identity.

Booker faces the task of reconciling with himself and resolving trauma. After quarreling with Bride so fiercely and receiving the advice of Queen, Booker no longer feels possessed by his traumatic past. Instead, he is in possession of himself. His task now is to become the person he wants to be. Due to the loss of Adam, of Queen, of his trumpet, three of what he had so intensely loved gone, Booker finally realize that he couldn't lose a fourth. Thus, he offers Bride "the hand she had craved all her life, the hand that did not need a lie to deserve it, the hand of trust and caring for—a combination that some call natural love" (175). Being a leaver for such a long time, Booker is ready for greater intimacy with his lover eventually.

Rain only experiences the first two stages of trauma recovery, because she is a little girl who has not grown up. Thus the narrative space for her is limited. But at the end of Rain's story, she embraces a better life with the hope that one day she will meet her black lady again. Readers do have the reason to believe that she will have a bright future, will live a happy life, will find someone who would like to listen to her. At that time, she will fight for herself and resolving the trauma, though it takes more efforts and more patience.

Near the end of *God Help the Child*, Queen once expresses her wishes for Bride and Booker, "They will blow it, she thought. Each will cling to a sad little story of hurt and sorrow—some long-ago trouble and pain life dumped on their pure and innocent selves" (158). Just like Queen's wishes, both Bride and Booker finally drop all the camouflage and face the mutual task of having a baby, which symbolizes the beginning of a totally new life. Contrary to Sweetness' notion of a "generational cycle of abuse" (Herman 83), Bride and

Booker are terribly afraid that their children will suffer a fate similar to theirs, and they will try their best to prevent dangerous and hurtful events from happening.

At the end of the novel, with the help of the omniscient narration, Morrison poetically expresses not only Bride and Booker's best wishes for their baby but also people's wishes for all the children in the world as followings "A child. New life. Immune to evil or illness, protected from kidnap, beatings, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing, abandonment. Error-free. All goodness. Minus wrath" (175). Such kind of nearly perfect wish may not come true in short term, because trauma inevitably happens in the cruel real modern world. God can not help the child. With the attempts on salvation, and the help of trauma recovery theory, these once traumatized and depressed children finally get out of their physical and psychological predicaments and begin their new lives.

Conclusion

In *God Help the Child*, Toni Morrison presents a heart-broken but an inspiring story about how the traumatized children eventually get out of their physical and psychological predicaments with efforts and tears. Facing with the predicaments resulted from serious trauma events which are caused by their parents' maltreatment and hostility in society, Bride, Booker, Rain and Sofia tend to escape and gain comforts from transitional objects, but these attempts only alleviate their situations. Eventually, with the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, reconnection with ordinary life, they three rebuild sincere relationship with others and begin their new hopeful lives. This novel represents Morrison's thorough observation of the dangerous environment for modern children's growth, the deep concern on children's physical and psychological predicaments, and the positive attitude towards the future of children.

With the assistance of trauma theory, Winnicott's concept of transitional object and Judith's trauma recovery theory, this thesis analyzes the physical and psychological predicaments, the attempts on salvation and the eventual salvation of Bride, Booker, Rain and Sofia.

Each of the three characters has the possibility to experience or witness traumatic events no matter in childhood or in adulthood. Bride bears her skin color as a heavy cross and the detestation from her mother. Moreover, she witnesses the landlord molesting a child and is deeply influenced by this unspeakable traumatic memories. When she grows up she suffers all kinds of abandonment. Booker is traumatized by the death of his beloved brother Adam, his family members' misunderstanding and alienation. Rain's trauma mainly results from the experience of being forced to be a child prostitute by her biological father and situation that

there is no one she can talk to in her adoptive family. As a consequence, they three are stuck with the physical and spiritual predicaments and experience the alienation, loss and the feelings of insecurity.

With the purpose of getting rid of the double predicaments, these characters start the journey of salvation. At first, they tend to escape from their original families and gain comforts from transitional objects. Home which should be a shelter that keeps children from danger and hurt now turns into the place that is full of violence and neglect. Bride, Booker and Rain all choose to escape from their original home to avoid traumatic experiences. According to Winnicott, transitional object does not only exist as the replacement of mother, it also suits for love, for the origins and loss of a strong emotion. The three characters gain comforts from their transitional objects which are Bride's shaving brush, Booker's trumpet and Rain's cat. However, they can not reach their final salvation because they do not resolve their trauma.

Eventually, Bride, Booker, Rain and Sofia achieve their salvation by their courageous actions of trauma recovery. They establish the sense of safety, remember and mourn for the past traumatic experience and reconnect with the ordinary life. The concept of the three stages of trauma recovery is advocated by Herman Judith to cure the trauma victims' physical and psychological trauma. With the establishment of safety, the three gradually restore the control of their body and soul; moreover, they eventually encounter beloved lover, genuine friend and also try to understand their relatives. By the remembrance and mourning, they make peace with trauma and tolerate the traumatic past. The reconnection with ordinary life help the three character take pleasure in their lives and engage fully in relationships with others.

The application of Winnicott's concept of transitional object and Herman's trauma recovery theory in the study of *God Help the Child* provides a new perspective to the researches on Toni Morrison and her magnificent compositions. It furnishes readers with a

deep understanding of Toni Morrison's humanistic concerns on the physical and psychological predicaments of modern children and also provides a relatively possible trauma recovery method for children who have suffered trauma. The salvation of Bride, Booker, Rain and Sofia at the end is both delightful and thought-provoking. God can not help the child but the child can help themselves. Each individual in the society must shoulder his or her responsibility for a better environment of the growth of children. Confronted with physical and psychological predicament, children should try to establish an active attitude and learn to resolve the trauma, only in this way can salvation be achieved successfully.

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