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**Trauma and Recovery: A Study of
Bride's Trauma in *God Help the Child***

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摘 要

诺贝尔文学奖得主托尼·莫里森不仅是美国著名的黑人女性作家，而且也是当今世界杰出的小说家之一。她的作品以史诗般的描述和深刻细腻的刻画反映了一个多世纪以来非裔美国人的创伤历史。《上帝救助孩子》发表于 2015 年 4 月 30 日，书中，莫里森又重温了黑人后代的创伤主题。

本文拟以创伤的基本含义和朱迪思·赫尔曼的《创伤与复原》中所阐述的理论作为理论基础，系统地分析小说《上帝救助孩子》中主人公布莱德的创伤经历、创伤症状、创伤复原及其最终成功走出创伤的原因，以探索当代美国社会环境下黑人后代的生活困境，彰显莫里森所倡导的“爱与和谐”文化观念的重要性。

本论文共分为六部分。第一部分简要介绍托尼·莫里森的生平状况，其主要作品，《上帝救助孩子》的故事梗概，国内外莫里森研究现状，以及本论文的研究目的与意义。第二部分介绍创伤的定义，分类及创伤理论的发展。接下来三部分是本论文的主体部分。第三部分结合文本，分析主人公布莱德所经历的个人创伤及集体创伤。第四部分从创伤症状入手，阐述布莱德在经历创伤事件后所表现出的孤立感和无助感，创伤记忆闪回，和自我认同危机等症状。第五部分探讨布莱德创伤复原的全过程，并揭示布莱德最终成功走出创伤，重新开始新生活的深刻原因。第六部分对全文做了总结和归纳，认为黑人后代只有正视自己的种族，学会自尊、自爱 and 自信才能在多元文化社会中，求得个人的生存和发展。

关键词：创伤理论；《上帝救助孩子》；布莱德；创伤；复原

Abstract

Nobel laureate Toni Morrison is not only the well-known American black female writer but also one of the world's most eminent novelists. Her works reflect the traumatic history experienced by African-Americans in a period of over one century with her epic description and vivid depiction. In her latest novel *God Help the Child*, which was published on April 30th of 2015, Toni Morrison revisits the theme of trauma among African-American descendants.

Based on the basic idea of trauma and Judith Herman's theory in *Trauma and Recovery*, the thesis attempts to analyze the heroine Bride's trauma in *God Help the Child* from the aspects of the traumatic events she has undergone, the traumatic symptoms she has performed, the recovery process she has experienced and the reasons for her successful recovery, so as to explore the living problems of African American descendants under the new social circumstances and highlight the importance of the cultural concept of love and harmony advocated by Toni Morrison.

This thesis consists of six sections. The first section includes a brief introduction to Toni Morrison and her latest work *God Help the Child*, a literature review of Morrison's works and *God Help the Child* at home and abroad, together with the objectives and significance of the research. The second section introduces the definition and classification of trauma, along with the development of trauma theory. The following three sections are the body part of this thesis. The third section explores the heroine Bride's trauma from individual and collective perspectives; the fourth section illustrates her traumatic symptoms such as a sense of helplessness and isolation, the fixation on traumatic memories, and a crisis of self-identity; the fifth section explores her recovery process and reveals the underlying reasons why she can successfully overcome her trauma and get a new start. The last section draws a conclusion that African American descendants can survive and develop in the contemporary multi-cultural society only if they face up to their own race and learn to love, respect and believe in themselves first.

Key Words: Trauma Theory; *God Help the Child*; Bride; Trauma; Recovery

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Introduction

0.1 Toni Morrison and *God Help the Child*

Toni Morrison, the first African American Nobel Laureate for Literature, is undoubtedly one of the most celebrated black writers in American literature. In her over forty years of literary creation, Morrison mainly writes about the life and experiences of African American people, especially the black females. Her focus has always been on the depiction of African Americans' physical and psychological trauma in the slavery, racial discrimination and white-dominated culture as well as on the exploration of the ways of helping them recover from trauma.

Born as Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, Morrison is the second oldest of four children in a working-class family. In order to get improved social, political, educational and economic opportunities, her parents migrated from the south to Ohio, the mid-west part of America. Her father George Wofford worked primarily as a welder and her mother Ramah Willis Wofford was a homemaker. And they held different opinions about blacks and whites, which greatly helped Toni Morrison form her own view on the historical and contemporary fortunes and misfortunes of African American people. What's more, her parents also instilled in her a love of reading, music and folklore during her childhood. Such a growing environment not only made Morrison deeply understand the black culture but also laid a foundation for her later writing career.

While Morrison's early life was chiefly influenced by the black songs and traditional African American folktales, her social and racial consciousness was not formed until she was in her teens. In 1949, after graduating from Lorain High School where Morrison read many great works of European literature, Morrison attended Howard University continuing to pursue her interest in literature, where she changed her name into Toni. In 1953, having obtained a Bachelor-of-Arts degree in English, she went to Cornell University and finally earned a Master-of-Arts degree in English literature. The education she had received at these prestigious institutes played an important role in her literary creation.

From 1955 to 1964, Morrison taught English, first at Texas Southern University for two years, then at Howard University for seven years. While teaching at Howard, she met Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect, whom she married in 1958. The couple had two sons but divorced in 1964. After the breakup of her marriage, she began working as an editor in 1965 for the textbook subsidiary of Random House in Syracuse, and two years later she was transferred to Random House New York City headquarters, where she became a senior editor. For almost eighteen years, Morrison had edited many books written by black authors such as Henry Dumas, Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, and Gayl Jones, her efforts helping black literature integrate into the mainstream. In 1983, she left the publishing house to devote more time and energy to writing and continued to teach, at Yale, Bard College,

SUNY-Purchase, SUNY-Albany and now at Princeton.

Toni Morrison embarked on her career as a writer in the late 1960s, when the American black literature began to bloom in the Civil Rights Movement. Up to now, she has written eleven novels, seven essays, two plays, one short story, and also four children's books with her son Slade Morrison.

Among all her works, what literary scholars praise most are her novels. Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) tells the story of a young African-American girl who believes her miserable life would be bettered if she had blue eyes. The book received warm reviews, but it didn't sell well. Her second novel *Sula* (1973), which gives an account of two black young women who have different world values and life experiences under gender oppression and racial discrimination, was nominated for the National Book Award in 1975. Her third novel *Song of Solomon* (1977) recounts the story of a black young man trying to search for his family roots. It received wide recognition and won the National Book Critics Circle Award. Her next work *Tar Baby* (1981) reveals the pain and struggle of African Americans seeking to live and love with integrity in America. It received a mixed reaction from critics. Morrison's fifth novel *Beloved* (1987), based on a true story, is regarded as one of her greatest masterpieces. It's about the story of Sethe and her daughter Denver after their escape from slavery. For this work, Morrison won several literary awards, including the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. As for her sixth novel *Jazz* (1992), which explores marital love and betrayal, the critical reaction was positive. In 1993, Toni Morrison became the first African-American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her seventh novel *Paradise* (1999), which tells the story of the tension between the men of Ruby, a fictional African-American town, and a group of women who live in a former convent seventeen miles away, won warm response. *Love* (2003) is Toni Morrison's eighth novel, telling of the lives of several women and their relationships to Bill Coosey, a charismatic but dead hotel owner. *A Mercy* (2008) is her ninth novel, reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery in early America. It was chosen as one of "10 Best Books of 2008" by *New York Times Book Review*. Her tenth novel *Home* was published in 2012, which is about the story of Frank Money, a 24-year-old African-American veteran of Korean War, and his journey home. At the same year, President Obama awarded Morrison the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Her latest novel *God Help the Child* (2015) mainly tells the traumatic experiences and struggling life of the ebony-skinned girl, Bride. The protagonist Lula Ann Bridewell, born with blue-black skin, is deserted by her father and alienated by her mother. What's worse, she is also rejected by the community. Desperate for love and approval, she tells a lie that puts Sofia Huxley, an innocent white schoolteacher, into prison. About 15 years later, dressed only in white, she changes her name into Bride and becomes a powerful entrepreneur of a cosmetics brand YOU, GIRL. Despite great material success, Bride still suffers from the physical and emotional traumas of her youth. When Sofia Huxley is released from prison,

Bride meets a new round of troubles. The act of concealing the truth makes her lover Booker misunderstand her and leaves her. Sad and heartbroken, Bride eventually goes on a quest for him. Without Booker, Bride discovers her own body metamorphose into that of a child—her pubic hair has gone, her earlobes become smooth, her chest becomes flat and her body shrinks, all of which drives her mad. In the end, when finding Booker, under fierce quarrel and scuffles, both of them blurt out their own childhood traumas and then they become reconciled.

0.2 Literature Review

Since the publication of *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison has been the focus of literary critics at home and abroad. Foreign researches on Morrison started earlier and can date back to 1975 with Joan Bischoff's essay "The Novels of Toni Morrison: Studies in Thwarted Sensitivity" as its beginning symbol. Up to now, according to ProQuest Center, there are 406 doctoral and master's theses with "Toni Morrison" as key words, and the academic papers about Morrison and her works are too numerous to count. The study of Morrison abroad can be divided into three stages—the initial stage, the development stage and the mature stage.

The initial stage mainly studied the themes of Toni Morrison's two earliest novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. One typical article of the early stage was "The Novels of Toni Morrison: Studies in Thwarted Sensitivity" written by Joah Bischoff, in which she focused on the common theme in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, namely, the "thwarted sensitivity" of Pecola and Sula, by comparing Morrison with the great black male writer Henry James.

The development stage began from the late 1970s when the publication of *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby* won Morrison widespread recognition in America. At this stage, the study of Morrison was not limited to theme study, but expanded to some new perspectives such as feminist perspective, black-literary-tradition perspective and comparative perspective.

The earliest article to analyze Toni Morrison's writing from the angle of feminism was Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (1979). In this article, Barbara Smith pointed out the close connections between black female literature and feminism, and criticized white critics and black male critics who obliterated the creative ability of black female writers. At the same time, James H. Evans explored Morrison's works from the perspective of black literary tradition in *Spiritual Empowerment in Afro-American Literature* (1987). By analyzing the works of Morrison and some other black writers, he found out the importance of black cultural tradition for the healthy growth of Afro-Americans.

The mature stage started from the 1990s and the research perspective has been constantly broadened. Apart from what is mentioned above, there also appeared the narrative perspective, the psychoanalytic perspective, post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism to analyze Morrison and her works.

As Morrison's works have unique narrative characteristics, many researchers have interpreted her works in terms of narrative discourse, narrative strategies and narrative

structures. Some other researchers have combined the psychoanalytic approach with other theories in analyzing Morrison's works. For example, Fei-hsuan Kuo's *Trauma, Racism and Generational Haunting in Toni Morrison's Fiction* (2009) explores the haunting power of the legacy of slavery and the trauma of racism on the lives of African Americans' young generation in Morrison's novels, and attempts to investigate how historical and individual trauma affect the formation of black ethnic identity.

In the past few years, some unique research perspectives have also emerged, including space, Bible Interpretation, ecological criticism and trauma theory. It is worth mentioning in this thesis that the trauma theory plays an important role in exploring Afro-American people's physical and psychological life of Morrison's works.

To analyze Morrison's works from trauma perspective began in the early 21st century, and the iconic work was J. Brooks Bouson's *Quiet as It's Kept: Shame, Trauma and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2000). In this book, for the first time, Bouson employs trauma theory to analyze the racial trauma and racial shame in Morrison's first seven novels and probes the root and influence of these negative feelings. However, she focuses more on the analysis of African Americans' racial shame and the causes of the shame rather than their efforts to get rid of shame and recover from trauma. Otherwise, this work would have higher academic value. Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber's *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2010) also analyzes Morrison's works from traumatic perspective. In this book, Schreiber applies Lacan's mirror theory, attachment theory and traumatic theory to analyze the relationship between trauma, memory and the construction of self-identity, and the role of home in constructing black self-identity and recovering from trauma. But Schreiber's analysis is mainly from racial perspective, so the trauma study is relatively simple.

So far, there are 28 doctoral and master's theses on the traumatic subject of Morrison's novels, among which Morrison's works are mainly compared with the works of the writers from the same race, age and gender so as to expound and verify the trauma problems. For example, Kathleen Laura MacArthur's doctoral thesis *The Things We Carried: Trauma and the Aesthetic in Contemporary American Fictions* (2005) analyzes the trauma in the novels of Gail Jones' *Corregidora* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and puts forward the view that "witness" is the traumatic recovery method adopted by the victims in both novels and trauma can be passed on to the next generation. Most theses reveal the similarities of the contemporary writers' trauma works and focus on the slavery trauma in *Beloved*, so the uniqueness of Morrison's trauma works haven't been explored.

In contrast, the ideas of the related academic papers in recent years are novel. For example, Florian Bast, in his "Reading Red: The Troping of Trauma in Toni Morrison *Beloved*" (2011), points out that the color "red" in *Beloved* highlights and strengthens the damage to blacks caused by slavery. His original view and rigorous analysis give this paper great academic value in Morrison study. Another example is Vikki Visvis' "Alternatives to the

‘Talking Cure’: Black Music as Traumatic Testimony in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (2008), which points out that Black music can serve as an effective way to cure trauma.

About the study of Morrison’s *God Help the Child*, there are only a few introductory and critical articles abroad. *New York Times Book Review* praises Toni Morrison for her “loving attention to the textures and sounds of words” and her “lively play” of “the natural landscapes” (Walker, 2015) in her new work. But *The Washington Post* thinks it “carries only a faint echo of that earlier novel’s power” (Charles, 2015). In addition, there are several essays about *God Help the Child*. For example, Delphine Gras’ “Post What? Disarticulating Post-Discourses in Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child*” (2016) situates *God Help the Child* within and against post-discourses, and confirms that the legacy of slavery still dominates “the way Black female bodies are seen and treated in 21st century America” in spite of the silencing effects of post-discourses.

The research results of Morrison study abroad are fruitful. The trauma study of Morrison’s works is a hot spot in recent years. Most researches focus on the slavery trauma of *Beloved*, and few articles mention the way of recovery and individual trauma, so the breadth and depth of the research need to be expanded.

Compared with researches abroad, the researches on Toni Morrison in China still lag behind. Although it started in the late 1980s, the research results are numerous. Up to December 20th, 2017, according to CNKI, there are 350 doctoral and master’s theses and over 1400 academic papers about Morrison and her works, among which a total of 198 articles have been published in the CSSCI core journals.

When Toni Morrison visited China in 1985, few people knew about her or her works. There were only several brief introductory articles on Morrison and her works at home. The earliest introductory article was written by Dong Dingshan on *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Tar Baby* in 1981. Gradually, some translations and critical articles of Morrison’s works came out. Hu Yunhuan was the first translator to translate Morrison’s whole novel. He translated *Song of Solomon* and *Sula* in 1987 and 1988 respectively. What’s more, he was also an important critic who gave many comments on the theme, style and creative thoughts of Morrison’s novels. In addition, Luo Xuanmin, Wang Jiayang and Wang Liyun published some critical articles as well. All of them made great contributions to the early Morrison study.

In October of 1993, Toni Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Then Chinese scholars and critics showed great interest in Toni Morrison and her works and the studies of Morrison stepped into the development stage. Introductory articles and critical essays grew in number, most of which were on *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, *Jazz* and *Beloved*. The research contents mainly included two aspects: one was the research on the historical, racial, cultural or gender themes in Morrison’s works. Related scholars were Wang Shouren, Wang Jiayang, Kong Xiangping and so on. For example, in 1994, Wang Shouren published an essay on *Beloved* in *Foreign Literature Review* (1994) and in this essay, he

commented that in a sense, the problem of American blacks had never been resolved because people always escaped the history of slavery. The other was the study of the narrative characteristics of Morrison's works, such as narrative patterns and magical realism. Main scholars were Li Guicang, Fang Hong, Du Weiping and Yang Renjing. For example, Li Guicang published an essay on *Beloved* in the *Journal of Northwest University* (1994), in which he discussed the narrative techniques such as "mirror structure", "interlocked time and space" in *Beloved* to express the theme—the absurdity and confusion of existence. Above all, in 1999, Wang Shouren and Wu Xinyun published *Gender, Race and Culture: A Study of Toni Morrison's Novels*—the first monograph of a systematic study of Morrison's novels, in which Morrison's thoughts and narrative characteristics were explored in an all-round way.

From the beginning of the 21st century, domestic Morrison research has aroused more and more attention, and come into the mature stage. So far, Chinese scholars have published almost 20 academic monographs about Morrison. For example, Zhu Rongjie's *Pain and Healing: A Study of Maternal Love in Toni Morrison's Fiction from a Cultural Perspective* (2004)—the first English monograph about Morrison's study in China, elaborates the special significance of maternal love in her works, and points out that Morrison resists against the hegemony of the white mainstream culture and the gender and class oppression within the black community by reconstructing African American history and culture. Other monographs study Morrison's works mainly from the perspectives of ethnic culture, feminism, psychology, space, identity politics, etc, such as Wang Yukuo's *Toni Morrison Study* (2005), Tang Hongmei's *Race, Gender and Identity: A Study of Novels by Alice Walker and Toni Morrison* (2006), Wang Langlang's *Identity-Building in Toni Morrison's Trilogy: Beloved, Jazz and Paradise* (2010).

At this stage, from the perspective of theoretical framework, the studies of Morrison mainly focus on feminism, cultural studies, narratology, racial political identity, mythological prototype, space, comparison and trauma. And most of the studies are on *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Song of Solomon* while there are relatively less researches on other works.

Feminism study composes the mainstream of domestic Morrison study. For example, Zhang Ruwen's "Feminine and Feminist Discourses in *Song of Solomon*" (2005) comments that "through the interaction of these two discourses, Morrison shows not only women's depressed life in the patriarchal society, but also the efforts of black women to fight for personality liberation." Cultural study is another main part of Morrison study. It focuses on the influence of white culture and values on the black race, and also explores the application of black cultural traditions in Morrison's works, such as Sun Jingbo's "The African Cultural Elements in Toni Morrison's Novels" (2008). Many scholars in this period also focus on the study of the narrative pattern, structure, discourse, time and strategies in Morrison's novels, such as Du Weiping's "The Historical Consciousness in the Narrative Discourse of Jazz" (2000). And there are many scholars who study racial political identity in Morrison's works to

reveal the discrimination and oppression suffered by ethnic minorities, especially African Americans, such as Wang Shouren and Wu Xinyun's "Transcending Race: An Analysis of 'Enslavement' in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*" (2009).

The above four perspectives are the most common research methods in domestic Morrison study from the beginning of the 21st century. In addition, some researchers have studied the mythological archetypes in Morrison's works, such as Du Zhiqing and Zhang Yan's "*Sula*—An Interpretation of Mythological Archetypes" (2004). A few scholars have carried on space research on Morrison's works, but the research results are limited. Comparative research is a novel perspective at this stage and some scholars compare Morrison with other white writers or black writers to explore their similarities, differences and inheritance in the creation.

Morrison's trauma study is a relatively new perspective in recent years with few research results. Up to now, according to CNKI, there is only one doctoral dissertation, 39 master's theses, and 56 journal papers with "Toni Morrison" and "trauma" as key words. Wang Lili's dissertation—*Recovery from the Trauma: A Study of African-American Women's Trauma in Toni Morrison's Novels* (2014) breaks the limit of the previous trauma study, explores the black female's trauma and recovery from the racial, cultural and social perspectives in *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, *Love* and *A Mercy*, and it makes great contributions to the development of trauma study. Most of master's theses are on *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved* or *Home*. For example, Ma Chen's "On Trauma and Self-Salvation—A Thematic Study of *Home*" (2015) analyzes the protagonist Frank's traumatic experiences and recovery process and points out that the trauma can be healed as long as the victim firmly believes in the power of self-salvation.

Though the word "trauma" appears in some paper titles, the papers don't explore the trauma issues at all. For example, Chen Jie's "The Aftermath of Slavery System and the Healing of Historical Trauma" (2004) is the study on *Beloved* from the angle of racism. Even if some articles are related with "trauma", the discussion is not connected with trauma theory, such as Zhao Qingling's "Trauma Complex in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Paradise*" (2008). Of course, in some papers, text analysis is well linked with trauma theory. For example, Shang Biwu's "Trauma, Memory and Narrative Therapy: on Morrison's *A Mercy*" (2011) analyzes the main characters' individual psychological trauma and their traumatic symptoms, such as panic, nightmares and flashbacks, and shows that different traumatic victims adopt different ways to cure their trauma. It is the first paper that analyzes the trauma, memory and recovery in Morrison's single work so thoroughly, so it is worthy of reference.

As for Morrison's *God Help the Child*, up to now, there are very few domestic researches and only eleven journal papers in CNKI with "*God Help the Child*" as key words. Among them, Wang Shouren and Wu Xinyun's "Childhood Trauma, Freedom and Peace of Mind in *God Help the Child*" (2016) gives great inspiration for the writing of this thesis. It first

discusses the influence of dark skin on family relationships and personal growth, then analyzes children's trauma and traumatic symptoms caused by sexual violence, and finally puts forward the key role of "talking cure" in healing the trauma. In addition, the other ten articles analyze this new work from different perspectives. Zhao Hongwei's "Shadowed Childhood, Struggling Maturity—An Interpretation of Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*" (2017) describes the story of child abuse and Bride's difficult life, and explores how Bride reconstructs herself; Pang Haonong's "A Social Ethics Approach to Trauma and Alienation in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*" (2017) shows the familial trauma, visional trauma and judicial injustice suffered by African American children from the angle of social ethics; Li Panpan's "Black Childhood, Golden Future—A Discussion of *God Help the Child*" (2017) explores what psychological changes Bride experiences and how contemporary American female get rid of trauma and become new women of self-esteem, self-love and self-reliance; Li Xiaoyan's "On the Musical Elements in *God Help the Child*" (2016) analyzes the role of black music in the language, structure and narrative of the new novel; Chen Minglun's "Analyzing the Self-Improvement in *God Help the Child* from the Viewpoint of Role Theory" (2017) narrates the protagonist Bride's role playing in childhood, role conflict and role innovation in adolescence to show Morrison's concern for childhood trauma. Besides, both Jiao Xiaoting's and Shang Fujun's articles interpret the childhood trauma in *God Help the Child* from narrative perspective; Hao Suling's paper explores the family and social reasons why many characters in *God Help the Child* suffer from childhood trauma, and then analyzes Toni Morrison's new thoughts on racism. The author of this thesis, along with her supervisor, published another two papers: "An Analysis of Magical Realism in *God Help the Child*" (2017) and "An Interpretation of Psychological Trauma in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*" (2017). The latter one analyzes the individual psychological trauma, collective psychological trauma and coping mechanism of trauma in the novel from the perspective of trauma theory.

Through the above discussion, we can find that four problems exist in domestic Morrison research: Firstly, the research perspectives are rich, but the research mainly focuses on limited works. In CNKI, there are a total of 778 articles studying *Beloved*. However, there are only dozens of essays on *Tar Baby*, *Jazz*, *A Mercy*, *Home* and only six articles on *God Help the Child*. Secondly, the research centers on limited topics and lacks interdisciplinary depth. Thirdly, the comments focus on the works of Morrison, but Morrison's thoughts are seldom touched. Finally, Morrison's trauma study is a new perspective in recent years, so the breadth and depth of the study are obviously inadequate.

0.3 Objectives and Significance of the Research

There are countless researches on Toni Morrison and her works at home and abroad, especially after she won the Nobel Prize. However, researches on her latest novel *God Help the Child* are scarce both inside China and abroad. By employing Judith Herman's trauma and

recovery theory, this thesis analyzes its protagonist Bride's trauma from the aspects of the traumatic events she has undergone, the traumatic symptoms she has performed, the recovery process she has experienced and the reasons for her successful recovery, so as to explore the living problems of African American descendants under the new social circumstances and highlight the importance of the cultural concept of love and harmony expressed by Toni Morrison.

By analyzing the traumas that Bride has experienced in *God Help the Child*, this thesis provides a new research perspective to appreciate trauma fictions; besides, it can stimulate the public to face up to such problems as racial discrimination, sexual violence and interpersonal barriers in American society. What's more, this thesis can help psychological trauma victims get rid of trauma and start a new life to a certain extent.

Chapter 1 Theoretical Foundations

This thesis is based on the basic idea of trauma and Judith Herman's trauma and recovery theory. In order to analyze Bride's trauma systematically and comprehensively, the definition of trauma, the classification of trauma and the development of trauma theory will be introduced at length in this chapter.

1.1 The Definition of Trauma

"Trauma", derived from the Greek word "traumatizo", originally refers to an injury or wound on one's body caused by the external force in the field of medicine. With the development of human society, the meaning of trauma has been expanded and now used in many different areas such as psychology, literature, culture, philosophy, history and so on.

The earliest study of trauma dates back to the study of hysteria, a kind of strange mental disease. When questing for the cause of hysteria, Sigmund Freud, together with his collaborators Pierre Janet and Joseph Breuer, found that it is the psychological trauma that results in hysteria. Since then, trauma has become the focal point in the field of psychology. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud also mentions that trauma "is not like the wound of body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivors" (Freud, 1975: 38).

In the 1990s, the American scholar Cathy Caruth first put forward the term "trauma" in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* and she also gave trauma a general definition that "describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon" (Caruth, 1996: 11). This definition manifests that the study of trauma has been acknowledged as a scientific theory. Since then, the trauma theory has been applied to many other fields except psychology.

Currently, many scholars and researchers have given an exhaustive definition of trauma. According to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (Unabridged), "trauma" not only means an injury or wound to a living body caused by the application of external force or violence, but also refers to a psychological or emotional stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behaviors, and the state or condition of mental or emotional shock produced by such a stress or by a physical injury.

1.2 The Classification of Traumas

The Chinese scholar Xue Yufeng thinks that "trauma can be classified into two kinds, individual trauma and collective trauma" (2015: 5). It is very common that most individuals

will experience some kind of misfortune in their life, such as an unexpected injury, a sudden loss or a deadly illness. These traumatic events only belong to and affect someone alone, so they belong to individual trauma. But sometimes the whole community will suffer a natural or social disaster like an earthquake, racial discrimination and terrorists attack. These collective traumatic events are a shared miserable experience for all the community members, so they are collective trauma.

The American sociologist Kai T. Erikson, known as an authority on the social consequences of catastrophic events, gives detailed definitions of individual and collective trauma in his book *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*, which tells the difference between them. In his opinion, individual trauma means “a blow that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively” (Erikson, 1978: 153). Such traumas as familial trauma and emotional trauma, are experienced not by a community but by an individual. Since everyone goes through a different way of life, individual trauma differs from one another. It is always connected with personal experiences and has an impact on one’s psychological and life state.

However, collective trauma means “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (Erikson, 1978: 153). It is a traumatic psychological effect shared by a group of people, sometimes by an entire society. When a whole nation has experienced such severe traumas as genocide, war and massacre, everybody is traumatized and treatment is almost ineffective, so the traumas often remain chronic and would reproduce themselves unless social causes are redressed. Collective trauma can arouse collective sentiment, often bringing about a shift in the culture. Therefore, the whole society may suffer from an everlasting culture pain. Well-known collective traumas consist of the Holocaust, Slavery in the United States and the Atomic bombings of Hiroshima.

Individual trauma has some similar features with collective trauma: sudden, unexpected and unpredictable, so both of them are capable to change people’s expectation of the future and affect their orderly life. As an individual, an African American can’t avoid experiencing his or her personal misfortune, like a miserable childhood and the abandonment by the lover. Moreover, the black community suffers from the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination, which leaves indelible scars in their minds and influences their social values deeply; so does a member of the black community.

1.3 The Development of Trauma Theory

In a linear order, the development of trauma theory can be divided into three stages. The first stage focuses on the study of hysteria, the archetypal psychological disorder of women. The second stage concentrates on the study of shell shock, the type of posttraumatic stress disorder many soldiers were afflicted with during the war. The third stage centers on the

ethnic, gender and cultural implications of trauma.

1.3.1 The First Stage—Hysteria

For two decades in the late nineteenth century, the study of hysteria as the origin of trauma theory became a major focus of many distinguished figures such as Jean-Martin Charcot and his followers Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet. Hysteria was a kind of mental disease, which initially was thought to be confined to women. The great French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, absorbed in the symptoms of hysteria, proved that hysterical symptoms like sudden paralysis, amnesia, sensory losses and convulsions originated from the patients' psychology in nature, moving the study of hysteria into a whole new phase, which is regarded as the origin of trauma theory.

This constructive conclusion was renowned in the world of medicine and attracted two eminent physicians Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet's attention to the study of the cause of hysteria. Each of them wanted to be the first to make the great discovery, so the competition between them was particularly intense. After a great number of investigations, in the mid-1890s, Freud and Janet had reached the similar formulation that psychological trauma resulted in hysteria. In other words, the hysterical patients experienced some sudden and uncontrollable traumatic events before, and the memories of these traumas were suppressed in their subconscious and haunted them all the time, and finally their consciousness was dissociated and they suffered from hysteria. What's more, Freud and Janet also found that by putting traumatic memories into words, the hysterical symptoms could be alleviated. This therapy was named "talking cure", which became the basic method of modern psychotherapy. Later, Freud connected hysteria with the patients' premature sexual experience and began exploring the role of sexuality in the origins of hysteria. This shift from the study of the cause of hysteria to the study of sexual psychoanalysis marked the end of early trauma study.

1.3.2 The Second Stage—Shell Shock

The atrocities of World War I aroused the public attention to the psychological trauma once again and brought great affliction to the survivors, so the second stage of trauma theory developed at this special time and reached its peak after the Vietnam War. The central study of trauma theory at this stage was shell shock and the soldiers became the research objects. Due to the constant exposure to the horrible war scenes such as intensity of the bombardment and fighting, threat of annihilation and the death of their comrades, many soldiers were trapped in a helpless condition. They became panic and scared, unable to reason, sleep, walk or talk normally.

At first, these symptoms were attributed to a physical cause. The British psychologist Charles Myers "attributed their symptoms to the concussive effects of exploding shells and called the resulting nervous disorder 'shell shock'" (Judith Herman, 1997: 20). Gradually

military psychiatrists were forced to admit that the symptoms of shell shock resulted from psychological trauma. After making sure that there existed a combat neurosis, medical controversy began to focus on the moral character of those traumatic soldiers and finally there were two treatment strategies to cure the soldiers with shell shock. The British psychiatrist Lewis Yealland, the representative of traditionalist view which regarded the traumatic soldiers as moral invalids, advocated the strategy of shaming, threats and punishment to warn them of behaving as the hero and controlling their bad feelings. On the contrary, W. H. R. Rivers, the representative of progressive view that treated the patients with respect and dignity and thought the symptoms of shell shock could also occur in soldiers of high morality, adopted a humane treatment based on psychological analysis to make the soldiers overcome the fear and return to combat. He also insisted that the most effective way to overcome the fear was the love between the soldiers. With the arrival of World War II came a revival of medical interest in shell shock. Similar to W. H. R. Rivers' view, many psychiatrists found that "the strongest protection against overwhelming terror was the degree of relatedness between the soldiers, his immediate fighting unit, and their leader" (25). To cure war trauma with emotional attachments among comrades made a major breakthrough in the development of trauma theory.

The study of war trauma was not systematic until after the Vietnam War. By the mid-1970s, a great number of informal rap groups, where veterans can retell their traumatic experiences in the war, had been organized to give relief to psychologically traumatic veterans and to arouse public awareness about the influence of war. After that, psychological trauma was recognized as an inevitable legacy of war and received official attention. In 1980, for the first time, the American Psychiatric Association officially recognized the shell shock as a new kind of mental disorder and called it "post-traumatic stress disorder".

1.3.3 The Third Stage—Contemporary Trauma Theory

The contemporary study of trauma turned to the ethnic, gender and cultural implications of trauma and the vulnerable groups such as women, children, minorities and black community have become the research objects. Many prominent figures including Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, Kai T. Erison and Jeffrey C. Alexander have made great contributions to the development of contemporary trauma theory. Works like Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* and Alexander's *Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma* all offered new perspectives to understand trauma. Contemporary trauma theory has two main characteristics: one is the research objects shifting from the individual traumatic experiences to collective ones, the other is the research area of trauma spreading to other fields like literature, culture, history and philosophy.

Cathy Caruth first mentions the term "trauma" in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* and she also gives trauma a general definition that it "describes an

overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon” (Caruth, 1996: 11). This definition manifests that the study of trauma is universally acknowledged as a scientific theory.

Kai T. Erison introduces the term “collective trauma”, which means the bond attaching people together is damaged, causing the loss of sense of belonging. Not as sudden as individual trauma, it has profound influences on a group of people, and even on the whole society. People find that the part of self-identity which has developed in and is connected with the community is gradually lost.

Jeffrey C. Alexander puts forward “cultural trauma” for the first time. As far as he is concerned, “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004: 1). He also points out that the most effective way to recover from trauma is to feel safety in the surroundings and gain inner peace in the self.

Judith Lewis Herman, known for her research on incest and complex post-traumatic stress disorder, is Professor of clinical psychiatry at Harvard University Medical School and Director of Training at Victims of Violence Program at the Cambridge Health Alliance. She is also a founding member of the Women’s Mental Health Collective. In addition, she was named as a Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association in 2003. She made great contributions to the understanding of trauma and the development of contemporary trauma theory. Her second book, *Trauma and Recovery: the aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*, was universally acknowledged as a classic of trauma study. And it was considered as “one of the most important psychiatric works to be published since Freud” (Herman, 1997) by *New York Times*. In this book, Herman first introduced the development history of trauma theory, then described the symptoms of the traumatic individual or group, analyzed the reasons for their trauma and finally put forward three stages of recovery. She conducted her research not only on combat veterans and victims of political terror, but also on women and children suffering from sexual and domestic violence and at the same time, she stressed the importance of understanding and analyzing the individual traumatic experience in a social context.

Correspondent with Bride’s traumatic symptoms and recovery stages in *God Help the Child*, Judith Herman’s trauma and recovery theory will be employed in this thesis. So the essence of this theory—the symptoms of traumatic disorders and three stages of recovery—will be introduced in detail. Herman classifies the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder into three main sorts: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. “Hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender” (Herman, 1997:

35). She also brings forward a three-stage recovery: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life.

As for the traumatic symptoms, hyperarousal is the first primary symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. After a traumatic experience, the person's autonomic nervous system seems to be chronically aroused, which leads to continuous physiological arousal. He keeps permanently alert for the return of danger. Even a small provocation, which is connected with the traumatic event to some extent, can make him startle easily, react irritably and suffer from sleep disturbance during the night.

After the danger is past, for a long time, the traumatized people cannot resume the normal lives, for the trauma continually intrudes on their lives. This is the second primary symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, intrusion. They relive the traumatic moment not only in their memories but also in their actions, as if it were repeatedly occurring in the present. On one hand, the traumatic memories, which always lack verbal narrative and context and often consist of fragments of the traumatic event, intrude into the consciousness of the traumatized as flashbacks in waking states and as nightmares during sleep. Small, seemingly negligible environmental stimulus can arouse these memories, which often come back with all the vivid images and emotional intensity of the original traumatic event. Thus, even safe and secure environments may make them feel dangerous. On the other hand, the repetitive reliving of the traumatic experience makes traumatized people behave abnormally. They often feel forced to reenact the traumatic scenes in disguised forms, which may bring further harm to themselves.

Since reliving the traumatic moment causes such strong emotional distress, the traumatized person will strive to avoid it as much as possible. However, the effort to get rid of intrusive symptoms often results in the alterations of consciousness, which are at the heart of constriction—the third primary symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. When a person finds himself completely powerless to resist the danger, he will give up all initiative and struggle and alter his state of consciousness to escape from the situation. His perceptions may become numbed with the loss of particular sensations and his feelings become indifferent, emotionally detached, and passive. Traumatic events continue to reoccur in his awareness, but it is as though they were not happening to him, or as though the whole experience were a nightmare from which he would soon wake up. This altered state of consciousness might be regarded as the traumatized people's protection against unbearable terror, rage, and pain.

Herman believes that "helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery" (Herman, 1997: 197). Hence, she states that recovery unfolds in three stages: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life. To establish safety, the traumatized person needs to control both the body and the environment. In the state of hyperarousal, it seems that danger may return at any time, so the victim needs

to care basic health needs, live a regular life, manage post-traumatic symptoms and avoid self-destructive behaviors to control her body. What's more, it is also necessary for her to control her living environment by establishing a safe living space, possessing secure money, obtaining social supports, and developing a self-protection plan.

Only by restoring the control of the body and environment can the traumatized person get a sense of safety and step into the second stage of recovery, telling the trauma story and mourning the loss. In order to restore a sense of continuity of the traumatic event with the past life, the traumatized person is encouraged to retell the traumatic events, including her response to the event and the responses of the important people in her life. By this kind of retelling, she gives a new meaning to the traumatic experience and regains the lost world. Trauma inevitably brings psychological or physical loss, so retelling the traumatic story will certainly cause great grief to the traumatized. At this moment, mourning the traumatic loss becomes a necessity, which can help the survivor get new hope and energy for life. When she realizes the trauma truly belongs to the past life, the second stage of recovery comes to an end.

At this point, she faces the new tasks in the third stage of recovery—rebuilding the present life and creating a future. By taking control of the reliving traumatic experiences consciously, the survivor learns to fight against danger. She takes courage to move out of the traumatic shadows and create a new self. Now, she, not her traumatic past, has herself. Besides, traumatic events destroy the connection between individual and community, so by connecting with others, the group can give affirms to the survivor and restore her humanity, and she can once again find a sense of trust and belonging, and begin to create a new identity.

In brief, Judith Herman's trauma and recovery theory has great academic and practical significance, and offers a new perspective for the analysis of the protagonist Bride's trauma in *God Help the Child*.

Chapter 2 Bride's Traumas

In *God Help the Child*, the protagonist Bride goes through a series of traumas. Superficially, she suffers the estrangement from her parents, the rejection from the community and the abandonment from her lover. But deeply these traumas result from two kinds of collective trauma: racial discrimination and sexual violence. Although born in Post-Civil-Rights era, in her childhood Bride doesn't get any love and care from her parents whose concepts are greatly influenced and distorted by racial discrimination. At the same time, she is rejected and alienated by the community. In addition, because she hides the truth about sexual violence, she is also abandoned by her lover. In a word, both childhood trauma and cultural trauma push Bride into the helpless abyss.

2.1 Individual Trauma

2.1.1 Estrangement from Parents

In *God Help the Child*, Bride's blue-black skin has great impact on her family relationships. Although she was born in Post-Civil-Rights era, the thoughts of her parents and grandparents are deeply influenced by racial discrimination. The deeply-rooted concept of self-color discrimination has seriously distorted their minds, which makes them disgust their immediate families. Therefore, since she was born, she has suffered the abandonment from her father and estrangement from her mother.

On one hand, her father Louis discarded her. As both of her parents were light-skinned, namely, high yellow, Bride's blue-black skin made her father doubt that she was not his daughter. He blamed his wife and treated Bride "like she was a stranger—more than that, an enemy" (Morrison, 2015: 5), and "never touched her" (5) the moment he saw the newborn baby. What's worse, when Bride's mother argued that Bride's blackness must be from his own family, in great rage he ran away from home and abandoned them, which suddenly made the mother and daughter's life very hard. First, they had to look for a cheaper living place. In the 1990s, although Civil Rights Act of 1964—the law against racial discrimination—had already been enacted for many years in the United States, still many people did not pay attention to it. For this reason, it surely took Sweetness plenty of time and energy to find a suitable one. Second, for a long time, they had to face the mean welfare clerks and count on welfare to support their life. Louis' irresponsible behaviour deeply hurt Sweetness and Bride. While he regretted later, he just sent them fifty dollars every month and never came back to their sides. The money indeed relieved their life burden, but didn't fill the emptiness in their spirits. For little Bride, she never knew what father's love was. Her father's abandonment caused great trauma to her heart. The pain was so acute that she never mentioned or talked about her father as if he hadn't existed.

On the other hand, her mother Sweetness always kept her at a distance. The first time

Sweetness saw Bride's terrible skin color in the maternity ward, she felt embarrassed. Then for a minute she got mad "because once—just for a few seconds—she held a blanket over her face and pressed" (Morrison, 2015: 5). She thought of giving her away to someplace like an orphanage, but the conscience as a mother didn't allow her to. And nursing little Bride with her teat was difficult for her to accept, so soon after she arrived at home, she turned to bottle-feeding instead of breast-feeding. When she had to bathe little Bride, she just rubbed her halfheartedly and rinsed her quickly. For Sweetness, Bride's skin color not only broke her marriage into pieces but also made her feel humiliated, so "she never attended parent-teacher meetings or volleyball games" (35). Besides, she was very strict with Bride. Regarding Bride's skin color as a cross the poor girl would carry for the whole lifetime, she brought her up in a careful manner. However, she was too careful that she even deprived little Bride of her right to call her "Mother" or "Mama". And she always made Bride "learn how to behave, how to keep her head down and not to make trouble" (7). For little Bride, "mother" was the most familiar stranger to her. Although they lived together, she can always feel Mother's distaste and indifference, which greatly traumatized her.

Living in a single family, Bride can't feel any fatherly love, and all her mother gives her is indifference and estrangement. Maybe what traumatizes Bride most is that her own parents discriminate against her and avoid touching her ebony-skin. There is no doubt that her parents have brought great harm to Bride's little heart.

2.1.2 Rejection from the Community

At home, Bride was not loved or cared by her parents. In addition, she was also rejected by the community. The landlord unfairly treated her and her mother, the drugstore owner ignored her and the students at her school ridiculed her.

In her childhood, Bride and her mother lived in a mixed neighborhood, which meant it was safe to them. The landlord Mr. Leigh, a white man, treated them unequally and sternly. He raised the rent seven dollars above what he advertised, and charged a late fee if they paid the money a minute later. However, they thought it acceptable and regarded Mr. Leigh as one of the kindest men. At the age of six, Bride saw Mr. Leigh sexually assault a little boy. The nasty scene frightened her, so she didn't notice Mr. Leigh had seen her. And the curse words "nigger" "cunt" (Morrison, 2015: 57) from Mr. Leigh hurt her badly. She was too little to get the meaning of these words but the hatred and revulsion in them she can feel. As she told Sweetness what she saw, to Bride's surprise, Sweetness did not sympathize the little boy at all, but was angry with her about spreading the story. Until she grew up, she finally understood that standing up to Mr. Leigh meant being driven away from the house, or the community. For a single mother with an ebony-skinned girl, finding another safe apartment was rather hard. So when faced with the choices between revealing the evil deeds and keeping a living place, Sweetness chose the latter and asked Bride to keep mute without hesitation. However, both

the scared scene and the curse words did great harm to little Bride. What's worse, her mother didn't give her any comfort but blamed her. It was impossible for a six-year-old child to bear this trauma, and even when Bride grew up, the trauma still existed.

The drugstore owner always turned his mouth down to Bride. No matter what she wanted to buy at the drugstore, the owner just thought of her as air and ignored her existence. Bride did nothing bad, but only because of her dark skin, some people like the drugstore owner disliked her and stayed away from her. This undoubtedly caused trauma to Bride.

At school, the students not only abused Bride "Coon. Topsy. Clinkertop. Sambo. Ooga booga" (Morrison, 2015: 56), hissed or shouted, but also made fun of her, treating her like a freak or an ape. Afraid of being suspended or even expelled, She didn't complain to the teacher, and just "let the name calling, the bullying travel like poison, like lethal viruses through my veins, with no antibiotic available" (57). The aesthetic of "the white is beautiful, while the black is ugly" has subtly influenced American young generations. It was no wonder that the skin color was one of the standards according to which they made friends. Bride's dark skin determined her unpopularity at school. For the same reason, she was despised by others and excluded from the whole school. What Bride did with this unfriendly situation was to keep her head bent and remain silent. She was too little and fragile to strive for her dignity.

2.1.3 Abandonment from Her Lover

When Bride grew up, she met her true lover and with him as her emotional anchor, she tried to get rid of her childhood traumas. But beyond her expectation, her lover deserted her, which further scarred her life.

With the cultural turn in the late 20th century, African culture arouses the interest of many scholars and intellectuals and it plays a more significant role in advanced societies. Dark skin has become very popular in modern society, so Bride's ebony skin became an advantage. Soon she got great success in a cosmetic business and became a regional manager. Meanwhile, her unique beauty attracted many men to pursue her. Lacking in love and care, she got on with some of them. Until she met Booker Starbern, who, Bride thought, was one gorgeous and flawless man, she felt she found true love. He can give her love, care and especially a feeling of safety. In this comfortable relationship, Bride trusted him and was willing to confide to him all her fear, hurt and accomplishment, no matter how small they were, and she did tell him some of her childhood traumas, such as her mother's indifference to her because of her skin color and the landlord's sexual abuse to the little boy. And she can always get relief from their talks. To some extent, she "felt curried, safe, owned" (Morrison, 2015: 56).

However, Bride didn't know anything about her lover's past life, which finally led to their breakup. The traumatic event that Booker's favorite brother encountered sexual assault and was killed in his childhood made Booker's character change a lot. He became taciturn and

lack of trust in people around him. Even though he loved Bride, he never told her about his childhood trauma and what he hated most was those sexual offenders. So when Bride intended to make restitution to Sophia Huxley, who was a sexual violence criminal in people's eyes, Booker was furious and left her.

Actually, Bride also held back the truth that she didn't witness Sofia Huxley to do the dirty thing. It was her false testimony that put the innocent white teacher into prison. She lied just to win her mother's love and care. This matter had left Bride in torment and guilt for over a decade. Therefore, she wanted to make up for her mistake on Sofia Huxley's release day. Unfortunately, this behavior was just misunderstood, and as a result, she was abandoned by Booker. Suddenly losing her true lover was hard for Bride to accept, which made Bride sink into great grief. And the six words "You not the woman I want" (Morrison, 2015: 8) said by her loved guy hurt her heart deeply.

2.2 Collective Trauma

In depth, what Bride suffers in her childhood and adulthood can be attributed to the following two collective traumas. Firstly, born in the late twentieth century and growing up in the post-racial and post-Black era, Bride still suffers the pain and trauma from racial discrimination. The legacy of slavery still influences her physical life and psychological mind. Besides, other problems prevalent in America such as sexual violence and interpersonal alienation are also challenging her physical and mental health.

2.2.1 Trauma from Racial Discrimination

America's racial discrimination has a long history, especially the discrimination against the black. With the Black Codes and the slavery abolished, and with a series of civil rights law enacted, the political and social status of African Americans has improved. However, invisible racial discrimination is still rampant and the racial conflicts often happen. During the Vietnam War, black soldiers and white soldiers were divided into different ranks and the majority of soldiers fighting in the front were black. In the 1960s, the black must give seats to the white on the buses. In the 1990s, millions of blacks paraded in Washington to vent their anger and show the unity of blacks. Today, the black still don't share the equal rights and fair treatments with the white in many aspects "such as education, employment, average wage and housing searches" (Pager, 2008: 187). Racial discrimination is particularly evident in daily life and has great impact on the black people's life. Therefore, as a marginalized group, African Americans have to tolerate the traumatic memory of slavery and suffer the trauma from racial discrimination; of course, as a member of the black community, one cannot avoid the suffering of this great trauma. Actually, in *God Help the Child*, in a deep sense, it is the racial discrimination that results in Bride's suffering exclusion from the community and alienation from her parents.

Although Civil Rights Act has been enacted for many years in America, the racial discrimination still exists in many white people's minds. They disregard the law and unfairly treat the black people in everyday life. Moreover, their behaviour also unconsciously influences the ideas and concepts of the next generation. In the US, it has been found that "about one in five blacks" has experienced "discrimination in housing searches" (Pager, 2008: 189). In *God Help the Child*, considering that Bride and her mother were blacks, the landlord raised the rent above what he had advertised before, and charged more even if they paid the fee a minute later. The white discrimination against the black is also reflected in many other aspects. The drugstore owner, on seeing Bride, refused to provide medical and health care for her. Even when Bride received education at school, she had to tolerate the insults and contempt from her schoolmates. The discrimination from the white is like a burden that is too heavy for a little girl to bear and definitely causes unbearable trauma to Bride.

Deeply influenced by racial discrimination, African Americans' self-consciousness is severely damaged. They lose the sense of common identity and regard their own race as a flawed and inferior group. Some of them spare no effort to move out of their traumatic past, only to find racial discrimination growing among the black community itself. Obviously, in *God Help the Child*, the deep reason why Bride is abandoned by her father and estranged by her mother is that all her families are deeply traumatized by racial discrimination. Sweetness' grandmother, whose skin color was very close to the white, was proud of her light color, and felt ashamed to talk with or contact with her children. She "never said another word to any one of her children" (Morrison, 2015: 3) and sent right back the letters from her children. Finally, all her children lost touch with her. Sweetness's parents' skin color was also so light that in many places, they could pass themselves off and shared the equal rights and treatment with the white. They could try on shoes in the front of the shoe store like all the white people without going into the back room reserved only for the black. They took pride in their light color and refused to do anything that destroyed their superiority over other dark-skinned people. Even if they were extremely thirsty, they were unwilling to drink from a "colored only" fountain. However, unfortunately, swearing an oath on their wedding day made them suffer discrimination, because in the courthouse, there were two Bibles, one for the white people, the other for the Negroes. Living in such a family environment, Bride's mother Sweetness undoubtedly discriminated against the dark-skinned people, even if that person was her own daughter. Like Sweetness, Bride's father Louis despised and loathed the newborn baby as well. All Bride's family members advocated the aesthetic of the white society—"white is beautiful, black is ugly", and believed "the lighter, the better", so Bride's black-blue skin doomed her to suffer discrimination from her own family. The concept of discrimination against their own race has been passed on from one generation to another, and it is so deeply-rooted in African Americans' minds that getting rid of the trauma resulted from racial discrimination becomes more difficult.

2.2.2 Trauma from Sexual Violence

Sexual violence against children is a common phenomenon in every country all over the world. It is considered to be one of the most traumatic and most common children rights violations. According to a 2014 UNICEF report, one in three girls and one out of seven boys have experienced sexual abuse during their childhoods. It can be perpetrated by parents, acquaintances and strangers, as well as intimate partners. What the sexual violence brings is far more than physical trauma. Physical trauma can be cured through treatment, but the psychological trauma may be permanent. WHO noted that among the adults who have experienced sexual violence in their childhoods, 6 percent of them develop symptoms of depression, 12 percent have abused alcohol and drugs, 8 percent have suicidal intentions, 10 percent suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders.

In *God Help the Child*, Bride's growth is associated with many children's sexual abuse experiences. Many characters, especially those who have close relationships with Bride, have experienced or witnessed child abuse, which bring great trauma to themselves and then affect their interpersonal relationships. Bride's boyfriend Booker, whose dear elder brother was sexually assaulted and killed in his childhood, suffered great depression and pain. Although the murderer was arrested later, he lost trust in people and became isolated and never told his trauma to others, even to Bride. This led to misunderstanding between him and Bride. Bride's only friend Brooklyn was abused by her uncle in her childhood, and Bride's savior Rain was forced to be a prostitute when she was a little girl. Their trauma caused by sexual violence humiliated them and made them lack trust in this society, so both of them had few friends. Even though Bride didn't experience sexual violence in her childhood, the witness of her landlord's sexually assaulting a little boy terrified her, which made her realize they were living in an unsafe environment. Even when she grew up and talked this horrified event to her reliable boyfriend, it was hard for her to hide her inner anxiety and fear of the society.

Children are the most vulnerable groups in this society. When they get abused physically or mentally, they have no ability to resist against this violence. To make things worse, if the sexual violence is perpetrated by the intimate people around them, they will have no sense of safety in life and lose trust in people. All in all, the psychological trauma caused by sexual violence in the childhood will affect the victims' normal life and their connection with the society.

Chapter 3 Bride's Traumatic Symptoms

Judith Herman holds the view that when the traumatic event overwhelms human self-defense system, human physiological arousal, emotion, cognition and memory will be profoundly influenced and greatly changed. The victims of trauma usually display many traumatic symptoms including anxiety, fear, a sense of helplessness and isolation and so on. They always fix on their traumatic memories, and some of them may be unwilling to reestablish the connection with the outside world. Most of them are not able to achieve a self-integration and face a self-identity crisis. In *God Help the Child*, the protagonist Bride experiences a series of traumatic events in her childhood and adulthood, and her self-protection system is dramatically destroyed. Thus she displays many traumatic symptoms: a sense of helplessness and isolation, the fixation on her traumatic memories from time to time, and a self-identity crisis.

3.1 Sense of Helplessness and Isolation

“Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma” (Herman, 1997: 197). When traumatized people are experiencing serious trauma, most of them try to be insensitive and numb so as to escape from the overwhelming danger and fear. In Bride's childhood, when confronting the racial discrimination and violence from the white people and light-skinned African Americans including her parents, the little Bride always chooses to be silent and unconcerned, which reveals the fear, and the sense of helplessness and isolation in her little heart. In her adulthood, when she is abandoned by her lover, a series of changes in her body also reflect her helplessness and fear.

Growing up in a single family, Bride always feels a sense of helplessness and isolation. Because of her dark skin, her father deserted her and her mother alienated her in many ways. She tried to do something to change this situation, but her effort was in vain. In order to make Sweetness touch her, she sometimes made some mistakes deliberately to let Sweetness blame her like slapping her face or hitting her, but to her disappointment, Sweetness always found other ways to punish her. Bride's abnormal thoughts and attempts not only reflect her longing for care and love, but also show her isolation and anxiety. Another case is that when Bride told Sweetness the incident that the landlord abused a little boy, she didn't get any comfort and concern from her mother. Instead, Sweetness was angry at her for spreading the matter. As a child, everyone expects that their parents will endeavor to protect themselves from harm. But for the little Bride, she gets no parental love and protection in her family, which naturally brings about her loneliness and helplessness.

Both at school and in the community, Bride suffers great trauma from the racial discrimination, and the trauma makes her reflect the traumatic symptoms of helplessness and

isolation. At school, Bride was always ridiculed and abused by her schoolmates, but as time went by, she was used to non-resistance and keeping silent. They always nicknamed her, and treated her like a monkey or a strange person. However, Bride never asked the teacher for help and “let the name calling, the bullying travel like poison, like lethal viruses through my veins” (Morrison, 2015: 57), because she was afraid of being expelled from school and losing the chance to receive education as other children did. Under such circumstances, Bride was too little to find a way to fight back, so she had no choice but to flee from all the humiliation and offensive conducts and endure all the traumatic events alone. And in the community, no matter when the drugstore owner saw Bride, he always pretended not to notice her existence. When confronted with the racial discrimination from these people, Bride behaved carefully and quietly, and bent her head down as if she had done something wrong, all of which showed her inner fear, helplessness, and isolation.

In Bride's adulthood, although Bride's physical life improves a lot, from time to time she feels a sense of helplessness and isolation. When the white teacher Sofia Huxley was released from the prison, Bride, out of guilt, wanted to make compensation for her. She gave five thousand dollars and the airline gift certificate to Sofia so that the latter could start a new life. But after Sofia knew Bride was that black girl Lula Ann Bridewell who had sent her into the prison, Sofia began beating her fiercely. At this moment, Bride “reverted to the Lula Ann who never fought” (Morrison, 2015: 32), lying there without making any sound or movement. She had no power to resist against the violence, and she even didn't make efforts to protect herself. Her reaction demonstrates that the fear and hopelessness in her inner world have never diminished.

After she broke up with her boyfriend, she found that a series of magical changes had happened to her body: her pubic hair had all gone, the ear holes had disappeared, the chest had become flat, and the body had shrunk. It seemed as if she had come back to be a little girl once more. In fact, the abandonment and distaste from her true lover make Bride suddenly feel that no one in this world loves her and her life seems empty and meaningless. Her peculiar transformations can be read as a displaced physical expression of her psychic distress and helplessness, and a response to her traumatic past.

3.2 Fixation on Traumatic Memories

Just as Bride says, “memory is the worst thing about healing” (Morrison, 2015: 29). When Bride grows up, she changes her name and restarts her new life. However, the traumatic memories repeatedly relive in her mind and are so hard to get rid of that she “cannot resume the normal course of her life” (Herman, 1997: 37), and any “small, seemingly insignificant reminders” can “evoke these memories” (37).

The traumatic memories of the childhood always break spontaneously into Bride's consciousness as flashbacks. The vivid scene that the landlord, Mr. Leigh, sexually assaulted

the white boy often occurred in her mind. She didn't know how to describe the boy's facial expression and the landlord's nasty behaviour. Every time she recalled this scene, she trembled and felt very scared. What's worse, when she remembered her mother's reaction to this matter, she was bitterly disappointed and painful. As she told Sweetness the truth, instead of getting comfort from her mother, she was immediately ordered to keep silent. In order to keep their apartment, Sweetness didn't allow her to expose Mr. Leigh's evil or confide her fear to others, so she had to suppress her emotion. Nevertheless, when Bride grew up, she often found that the traumatic memory of this matter always intruded into her consciousness and influenced her mind and life.

Sophia's release from the prison reminds Bride of a painful traumatic event in her childhood again. The court sight that turned Sofia Huxley into 0071140 appears before Bride's eyes. Although she was only eight years old, she was bold enough to be eyewitness and point to Sophia, who was accused of child sexual abuse. Her brave action not only won Sweetness's care and love, but also got other people's praise and attention. For the first time, Sweetness smiled at her and held her hand, and other parents touched her and gave her thumbs-up. All these changes surprised her as well as pleased her. But in her inner heart, she always felt guilty and ashamed about what she did in court, because in order to get maternal love and care, she made a false charge against the innocent white teacher Sophia. She never told the fact to anybody, for she didn't want others to know her childhood trauma that her mother didn't love and care her at all. But the lie cannot conceal the fact and Bride's trauma. Every time she remembers Sophia, the traumatic memory emerges.

"What you do to children matters. And they might never forget" (Morrison, 2015: 43). Although Bride has won her mother's love and care since Sophia's case, the traumatic events in her miserable childhood, when she was alienated from her parents and rejected by the community, repeat themselves in her mind again and again. Each time she relived her traumatic childhood, she felt extremely depressed. She remembered that Sweetness' face was full of distaste whenever Sweetness had to touch her dark-blue skin, and she screamed each time she stumbled or dropped something. Perhaps for this reason, when Bride grew up, she lived alone and seldom saw Sweetness. Even though she wrote to her mother, she only referred to "Sweetness" as "S". She could not forget the bullies from her schoolmates either, so she was very sensitive to the words "nigger girl".

After Bride was abandoned by her lover, there was no one to whom she can pour out her psychological trauma. So she completely fell into the memories of past traumatic events, which had a great impact on her daily life and her work. Apart from recalling the past traumatic event, over and over again she also thought about everything about Booker and his hurting words when they split. She tried her best to avoid these memories and sought solace in drugs, drinking and sex, only to find that her effort was in vain and her traumatic symptoms were further aggravated.

What's worse, since Bride's leg was broken in the car accident, she had to stay in the white couple's primitive house where there was no television and no radio for about five weeks, waiting for her leg to heal. Without physical activities, she couldn't find ways to distract her attention from the traumatic memories and once again she sank into her past.

3.3 Self-identity Crisis

Traumatic events “shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others” (Herman, 1997: 51). After experiencing trauma, the victim often shows the symptom of the loss of self-identity. Their basic assumptions about the security of the world and the positive self-value are destroyed, and their attachments to others are also damaged. In *God Help the Child*, Bride's traumatic experiences result in the destruction of her self-certainty, which makes her face a self-identity crisis.

Bride's symptom of self-identity crisis is mainly shown in four aspects: the loss of a secure sense of connection with others, the loss of her self-value, the loss of her womanhood and the loss of her Afro-American identity. Firstly, “A secure sense of connection with caring people is the foundation of personality development” (Herman, 1997: 52). In Bride's childhood, the abandonment from her father and alienation from her mother often made her feel completely lonely in the inner world. Without parents' care and protection, the safe sense of connection was broken and then Bride lost her basic sense of self. She seldom believed in people around her, and a sense of estrangement pervaded her every interpersonal relationship when she grew up. Even if her mother cared her more or less later, Bride seldom wrote to her and never saw her. She only had one good friend, but in fact she didn't trust her completely. She made many boyfriends, who either wanted to have sex with her or liked her money, so Bride's life with them was just like “Diet Coke—deceptively sweet minus nutrition” (Morrison, 2015: 36). When she met her true lover Booker Starbern, she still did not dare to tell him all her trauma. After she was hit by Sofia, many people saw her, but Bride regarded others' greetings and care as hypocrisy. In brief, after her secure sense of connection with caring people was damaged, her basic sense of self was lost and her interpersonal relations were messed up.

Secondly, the traumatic events also make Bride lose her self-value. Bride's positive self depends on her mother Sweetness' “benign use of power” (Herman, 1997: 52). In Bride's childhood, Sweetness was too powerful and didn't care about Bride's individuality at all. No matter what happened to the little child, Sweetness ignored right and wrong and asked Bride to bend her head and keep silent, so Bride didn't develop her self-esteem or autonomy. Witnessing the suffering of the little white boy but not exposing the landlord's evil deeds made Bride feel really guilty and inferior. When she was humiliated and bullied by others but cannot fight back, she didn't feel respected and further recognized her incompetence. Through others' eyes, she realized that she was valueless and inferior, so in order to prove her

self-value, she endeavored to get her mother and other people's approval even if it meant she should give false testimony and send the innocent white teacher Sophia into prison. But sadly, totally depending on others' evaluation has already made her lose her sense of self.

Thirdly, the abandonment by her lover also makes Bride lose her womanhood. When they broke up, the six words "You not the woman I want" (Morrison, 2015: 8) said by Booker hit Bride "harder than a fist" (10). These words were so destructive that they denied Bride's womanhood. Bride made great efforts to become a successful entrepreneur, but her lover's rejection turned her back into that poor girl and even the current rich material life cannot provide a shelter for her traumatic soul. Having lost the identity of a woman, Bride felt scared and helpless, which was mirrored by her physical regression.

Finally, the dark blue skin gives Bride a special racial stamp, but the trauma from racial discrimination makes her gradually lose her racial identity and unconsciously identify herself based on white people's aesthetic standard. She looked down upon herself, loathed herself, and always felt ashamed of being a 'nigger girl'. Even when she grew up, Bride was confused about her racial identity now and then, and didn't know how to keep her integrity and maintain her African American identity.

All in all, in the aftermath of traumatic events, Bride faced a self-identity crisis. She lost not only a secure sense of engagement with others, but also her self-value. What's worse, the rejection from others in her childhood and adulthood made her lose her womanhood and her African American identity.

Chapter 4 Bride's Recovery and Reasons for Her Recovery

After experiencing traumatic events, most victims endeavor to recover from their trauma. As a result, some can work through their trauma while others cannot, which not only depends on social environment, but also lies in the love they can get from parents, friends, lovers or the community. Judith Herman puts forward three phases of recovery: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life. And she also adds that not every recovery process strictly follows these stages linearly. Based on Herman's theory of three-stage recovery and Bride's personal traumatic symptoms, this chapter will firstly discuss Bride's recovery from the following three aspects: the establishment of security, the retelling of traumatic stories and the reconstruction of self-identity, and then explore the reasons for her recovery.

4.1 Bride's Recovery from Trauma

4.1.1 The Establishment of Security

After undergoing the trauma of racial discrimination and sexual violence, Bride tries her best to recover from the trauma. Judith Herman thinks "the guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor" (1997: 159). So at the first stage of recovery, the traumatized Bride concentrates on the control of her living environment to establish her sense of security.

To get rid of her trauma, Bride needed to establish a safe living environment for herself. So when she grew up, in the first place, she moved out of the house where she had lived before with her mother, and rented her own apartment. It was in that house that Bride experienced most of her childhood trauma like her mother's estrangement and the landlord's sexual violence. Anything there may remind her of those traumatic events and make her feel depressed, so a new living space was like a safe shelter for Bride to restart her life.

In the next place, she grasped the opportunity and found a good job through her own efforts. With the cultural turn, "black is the new black" (Morrison, 2015: 33). Bride took advantage of her skin color and got a first-class job at Sylvia, Inc., a cosmetics company. Moreover, through her unremitting efforts, she became a regional manager and created the product line called YOU, GIRL. The success of the career provided Bride with a decent material life. She employed the maid and bought a beautiful Jaguar, which made her gain dignity and security.

Last but not least, she got a lot of support from her friend and her lover since she can't create a secure environment on her own. For one thing, whenever Bride was in trouble, her only true friend Brooklyn helped her out. When she was beaten half to death by Sophia, Brooklyn hurried to help her and sent her to the nearby clinic. As she saw her cratered face, Brooklyn comforted her, took care of everything at her work and let her rest at home. To some

extent, the care and greetings from her friend made Bride feel a sense of security in her inner world. For another, Bride's lover Booker always gave her a reliable and safe feeling. In his company, Bride often forgot her traumatic past and lived happily. It was his love and protection that helped Bride finally walk out of her traumatic shadow.

In a word, to establish a sense of safety, Bride actively changed her living space, and strove to get a secure job to improve her living standard; most importantly, the support and care from her friend and lover gave her great mental security.

4.1.2 The Retelling of Traumatic Stories

After establishing a sense of security, the traumatized person is encouraged to "retell the traumatic stories to integrate the traumatic memory into her past life" (Herman, 1997: 175). At the same time, she can give a new meaning to the traumatic experiences. The retelling of the trauma stories will cause great grief to the traumatized person, so mourning the traumatic loss becomes a necessity, which can help her get new hope and energy for life. In *God Help the Child*, after Bride retells her childhood trauma to her reliable listener Booker and mourns her psychological trauma, she gets great relief. As a result, she has come to terms with her traumatic past and gets renewed hope for life.

The cure of retelling the traumatic stories is so powerful that it can help the traumatized person rebuild the past and improve the present, but it usually takes a long time for the victim to find a secure listener before the retelling. Bride didn't talk about her past to anyone until she grew up and met Booker. As Bride fell in love with Booker, she deeply felt that he was that right person who can give her love, care and a sense of security. Hence, she started to confide to him her traumatic experiences. Having been buried in her inner heart for many years, the traumatic scene that the landlord Mr. Leigh sexually assaulted the white boy rose before her eyes as if she had seen it for the first time. Except for the event itself, she also retold her and her mother's response to the event. She still can't believe that it was Mr. Leigh who could do the nasty thing. When she was seen by Mr. Leigh, she was hurt badly by his abusive remarks "little nigger cunt" (Morrison, 2015: 55). What's worse, when she told her mother about what she had seen, Sweetness's furious response to the story made her feel more fearful and helpless. She felt really guilty about that white boy, for she cannot clarify the truth. After Bride finished her retelling, her emotion of the original traumatic event was so intense that she couldn't help crying. Booker held her head in his arm and comforted her tenderly. Never had she felt such relief in her life. Or more than that, she "felt curried, safe, owned" (56).

However, retelling all the trauma and mourning the loss "are ambitious work" (Herman, 1997: 176), which cannot be accomplished in a short time. Bride's retelling was interrupted for a time because she couldn't find anyone to retell her traumatic events. Bride paid little attention to Booker's life while retelling her trauma, so until Booker left her, she suddenly

realized that she knew little about him “other than our lovemaking and his complete understanding of me” (Morrison, 2015: 61). Owing to his brother's death, Booker hated those children molesters. But for Bride, she lied and perjured herself against the innocent white teacher Sophia in order that her mother would touch her and love her. Either because retelling this traumatic event would cause great depression and fear to her or because she's afraid to admit the fact of her lack of love, she never retold it to Booker. Finally Bride's behaviour of making amends caused his misunderstanding and their breakup. Losing her only reliable listener, Bride felt very helpless and painful, which cannot be articulated in any other way but was magically reflected on her body.

At last, having gone through lots of hardships and sufferings, panic-stricken Bride found Booker. In their quarrel and fight, Bride retold her sins, “I lied! I lied! I lied! She was innocent. I helped convict her but she didn't do any of that” (Morrison, 2015: 153). And Booker retold his childhood trauma, too. After mutually learning each other's secrets, they understood each other and were on good terms as before. Before long, Bride found her flawless breasts come back magically, and she “felt newly born” (162). The retelling of traumatic events and learning to confront grief were so important that they made Bride reconcile with her past traumatic experiences and regain her lost world.

Therefore, the trauma must be retold in order not to be repeated. Retelling is vital for the recovery of the traumatized. After Bride and Booker shared their traumatic stories, they faced their sorrow together and comforted each other, which helped them get rid of the shadows of traumatic memories.

4.1.3 The Reconstruction of Self-identity

As the trauma belongs to the past, it no longer presents a barrier for the traumatized person to rebuild the present life and create a bright future. At this moment, she steps into the third stage of recovery. Judith Herman thinks that the trauma destroys the old self, “now she must develop a new self” (Herman, 1992: 196). Besides, the trauma destroys the connection between individual and community, and the traumatized person shows backwardness in social activities and a lack of social skills, so “now she must develop new relationships” (196), restore her humanity, and create a new identity. In *God Help the Child*, Bride controls her reliving traumatic experiences consciously, and takes the courage to work through her trauma to develop her new self. She also reconnects with others and once again she finds a sense of trust and belonging. At last, she reconstructs her self-identity and creates a new chapter of her life.

On the one hand, to develop a new self, Bride changes her image and rebuilds her self-esteem. To some extent, the majority of Bride's trauma comes from racial discrimination. With her blue-dark skin, she suffered the abandonment of her father, the estrangement of her mother and the rejection of the community in her childhood. So when she was old enough,

she moved out and positively altered her life. Luckily, with the cultural turn, “black is the new black” (Morrison, 2015: 33), Bride’s image changed with the help of the designer. Wherever she went, she strode confidently and became the focus. Neighbors praised her black beauty and men adored her. She was remade. Besides, the new social environment provided African Americans more opportunities. Bride took the chance to get a good job, which not only offered her secure money but also helped her regain respect. And when someone hurt her self-esteem, Bride knew how to work through the trauma and fight back. As she was abandoned by her boyfriend without a clear reason, at first she relived her traumatic experiences and felt helpless, but as soon as she realized that she lost her self-esteem, she decided to move out of the traumatic shadows and regain the respect from Booker. After the long journey, Bride found him. They quarreled, fought with each other and finally cleared up the misunderstanding. In Bride’s eyes, Booker can’t have to love her, but he must respect her.

On the other hand, Bride’s traumatic events destroy the continuous connection between her and the community. Trauma isolates her, shames her, degrades her, and even dehumanizes her, while the community can recreate her sense of belonging, give her affirmation, praise her and restore her humanity. To reconstruct her self-identity, Bride has to reconnect with others and engage in a wide world.

On the way to looking for Booker, Bride had an accident. Her car crashed into a big tree and her left foot was injured. What’s worse, her cellphone was not in service. Afraid, angry, painful and helpless, Bride didn’t know whom she can ask for help. By the dawn, a milk-white girl named Rain encountered Bride, and asked her adoptive father to help her out. Maybe Bride was deeply traumatized by the racial discrimination and sexual violence, so when the white man rescued her, she thought of him as a raper or murderer and felt very terrified at first. However, during her stay at Rain’s home for about six weeks, the white couple took good care of her health and her daily life, which was out of her expectation. It was the first time that Bride had experienced such a free care, “without judgement or even a passing interest in whom she was or where she was going” (Morrison, 2015: 90). Gradually Bride trusted them and got on well with them.

Besides, with more and more control of her present life, Bride began to recognize her own powerlessness in the face of her childhood trauma, and then showed sympathy and respect for the traumatized people around her. Rain was forced to be a prostitute when she was about six years old, and when she hurt one of whoremasters, she was thrown out by her mother and lived a street life. Listening to Rain’s recounting of her traumatic past, Bride was very sympathetic to her and tried her best to help Rain fight against the fear and console the poor girl. Soon she felt they were close friends and can understand each other easily like schoolgirls. The moment Rain was bullied by some big boys, Bride even put her own self in danger to protect Rain, which made Rain very grateful to her.

By reconnecting with the community, Bride feels trust in others, gets approval from them,

and dares to deepen the relationship with others; and with young people, now she can seek mutual companionship that doesn't depend on performance or a false self.

Having arrived at her destination, Bride encountered Booker's aunt Queen Olive. Different from many people who praised Bride for her gorgeous and stunning look, Queen thought she looked like "something a raccoon found and refused to eat" (Morrison, 2015: 144), which made Bride rethink about her superficial aesthetic standard. In the next few hours with Queen, Bride learned that the union, which was not based on appearance but on love and respect, was meaningful, and she also needed to value herself and redefine her womanhood no matter what would happen to her relationship with Booker.

When Bride found Booker, the misunderstanding was cleared up. Unfortunately, it was not long before Booker's aunt Queen Olive's house caught fire and Queen was seduced into unconscious by the smoke. At that moment, Bride and Booker rescued her from the house regardless of their personal safety. As they were waiting for the ambulance, there were more and more onlookers who focused not on the moaning patient but on lovely Bride. It seemed that they were praising her. After Queen was admitted to hospital, they looked after her well as if they were of the same family. Since Queen was badly hurt, she passed away a few days later. Both Bride and Booker felt very sad. After undergoing so many things, Bride could control her traumatic experiences consciously and learned to believe in herself and rebuild her womanhood. And she was certain that she can handle her future by herself no matter whether Booker can be with her or not. When Bride told Booker that she was pregnant, to her surprise, Booker got rid of his traumatic past and decided to confront the future with her together. They made up and found a sense of belonging and trust from each other once again. Since then, both of them, not their traumatic past, have possessed themselves.

"The deepening of intimacy" with Booker makes Bride "concern for their next generation" (Herman, 1997: 206). In the past, Bride never got involved with children so as not to recollect her childhood trauma. After coming to terms with her traumatic past, for the first time she wished to bring their child into this world. Of course, she would endeavor to protect their child from hurt, insult, racism and sexual violence.

In brief, when Bride grew up, she took more initiative in her life. She actively developed her new self and rebuilt her self-esteem. Moreover, by connecting with others, she reestablished her self-identity and started a new lease of life.

4.2 Reasons for Bride's Successful Recovery

Bride was fortunate to find a way to recover from her traumas, and her successful recovery can be attributed to two aspects: new social environment and the power of love. Toni Morrison once said in an interview that the world was changing and people's ideological consciousness was growing, and that people of different times had different understandings of the same problem. Contemporary America is an open and inclusive society where racial

environment has been greatly improved. Therefore, compared with African Americans of other times, Bride was more likely to improve her physical conditions and recover from her traumas. In the interview, Morrison also emphasized the power of love in *God Help the Child*, which was another reason for Bride's successful recovery.

4.2.1 New Social Environment

After entering the 21st century, the United States is actively changing people's racial concept. The first African American President Barack Hussein Obama's election and re-election have greatly altered people's attitudes toward the racial discrimination in America, which marks great progress in African American history. Nowadays, African Americans' social status and living conditions have been improved a lot, and they get more opportunities in such aspects as education, employment and house searching.

Under the new social circumstances, the dark-blue skin, which is regarded as "the hottest commodity in the civilized world" (Morrison, 2015: 36), becomes Bride's advantage. With the help of a designer called Jeri, she is dressed only in white to highlight her black beauty, which not only helps her get the job at Sylvia, Inc., a cosmetics business, but also makes her confident. A stable salary improves her living standard and she can live in her own apartment. Neighbors and the passers-by change their views toward Bride and begin to adore her attractive appearance.

A lot of people change their attitudes to racial discrimination in the new social environment. In *God Help the Child*, many white people think Bride's dark is just a skin color, "a genetic trait—not a flaw, not a curse, not a blessing nor a sin" (Morrison, 2015: 143). Bride's boyfriend Booker relieved her when he knew Bride's traumatic experiences caused by racial discrimination. When she was caught in an accident and hurt, a white girl called Rain and her adopted parents helped her get out of the trouble and took good care of her. As Rain was surprised at Bride's dark skin, her mother told her that she was born that way. The racist ideas of the young generation are gradually changed and Bride herself starts to find her black beauty.

Although there arises some new problems in modern society, such as sexual violence against children referred to in *God Help the Child*, every country including the United States makes great efforts to solve these problems and ensure children live in a safe and harmonious environment and have a happy and fulfilled childhood. Toni Morrison's optimistic attitude toward African Americans' future life is reflected at the end of the novel. She believes that the next generation of Bride will be "immune to evil or illness, protected from kidnap, beatings, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing, abandonment. Error-free. All goodness. Minus wrath" (Morrison, 2015: 175).

So the new social environment not only provides Bride with new opportunities but also relieves Bride's childhood trauma caused by racial discrimination. While there are some new

problems in the new society, they will be well resolved as long as people and the government face up to them.

4.2.2 The Healing Power of Love

Toni Morrison always transmits the value of “love is color blind” in her works, and her latest novel *God Help the Child* is no exception. And Judith Herman thinks social support is vital for the traumatized person to recover from the trauma. So without love of her mother, her friend, her lover and the community, especially self-love, Bride cannot recover from her past traumatic events alone and begins her new life.

In Bride's childhood, maternal love has great impact on Bride's physical life and psychological mind. At first, deeply influenced by racial discrimination, Sweetness disliked Bride and often alienated from her. But after Bride boldly bore witness to the white teacher Sophia's molestation in the law-court, Sweetness changed her attitude to her and behaved like a mother. For the first time, she held Bride's hand and smiled at her with mouth and eyes. She even had Bride's ears pierced and bought a pair of tiny gold hoop earrings for her. Although Bride gets maternal love through a lie, there is no doubt that her life has gradually changed since then. Another person who provides Bride with alternative motherly love is Queen, Booker's aunt. The encounter with Queen made Bride start a new round of self-examination and begin rejecting her superficial aesthetic standard. Queen also taught her that the relationship based on looks was superficial, and only a union based on love and respect was meaningful. It is Queen's motherly figure that lets Bride learn to love herself, believe in herself and redefine her relationship with Booker.

For a long time, Bride's only true friend Brooklyn not only cares her in life but also helps her at work. Whenever she is in trouble, Brooklyn can always give her a hand. When she was hit hard by Sophia, Brooklyn hurried to help her out, comforted her, took care of everything at her work and let her rest at home. As the old saying goes, a friend in need is a friend indeed. Brooklyn is just like her sister whose care, company and love help Bride go through many difficulties in her life.

Bride's lover Booker, as her only reliable listener, plays a vital role in her recovery. With his love and care, Bride started pouring out her heart and retelling her trauma. And reliving the traumatic events often brought enormous depression to Bride, so Booker comforted her. Losing him once made Bride sink into great panic and helplessness, while finding him made her regain her new life. After knowing Bride was pregnant, he also decided to get rid of his trauma and be together with her forever. At last, he offered Bride his hand that she longed for all her life. It was “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” (Morrison, 2015: 175). Bride felt very happy and was full of hope for the future life.

The community can always give the traumatized person a sense of belonging, affirmation

and praise, so the love from others also helps Bride get recovery from trauma. After Bride changed her image, neighbors and her daughters praised her, which made Bride feel more confident. On the journey to seek Booker, when she was caught into an accident, the white couple and Rain rescued her and gave her great assistance. Their warm love let her once again believe in others and integrate into the present social life.

If Bride hadn't loved and respected herself, she would never recover from trauma. Actually, the trauma from racial discrimination made Bride hate herself. But as she changed her image and found a good job, she gradually liked her beautiful black skin and became bold and confident. When Booker abandoned her without a clear reason, she called up all her courage to find him and regain her self-esteem. With self-love and self-esteem, Bride reconstructed her self-identity and knew herself more clearly. Thus, she can start a new life.

Therefore, there are two reasons why Bride can recover from her traumatic experiences: one is the new social environment which provides African Americans with more opportunities and more safe external conditions; the other is the love of all kinds such as maternal love, sister's love, lover's love, the community's love, and most importantly, self-love, which all play important roles in the healing of Bride's trauma.

Conclusion

Based on the basic idea of trauma and Judith Herman's theory in *Trauma and Recovery*, this thesis makes a systematic study of the protagonist Bride's trauma in *God Help the Child*. It analyzes Bride's trauma on two levels, including individual trauma and collective trauma, and explores her traumatic symptoms and her stages of recovering from trauma. It also argues that it is the new social environment and the love that finally heal Bride's trauma.

From the perspective of individual trauma, Bride experienced the estrangement from her parents, the rejection from the community and the abandonment from her lover. In Bride's childhood, because of her dark-blue skin, her mother disliked her and her father abandoned her on the day when she was born. Living with her mother, she can always feel the distaste in her mother's eyes, so she didn't get any care and love from her mother except for alienation. Additionally, at school she suffered the ridicules and bullies from her schoolmates and in the neighborhood, she was rejected by the drugstore owner and other people. In her adulthood, Bride was once again abandoned by her boyfriend, whom she regarded as her true lover. All these things traumatized Bride deeply. But on a deeper level, what Bride has suffered in her childhood and adulthood resulted from two collective traumas: the trauma from racial discrimination and the trauma from sexual violence. Owing to racial discrimination, the white people and some light-skinned African Americans still despised the little Bride, and this discrimination even existed in her own family. Moreover, many American adults experienced or witnessed sexual violence in their childhoods, and Bride was no exception. The traumatic incident that she witnessed the landlord sexually assaulted the white boy terrified her. And she also took advantage of people's bitter hatred of children molesters to put the innocent white teacher into prison, which made her ashamed for over a decade.

Accordingly, Bride exhibited a series of traumatic symptoms. Her first cardinal traumatic symptom was a persistent sense of fear, helplessness and isolation. When confronting the racial discrimination and sexual violence, Bride always chose to endure silently and never fought back, which showed her fear and helplessness. Meanwhile, Bride was craving for love both as a child and an adult and this was an expression of her isolation. When she was deserted by her lover, her physical regression also reflected her fear and isolation in her inner heart. What's more, the traumatic memories always burst into Bride's consciousness as flashbacks. She tried to repress those reminiscences, but only to find she was haunted by them, which was unconsciously transformed into her second traumatic symptom—fixation on traumatic memories. Having grown up in such an abusive environment, Bride often felt her worthlessness. And since she was often denied by others, she not only lacked the social skills that were normally formed in adolescence, but also lost her identity of a woman and an African American. As a result, she withdrew from engagement with others, lost her self-value and faced a self-identity crisis.

In order to get rid of these symptoms, Bride began the journey that would lead to recovery. First of all, she endeavored to establish a sense of security by controlling her living environment. She moved out of the original house and rented a new one, and she also found a big-time job, which provided her with secure money. Of course, she cannot create a safe environment by herself, so the support and care from her only friend and her lover played important roles in this process. When she found that her lover Booker was that person who can give her a sense of security, she came to the second stage of recovery, namely, retelling her traumatic stories. Only when the trauma stories were fully integrated into her past life can Bride improve her present life. Although the process of retelling was painful, it gave Bride strength and courage to face life. The final stage of Bride's recovery was to re-establish her identity. Trauma destroyed her old self and the bonds between her and the community, so Bride developed a new self by changing her image and rebuilding her self-esteem, reconnected with others, and developed new loyalties. Finally, her self-identity was reconstructed and she started a new life. Together with peers, now she can find true friendships that are based on maintenance of her true self. With her lover and family, she wants to be closer to them.

Thanks to the new social circumstances, Bride recovers from her traumatic experiences in the end. Of course, her recovery can not be separated from different kinds of love, which is the main concept that Toni Morrison wants to convey in her novels. In the process of her recovery, she gets the love from her mother, her friends, her lover and the community, and she also learns to love herself, respect herself and believe in herself. All the love has great healing power.

Through the analysis of Bride's trauma in *God Help the Child*, it can be concluded that African American descendants have suffered great pain and distress caused by their traumatic experiences, and only if they face up to their own race and learn to love, respect and trust themselves first can they survive and develop in the contemporary society. This thesis not only draws the public attention to such problems as racial discrimination, sexual violence and interpersonal barriers that many African Americans face in modern America, but also offers some feasible ways for the traumatized to recover from their trauma. Besides, it offers a new angle to analyze trauma novels.

However, there are limitations in this thesis. The novel *God Help the Child* was published on April 30th, 2015 and there are relatively limited studies on the novel that the author can refer to. And the research methods of this thesis are mainly based on a close reading of the text. Therefore, some examples may not be cited appropriately and the analysis may not be thorough enough. In addition, due to the author's limited time and energy, this thesis is restricted to the discussion of the protagonist Bride's trauma and recovery. But actually many characters in the novel have traumatic experiences and some of them have recovered from their trauma, so the trauma theme in *God Help the Child* can be further

studied in the future.

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