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**Child Trauma in American Postmodern Literature.
The Case of Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*: A
Psychoanalytic Approach**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation work solely to my parents, siblings, nieces and nephew. No words written on paper can adequately express my gratitude and love for you all. I am so delighted to be the first member of our family graduating with a Master's degree.

To my beloved mother Fatiha whose constant reassurance and motivation for tenacity still reverberate in my ears. You instilled in me that to Allah nothing is impossible and that no mountain is too high to climb. You are God's gift to me and I am tremendously appreciative of all your unconditional love and never-ending sacrifices.

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Abstract

The current study examines Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* wherein she portrays childhood traumas endured by the characters in a society corrupted by racial prejudice through a unique narrative. Hence, the research aims to trace each of those traumas and the recovery process through various events presented across the storyline of the novel. This research utilizes the descriptive and analytical method based primarily on a psychoanalytic approach and trauma theory to evaluate the innate desires and traumatic experiences of the writer as well as her characters psychoanalytically. The dissertation is partitioned into three chapters; the first chapter provides an overview of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical literary criticism. The second chapter covers the main points about trauma theory and literary trauma theory. The third and last chapter describes the focal points about Morrison and her last work; it also unveils the childhood trauma and recovery of the main characters Lula Ann/Bride and Booker Starbern. By approaching Toni Morrison's biography and her novel *God Help the Child* from a psychoanalytical perspective, the findings clarify that the characters of the novel are a reflection of the author's life and a mirror of the American society. It also evidences the valuable role of psychoanalysis in understanding the psychology of Morrison and the personages in American Postmodern Literature generally and the novel particularly. Moreover, the research asserts Toni Morrison's ability to portray the characters' child traumas and their routes towards rehabilitation.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child*, Child trauma, American Postmodern Literature, Psychoanalytic approach.

List of Abbreviations

APA: American Psychiatric Association

PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

PTSS: Post Traumatic Slaves Syndrome.

WWI: World War I

WWII: World War II

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General Introduction

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to
abuse one

– Mitchell Garabedian, *Spotlight*

1. Background of the Study

From ancient Greek philosophy, literature has addressed the writer's intentions, overall influence of fiction on audiences and the interrelationship between the conscious and unconscious mind. Sigmund Freud initiated a psychoanalytic theory in 1896 and collaborated alongside his adherents, including Jacques Lacan, Alfred Adler, and Julia Kristeva to evolve its principles. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, psychoanalysis explored chiefly the complexities of human psychology, treated mental dysfunction and analyzed various case studies of psychological trauma such as hysteria and shell shock disorder.

Years of comprehensive research contributed in the development of Freud's Ego (the conscious side of the human brain) and Id (the unconscious side of the human brain), which fundamentally altered psychoanalysis. Consequently, psychoanalysts grew interested in education, cognitive therapy, literary criticism, child development and trauma's negative interference with the psyche.

Psychoanalytic concepts underpin psychoanalytic literature criticism and seems to have a profound contribution to numerous facets of contemporary literary studies. Psychological literary critics consider fictional characters as a manifestation of human beings and dwell mostly on writers, literary text, and audience or readers. Overall, psychoanalytic criticism regards fiction and its characters as projections of the writer's psychology, thus critics deeply dig in to find traces of writer's trauma and repressed desires in different sections of a narrative. In this regard, postmodern American writers such as Toni Morrison began breaking the traditional literary standards and highlighted the complicated correlation with the past, paving

the way for postmodern trauma fiction wherein childhood appears as a major theme.

Toni Morrison's last novel *God Help the Child* reintroduces several of her previous themes, dwelling on colorism and childhood trauma. She portrays the individual child traumas endured by the numerous characters as well as the collective trauma of the Black community through innovative and daring trauma narrative. Correspondingly, she tends to detail the characters' recovery narrative which considers both individual and collective perspectives. In brief, trauma theory gained popularity because trauma fiction often grants a voice to the powerless and seeks to highlight trauma's impact on the characters, assisting them in their recovery.

2. Statement of the Problem

Toni Morrison is generally regarded as one of America's highly valuable authors as she is the winner of several honorable awards such as the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature. Most importantly, Morrison is recognized for her vibrant and poetic style which captures the sounds and images of African Americans.

God Help the Child, Morrison's most recent book, was among the highly anticipated novels of 2015. It is a fast read and a complicated novel with a wide range of symbols and variations of meanings loaded in its thin pages.

The novel earned split opinions upon its initial publication. A number of critics such as the American literary critic Michiko Kakutani, writing for *The New York Times* in 2015, favorably deemed "it attests to [Morrison's] ability to write intensely felt chamber pieces that inhabit a twilight world between fable and realism, and to convey the desperate yearnings of her characters for safety and love and belonging". Conversely, other critics such as the American book critic Ron Charles, writing for *The Washington Post* in 2015, viewed the novel in a negative light and stated, "[it] carries only a faint echo of that earlier novel's power". He

also claimed, “While attempting to create a kind of fable about the lingering effects of maternal neglect and racial self-hatred, Morrison ends up instead with characters who keep phasing between skimpy realism and overwrought fantasy”. Accordingly, this research paper strives to conduct further investigations on the theme of childhood trauma through the psychoanalytic lens in Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child*.

3. Aims of the Study

This research, therefore, will analyze childhood trauma and trace the psychological scars caused by such experience in the individual and collective trauma narratives. Putting more emphasis on the adverse impact of childhood trauma on forming the identities of the characters as adults and approaching their healing process through the recovery narrative.

4. Research Questions

The research intends to critically address the following central questions:

- How does psychoanalysis contribute in examining the psychological aspect of characters?
- How do Toni Morrison's characters reflect her inner unconscious desires and conflicts in the novel?
- To what degree did Toni Morrison excel in depicting the characters' childhood trauma and recovery process?

5. Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are suggested in response to the above-mentioned questions:

- Psychoanalytic theories might explore different characters unconscious and conscious minds throughout the storyline of the novel.
- Toni Morrison's characters might reflect her real experiences and desires through various events as well as their own psychological conflicts.
- Toni Morrison may have succeeded in portraying the majority of characters' childhood

traumas and recoveries via narrative.

6. Research Methodology

This dissertation implements the descriptive and analytical method, which is centered mostly on trauma theory and psychoanalytic approach, to answer the stated questions and attain the objectives of this study through data explanation and novel examination. The analysis relies heavily on the psychoanalytical investigation of the writer's writing and works as well as the description of characters' childhood trauma and recovery process.

7. Literature Review

Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* has gained a fair amount of book reviews but comparatively little critical recognition since its release in 2015. According to the most recently published works, only a few academic essays have been dedicated to Morrison's work in terms of psychoanalytical approach to trauma.

In “‘What You Do to Children Matters’: Toxic Motherhood in Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child*” (2015), Manuela López Ramírez discusses the dire consequences of racially prejudiced and oppressive parenting styles, particularly patriarchal motherhood, on the formation of black identity and sense of self in children in the novel. Similarly, in “Race, Interdependence and Healing in Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child*” (2019), Gallego argues that traumatized characters in Toni Morrison's last work are oppressed by the predominant racist culture that somehow still upholds Black people as inferior owing to the persistent consequences of slavery. In addition, both individual and collective traumatic experiences seem to be disrupting the capacity to formulate positive ways for subject development and societal efforts towards prosperity. By the same token, in one of the latest papers addressing Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*, “Racial Passing in Toni Morrison's Novel *God Help the Child*” (2021), Gurung investigates racial passing and the storylines of characters who play the

role of narrators to further share their experiences and reveal their racial identities.

Meanwhile, in “Polyphony of Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*” (2016), Zayed Jihan and Shaista Maseeh examine Morrison's novel in terms of Bakhtin's dialogism, which asserts that the novel is polyphonic or has multiple voices. They argue that the novel elucidates the voices of the characters more than Morrison's voice, enabling them to express their own realities. Likewise, Jean Wyatt analyzes Morrison's narrative forms and how they affect readers in the seventh chapter of “Love and Narrative Form in Toni Morrison's Later Novels” (2017). He maintains that *God Help the Child* is infused with a sense of urgency for the characters to move past their childhood traumas in order to proceed with the loving process. In a similar vein, in “The Secret of Bride's Body in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*” (2018), Paula Martín-Salván discusses how the novel's narrative connects the seemingly disjointed changes of Bride's body into a cohesive narrative of trauma. Additionally, she addresses how such a transformation is textually described as the site for the construction of her identity, whereby indications of an identity crisis manifest as symptoms of childhood trauma. In a similar way, Wang Liting applies trauma theory to investigate the root of Bride and Booker's childhood trauma as well as their recovery process in “An Analysis of Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* from the Perspective of Trauma Theory” (2020).

8. Structure of the Research

This dissertation is separated into three chapters. The first chapter entitled “An Introduction to Psychoanalysis” focuses on providing a theoretical framework for psychoanalysis by defining it. Moreover, it clarifies psychoanalytic literary criticism, and reports on the major pioneers of psychoanalytic theory and their core theories.

The second chapter labeled “Child trauma in American postmodern literature” presents a theoretical frame for trauma by tracking down its roots, exploring collective and individual

trauma. In addition, it provides a quick overview of PTSD, explains literary trauma theory, clarifies trauma and recovery narratives and ultimately reviews childhood trauma in American postmodern literature.

Chapter three entitled “Child Trauma in American Postmodern Literature, The Case of Toni Morrison's Novel *God Help the Child*: A Psychoanalytic Approach” is composed of two parts. The first part psychologically discusses Toni Morrison's life, lists her main works, and provides a short summary of her novel *God Help the Child*. Meanwhile, the second part analyzes the influence of childhood traumas on character's identity development and their recovery process.

CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to Psychoanalysis

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Introduction

Psychoanalysis is a therapy that focuses on the recovery from psychiatric disorders by investigating the interaction between an individual's conscious and unconscious mind. However, psychoanalytic criticism—a subset of literary criticism—centers the interpretation of literary works on psychoanalytic techniques (Barry 96).

Since Aristotle, theorists and scholars have explored the psychological facets of literature, stretching from an author's interests and motives to the impact of texts on readers. The adaptation of psychoanalytic concepts in literary analysis, on the other hand, is a relatively new concept, pioneered predominantly by Sigmund Freud and his followers Jacques Lacan, Alfred Adler, and Julia Kristeva. The concept of the “unconscious” can be seen in several theorists before Freud, noticeably in Friedrich Schlegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Psychoanalysis has a significant impact on almost every aspect of contemporary literary theory.

The primary aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical background on psychoanalysis by identifying it as a concept, tracing its origins, explaining what psychoanalytic literary criticism entails. Moreover, the chapter focuses on the major pioneers of psychoanalysis and their fundamental theories. These theories will serve as the basis of the analysis in chapter three.

1. Defining Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis, often regarded as Freudian psychology, is a collection of psychological and therapeutic theories within the field of psychotherapy, which is mostly devoted to discovering the unconscious of the laws of dream work and the instinctive drives of the self that seek to analyze systematic connections between unconscious elements of analysand's cognitive processes by tracing out associations. According to Barry: “[p]sychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorder by ‘investigating the interaction of

conscious and unconscious elements in the mind”” (96).

2. Concept Origins

Psychoanalysis was founded in the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the period between 1867 and 1918, precisely in 1896 by an Austrian neurologist named Sigmund Freud. The latter’s self-analysis and ideas about the inner human psyche led to the invention of the term “psychoanalysis” and devoted his career to fully formulate its basic concepts such as seduction theory, resistance, repression, dream interpretation, transference, counter transference and Oedipal conflict.

For twelve years, between 1885 and 1896, psychoanalysis consisted of three interconnected strands: a paradigm of psychiatric development, a series of basic psychotherapeutic techniques and a metapsychology. Hypnosis was first introduced to Sigmund Freud by a French Neurologist goes by the name of Jean Charcot who used it to treat hysterical patients. Since then, under Charcot's influence, Freud started developing his own theory of psychoanalysis as he focused his research around the examination of the numerous patients suffering from hysterical symptoms that he refers to as psychoneurotic disorders. He worked alongside a Viennese physician Josef Breuer who introduced him to Cathartic method of treatment of hysteria resulted in the release of *Studies of Hysteria*.

Around 1896 and 1939, Freud used the term “die Psychoanalyse” or psychoanalysis in three divergent aspects, first, explanation of the structure of the psyche, the growth of the personality and psychopathology; second, treatment of psychiatric difficulties; third, scientific investigation of a clinical observation called *Case Study*. Freud published three books successively, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and *Three Essays on Sexuality*, which made his theories widely known. Then followed by the publication of his essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” that introduced his notion of the death instinct. Also, the publication of his book *The Ego and the Id*, played an essential role in the

development of psychoanalysis. Other analysts also modified Freud's psychoanalysis such as Carl Jung with his Analytical psychology, Alfred Adler with his Individual psychology, Karen Horney with her Feminine psychology, Harry Stack Sullivan with his Interpersonal theory and Erik Erikson with his development theory.

In recent years, psychoanalysis has stepped away from its initial scientific context and embedded in the literary and western artistic traditions, particularly in education, childcare and literary criticism, in addition to psychotherapy.

3. Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

Literary criticism and psychoanalytical theories have shown a strong set of interactions in which “the former explicates or comments on texts which have been crafted and (usually) published. [While] The latter uses artlessly spoken texts, which are treated by the analyst as a source of information about the unconscious mind of the speaker, and used therapeutically” (Wolfreys 98). That is to say, the relationship between both fields is that the psychoanalyst attempts to interpret the author's intention through analyzing the characters' personality, behavior and unconscious psyche in the literary work. It also challenges the audience to understand how the author's repressed emotions, concerns, and inner conflicts are reflected on the style of writing.

Following all of this, psychoanalytic literary criticism can be defined as “a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature” (Barry 96). To express this in a different way, psychoanalytic theories such as the unconscious, repression, Oedipus complex, and others are used to interpret any form of literary works to shed light on the facets of literature that is related to contrasting psychological states. It suggests an extension of literary meaning beyond the text to the author's and the reader's psychology.

3.1. The History of Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

The history of psychoanalytic criticism is as old as psychoanalysis itself, although it has changed dramatically since Freud's Critique of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in 1900, Dostoevsky's novels in 1928, and the story of *Moses* in 1939. Psychoanalytic criticism's methods, founded by Freud and adopted by both psychoanalysts and non-analysts, are based on the premise that authors create narratives and characters that mirror their inner unconscious psyche (B H. Ogden and T H. Ogden 6).

Contemporary literary psychoanalysis critics tend to base their literary analysis on the assumption that literary characters represent real people; that the reader must detect and identify the unconscious psychological issues that literary characters have; and that the writer and his characters possess the same unconscious struggles (7).

Regardless of their forms, the various types of literary criticism are considered as psychoanalysis on the grounds that they either employ psychoanalytic theories to read literary work or they use literature to form psychoanalytic interpretations. Similarly, psychology in literature is clarified by what Warren and Wellek state in their book *Theory of literature*, “we may mean the psychological study of the writer, as type and as individual, or the study of the creative process, or the study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature, or, finally, the effects of literature upon its readers (audience psychology)” (56). In other words, they proclaim that the methodology of psychoanalytic criticism focuses on three dimensions: the writer, the literary work, and the readers. To illustrate more, when applying psychoanalytic criticism, the psychoanalyst must accentuate the following:

First, the writer's psychology is studied by seeing what mental elements of a writer are freed in the process of creation. In other terms, the authors' dreams, repressed desires, traumas, unconscious mind and the relationship between their neurosis and creativity are part of the analysis. Psychoanalysts “can classify the [writer] according to physiological and

psychological types; they can describe his mental ills; they may even explore his subconscious mind. The evidence of the psychologist may come from unliterary documents or it may be drawn from the works themselves” (65). In addition, the themes chosen by writers may reflect their personal traits, this idea is supported by Warren and Wellek who claim that “writers often document their own cases, turning their maladies into their thematic material” (57). According to Freud, a writer is initially a person who turns away from reality because he refuses to give up instinctual pleasure, and instead lives a life full of desires in phantasy. However, he is able to discover a path to return from this realm of phantasy to reality where he shapes his phantasies into a new reality using his sophisticated skills. Thus, he becomes the hero, king, maker, and favored he wanted to be, without causing any significant changes in the outside world (57-58). In such circumstances, only the literature which is related to suffering, repression and neurosis can be considered valid for analysis.

Second, literary work is primarily interpreted by defining the psychological traits of the literary characters that serve as metaphors. These symbols reflect the real world and convey the essence of existence. In addition, “[t]he simplest form of characterization is naming. Each “appellation” is a kind of vivifying, animizing, individuating” (190). That is to say, naming allows the writer to create an illusion of reality. In this regard, Warren and Wellek state, “[p]eople may model their lives upon the patterns of fictional heroes and heroines” (75). This suggests that readers will identify with these protagonists and consider them as actual people. As a result, characterization in fiction should be stressed and considered as an important factor in decoding authors' implicit psyche and describing aspects of their phantasy.

Third, the last dimension is the study of audience psychology by interpreting the type of response—special sentiments a literary work evokes in readers. Warren and Wellek claim that the purpose of literary works is to alleviate readers of emotional distress. To express emotions is to get free of them and the reader of a novel is also said to experience release and

relief which leaves them, at the end of his aesthetic experience, with a calm mind (23). In addition, different narratives can impact readers in various ways as they allow them to identify themselves with characters and to visualize different aspects of literary work. Moreover, the interest in the readers' psych led to the birth of Reader-response criticism which views readers as the main element that allows the accomplishment of texts meaning through interpretation, that is to say that readers construct their personal understanding out of their response to the literary text.

In essence, psychoanalytic criticism views literature and the protagonists in them as depictions of the authors' mind, looking for signs of their traumas and fixations in the protagonists' actions. This theory is associated with unconscious content that is conveyed implicitly by literary techniques like irony, suppression, and so on. Furthermore, the significance of the text is incomplete in its written form—the context of the author's existence is essential to understand the text. Psychoanalytic Criticism is often associated with evaluating protagonists' mental and emotional states by narratives in works of fiction where their thought patterns can be expressed in visions and repetitive thoughts.

Psychoanalysis as an independent field was established by Sigmund Freud and expanded in numerous directions by a large number of psychoanalysts, primarily Freud's followers. After countless disputes, it gained prominence and became one of the highly significant fields, particularly in the discipline of psychology.

4. The Freudian Approach

4.1.Sigmund Freud's Key Concepts

Sigmund Freud is deemed the father of Psychoanalysis. 1895 marks his first publication, *Studies on Hysteria*. In 1899, *Interpretation of Dreams* was resulted from his self-analysis after his father's death. To add more, Freud issued a number of works after that, for instance the “Freudian slip” which refers to everyday tongue slips and jokes. In 1907, he and

his fellow psychologists created Psychological Wednesday Circle for Jewish psychologists. It was renamed later to Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. Freud's influence on American scholars began with the publication of his *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* in 1910. He developed many of his basic principles in the period between 1920s and 1930s, namely his Beyond the Pleasure Principle and the Ego and the Id. Freud was forced to move to London where he died of oral cancer in 1939.

4.1.1. The Dream Work

It refers to Sigmund Freud's therapy which states that an individual's hidden desires can be revealed through his or her dreams. He believed that analyzing a person's dreams leads to an understanding of aspects of the personality. Symbols were considered vital in decoding the signification of dreams. Freud developed the Dream Work theory in 1899 resulting in publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

4.1.2. Structural Model of the Psyche

Freud claims that the psyche resembles an iceberg with three parts:

The Ego is the major seat of consciousness which is responsible for repressions, integrates and consolidates tendencies before they are translated into action. The Id is the mind's unconscious aspect, the repository of repressed and inaccessible evidence of early memories. The Super Ego serves as the mind's conscience and guidance, as well as a collector of restrictions and ideals to aim for.

4.1.3. The Defense Mechanisms

It refers to the unconscious defenses used against anxiety. These defenses include projection which is to assign negative self traits to others. Displacement is to direct the anger towards a different object, other than the original one. Undoing is the act of compensating for a negative behavior with a positive one. Repression is the denial of conscious representations of memories that are incompatible with the Ego. Suppression

which is to voluntarily choose to repress negative memories. Devaluation is to give exaggerated negative attributes to oneself, object, or others. In addition to regression which is the retreat to a childlike pattern of behavior.

4.2. Sigmund Freud and Literature

Freudian psychoanalytic critics often give central importance, in literary interpretation, to the distinction between the conscious mind or overt content and the unconscious mind or covert content. They also give particular attention to the author's and his characters' unconscious intentions. Additionally, they demonstrate the existence of basic psychoanalytic symptoms, contexts, or phases in works of literature, such as the stages of psychosexual development of Freud. Moreover, they make extensive applications of psychoanalytic theories to the history of literature, for example, Harold Bloom's book *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) which focuses on struggles of identity as an enactment of the Oedipus complex. Furthermore, critics privilege the individual psychodrama above the social drama of class conflict. The conflict between siblings or between competing desires within the same individual are more important than conflicts between social classes (Barry 105).

5. The Lacanian Approach

5.1. Jacques Lacan Basic Theories

5.1.1. The Mirror Stage

In his paper on “The Mirror-Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” (1949), Lacan explained how the infant, from age 6 to 18 months, forms an image of his body through a gestalt in the mirror that is far more developed and unified than the child's actual bodily motor capacity. The infant sees his own image as a whole, and the synthesis of this whole image evokes a tension between the image and the body. The infant wants to become the ideal image inside the mirror, yet in introjecting this

superior image, he also introjects other images. Lacan emphasized that the subject is defined by desire which is decentered as it is only through and for the Other that the subject comes into being (Gabbard, et al. 227-28).

5.1.2. The Three Orders

As per Lacan, there are three different registers or categorization systems which facilitate the distinction between concepts.

- **The Imaginary** is a preverbal stage where an infant usually between the ages of 6 and 18 months starts to acquire a sense of disconnectedness from the mother and also other individuals and objects; nevertheless, the child's understanding of sense remains limited.
- **The Symbolic** marks a child's entry into language which is the capacity to grasp and produce symbols; unlike the imaginary order, the symbolic order emphasizes the father, who embodies social conventions, language, regulations, and power according to Lacan's theory.
- **The Real** is an unachievable phase that reflects everything that an individual lacks. Both Lacan and his proponents debate if the real order symbolizes the era preceding the imaginary order when an infant is entirely satisfied or if the real order succeeds the symbolic order and reflects an eternal lack.

5.1.3. The Law of the Father

Lacan lays great importance on the role of the father in the psychic structure. In his 1938 article on the family, he explains the father's two conflicting functions: the protective function and the prohibitive function. The father is therefore greater than a simple opponent with which the child battles for the mother's affection because only by uniting with the father within the Oedipus Complex could the child obtain access into such an order. Lacan stresses the importance of distinguishing between: the symbolic father which is not a real being but a position, a function of imposing the law, regulating desire in the Oedipus complex and of

intervening in the imaginary dual relationship between mother and child to present an essential 'symbolic distance'. He is the fundamental element in the structure of the symbolic order, also referred to as the "Name-of-the-Father". The imaginary father is indeed an imago that combines all the imaginative conceptions that the child creates in fantasies around the image of an ideal father or the reverse, a frightening parent. The remarks on the real father are quite obscure, he is the individual who is claimed to be the subject's biological father (Evans 63-64).

5.2. Jacques Lacan and Literature

Similar to Freudian critics, Lacanian critics give plenty of consideration to unconscious intentions and emotions; they also search out the literature to unveil conflicting meanings which is some other direction of describing the procedure of 'deconstruction'. In addition, they reveal the appearance of Lacanian psychoanalytic stages in the literary work. Moreover, they approach the literary work in based on a set of broader Lacanian notions like his Desire concept. Lacanian critics also consider the literary work as a manifestation of Lacanian theories regarding, mainly, the language and the unconscious side of human mind. This leads to encouraging the anti-realist literature which defies the norms of literary representations (Barry 115).

6. The Adlerian Approach

6.1. Alfred Adler Basic Theories

Adler's School recognized as Individual Psychology is often a community, social psychology and a depth psychology. Adler was indeed an active supporter of psychology for protection and stressed the preparation of parents, schools, social workers to allow children to use their authority and power. Adler was a social optimist and was recognized as a socialist in his earlier days of participation in psychoanalysis. Moreover, he was an early advocate of feminism in psychology, arguing that sentiments of superiority and inferiority were commonly gender biased.

6.1.1. The Inferiority Complex

Adler thought that inferiority emotions are a driving factor in human behaviors. Inferiority complex is a disorder that occurs when a person fails to cope with common inferiority emotions; therefore, they develop a negative impression of themselves, lose confidence and fail to deal with the pressure of life. It could perhaps originate from three factors in childhood: organic deficiency where body organs or parts are damaged. Spoiling, which concerns spoiled children who are the central focus in their home yet are deprived of it elsewhere. Neglect, which is related to unwanted children, may form an inferiority complex since their life was full of absence of affection and protection due to their parents' negativity (D P. Schultz and S E. Schultz 111-13).

6.1.2. The Birth Order Theory

Adler asserts that although siblings have the same parents and inhabit the same residence, they do not experience similar social circumstances. First-born children possess a very comfortable and secure lifestyle until the second-born sibling appears, they get a feeling of being dethroned. Second born children hardly enjoy the prominent position usually held by the first-borns. They frequently use older child's attitude as a model and a source of rivalry. Youngest or last-born children are usually the favorite of the family. Motivated by a desire to outshine elder siblings, youngest children are generally brilliant achievers; however, the opposite happens when they are overly pampered. The only children are constantly the focus of attention. They are normally mature and may face disappointment in places outside the family, including school, where they are not the center of interest (D P. Schultz and S E. Schultz 117-19).

7. Julia Kristeva Approach

7.1. Julia Kristeva Basic Theories

Julia Kristeva is a critic, psychoanalyst, writer, and academic. She is most recognized

for her contributions in psychoanalysis, semiology, and feminist theory. She became a part of the intellectual community related to the journal *Tel Quel*. Her works, which were defined by two major trends namely structuralist-semiotic period and psychoanalytic-feminist period, were published in a variety of academic publications (Oliver).

7.1.1. Abjection

According to Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, the abject is the individual's reaction to an endangering breakdown in meaning due to loss of the differentiation in both self and other. For Kristeva, the transcendent is an attempt to conceal this breakdown. The corpse reflects the self-division which can disrupt the formation of identity and entry into Lacan's symbolic order. According to her, literature investigates how language is formed around a lack and a desire. She values poetry due to its high readiness to experiment with grammatical rules, symbolism, and meaning, hence highlighting the assumption that language is both arbitrary and entwined with an abject fright of loss (Felluga).

Conclusion

This chapter has set forward the definition of psychoanalysis and traced the origins of the concept that led to its disclosure. It has also explained the meaning of psychoanalytic literary criticism, its history and shed light on the basic dimensions it deals with. The chapter then presented four of the major theorists who are considered the founders of the predominant schools of psychoanalysis. They are namely, the father of Psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud and his concepts and his influence on literature. Jacques Lacan and his concepts as well as his relationship with literature. Alfred Adler and his theories. Finally, Julia Kristeva's main concept. Essentially, this chapter imparted the essential details to understand the notion of psychoanalysis and its theories which will be employed in the analysis of Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child* in the third chapter of the dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

Child Trauma in African-American Postmodern Literature

Chapter Two: Child Trauma in African-American Postmodern Literature

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Introduction

Humans are vulnerable creatures who tend to be injured all the time. These wounds are either physical—bruises, gashes and fractured bones—or emotional, as with fear, depression or trust issues. The injuries on the emotional or psychological level are most likely the ones that would remain engraved in the individuals' memory and consequently lead to the development of trauma. In this sense, trauma can be identified as a reaction to disturbing situations which hinder individuals' feelings, dwindle their ability to fully express their emotions and unable them from verbally expressing themselves. Trauma has no limitations regarding the individual's age, gender, race or geographical location.

Literary trauma theory became widespread in the recent decades as novels strive to show trauma's effects on the characters and follow their progress towards recovery or insanity. Authors attempt to replicate real life trauma effects through providing detailed descriptions of characters' inner thoughts and feelings.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework on the notion of trauma. It focuses on providing a definition of trauma, unearth its history, introduce collective and individual trauma. It also provides a brief insight into PTSD, understands literary trauma theory, explains trauma narrative and recovery narrative and finally throws light on childhood trauma and its presence in American postmodern literature.

1. Defining the Concept of Trauma

Before digging deeper into the notion of trauma, it is essential to comprehend the term “Trauma” from a historical perspective.

Its roots come from the Greek word for “wound” which indicates that an individual has been injured or damaged (Danese and Baldwin 518).

In antiquity, there was an adequate explanation of the term that was founded on a

cuneiform script that explains King Ur-Nammu's death and interprets a traumatic experience resulting in a post-traumatic reaction such as sleep disturbances.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century when Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet introduced the first theory to conceptualizing the term "trauma" which began to change from a physical damage to a shocking incident and its effect can be perceived within the victim's nerves and psyche (Nash and Figley 37).

Eventually, this formulated a different type of trauma named "psychological trauma" which Judith Herman defined as an affiliation of the helpless. At the phase of trauma, the victim is deemed powerless by overwhelming power. When the power is a result of nature, we talk of disasters, however when it is caused by any other individuals, we talk of atrocities. Traumatic experiences overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. They include risks to one's life, or a near personal encounter with aggression and death (33).

We also have a number of statements from Freud himself that define trauma and describe some of the processes that resulted in the creation of a traumatic state as in, "We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli" (29). According to him, with penetration of the "barrier", the mental apparatus is overwhelmed by stimuli that cannot be mastered or bound and his use of the term "protective shield" refers to a protective barrier that shields the mental apparatus from imminent overwhelming trauma.

Cathy Caruth defines trauma and its effects through her significant work *Unclaimed Experience*: "In its most general definition, trauma 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 phenomena" (11). She

claims that trauma is a highly unusual experience that describes a sudden or catastrophic event. As for Roger Luckhurst trauma is “a piercing or breach of border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication. [It] violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound” (3).

The concept of trauma can mean various things to different individuals, based on the context. In medicine field, trauma is regarded as an acute onset of a dysfunctional physical system wherein the persistent danger is internal and can be long-term or chronic. Whereas, in psychoanalytic literature, trauma mainly refers to a description of anything that brings harm to the psyche.

Trauma can affect any humans, regardless of age or gender. Children, specifically, may experience or witness an intense incident or a specific tragic event that harms or damages his or her mental and physical well-being and may have long-term effects.

Child trauma has been defined in diverse ways, the most noticeable of which is stated by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), “A traumatic event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to a child’s life or bodily integrity. Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens life or physical security of a loved one can also be traumatic”.

2. A Brief History of Trauma

Much of our early understandings of trauma emerged from the experiences of those who saw the horrors of war and child sexual abuse during the 19th and early 20th century. Joseph Frank, a Viennese medical professor, recorded one of the earliest documented cases of trauma in 1813. He described the experiences of a 14 years old girl who witnessed invading soldiers from Napoleon's forces threaten her father's life. This made him question the absence of medical literature on the mental illnesses associated with citizens who have survived war-

torn areas (Black and Flynn 120-21).

In 1866, John Eric Erichsen believed the psychological symptoms originated from the physical injuries of railway accident survivors and warned against confusing them with the symptoms of hysteria. He then authored *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System* and documented the physical injured and somatic complaints of the survivors. For two decades (1860–1880), physicians believed the somatic complaints had psychopathologic origins arising out of the survivor’s experience of the shock rather than an actual shock to the spine. The concept of railway spine had been replaced by that of traumatic neurosis by the end of 1880s. The traumatic neurosis was a term first coined by Hermann Oppenheim in 1889 who associated trauma-related symptoms with molecular changes in the brain (121-22).

During the late nineteenth century, the primary concentration of Jean Martin Charcot’s research—he is a neurologist who worked with traumatized women at the Salpêtrière hospital—was hysteria, a disorder that was widely diagnosed especially in women. Its symptoms included paralysis, memory loss and seizures. Hysterectomy was the earliest therapy for hysteria (Ringel and Brandell 1).

In the late 1880s, Freud, Josef Breuer as well as Janet based on Charcot's theories concluded that hysteria was caused by psychological trauma. However, Freud eventually moved from seduction theory to conflict theory. It was believed that the unallowable nature of violent and sexual desires is the cause of hysterical symptoms. Freud focused on intrapsychic concept and dream rather than external trauma (2).

By the end of WWI, psychiatrists noticed soldiers returning from the war with shell shock disorder. The purpose of psychiatric first aid was to give a brief treatment that would assist soldiers in recovering and returning to the front lines as quickly and efficiently as possible. Traumatized warriors were capable of overcoming their shell shock symptoms and

rejoining the active combat duty after receiving treatment. Following WWI, Abram Kardiner began treating traumatized American war veterans in 1923. He recognized, like Janet and Freud, the nature of recurrence, in which victims repeat the initial traumatic event. He was concerned with the degree of interdependency between the soldier and his combat unit. As a result, therapy for traumatized warriors during WWII centered on limiting isolation between these warriors and their unit. During WWII, psychiatrists reinserted hypnosis as a trauma therapy, and the United States Army used “group stress debriefing” (2-3).

After WWII, Henry Krystal was a psychoanalyst who studied outcomes of prolonged traumatization on concentration camp survivors. He expanded the diagnosis of alexithymia, a common condition in severely traumatized individuals, noting their inability to dream, express, or experience. Conversely, Joyce McDougall stated that her patients were not suffering from an inability to experience emotions, but from an inability to reflect over an excess of affective situations (3).

Contemporary trauma theory emerged after the Cocoanut Grove fire in Boston in 1942 where almost five hundreds persons died at a nightclub. Doctor Lindemann, who examined the majority of the survivors, noticed that they all showed similar reactions. He began to postulate about normal grief reactions, including engrossment with lost loved ones, identification with the deceased, expressions of guilt and hostility, disorderedness, and somatic complaints (4).

During the War in Vietnam, warriors as well as veterans returned suffering from symptoms which evolved into chronic conditions impacting their effectiveness in normal life. Most of them began consuming alcohol and drugs, behaved violently toward their partners, or became homeless. Lifton and Shatan found almost thirty symptoms that are typical to “traumatic neurosis”. These symptoms were documented based on analysis of veterans, readings of Kardiner and studies on Holocaust accident victims (4).

Lenore Terr made further contributions to the study of child trauma and its effects in 1979 based on her work with children entangled in a school bus kidnapping in California (5).

3. Collective and Individual Trauma

Traumatic experiences or trauma defines the inability of an individual or community to react in a healthy way either physically or mentally to severe distress. This can have an adverse impact on an individual's wellness and it can be experienced collectively, affecting community—a group of individuals. Regardless of their traumatic nature, it is essential to explore the distinction between collective traumas suffered by a large number of individuals or a segment of the community and individual traumas that cannot be approached without first discussing the collective one.

3.1. Collective Trauma

The concept of trauma has been vastly expanded to include psychic aspects that affect entire group of people or an entire society collectively.

3.1.1. Definition

Collective trauma, also referred to as community trauma, is interpreted as an aggregate of trauma experienced by community members or an incident that affects a group of individuals but has structural and social traumatic consequences. The term “community” may stretch to many aspects: geographically as in a neighborhood, virtually as in a collective identity or institutionally, such as in a house of worship (Weisner 4).

In recent years, researchers have conceptualized collective trauma as the shared sentiments that community members feel when exposed to a horrific experience which leaves an ineradicable trace on their collective conscience, permanently, altering their future identities in irreversible ways.

Collective trauma could have numerous types including but not restricted to the ones

listed below.

3.1.2. Types

- **Historical trauma** is often a multifaceted and collective trauma endured by a group of individuals who share similar identity connections across time and generations. It was initially used to represent the suffering of Holocaust survivors' children; however, during the last twenty years, the label had been increasingly used to a broad spectrum of colonized aboriginal populations across the globe. It has also been used to describe African Americans, Palestinian youth and many other cultural communities that share a history of oppression, victimization, or massive group trauma exposure. Researchers from numerous fields have coined terms like PTSS to describe the collective experience of trauma shared by certain ethnic groups across generations (Mohatt, et al. 128). PTSS is “a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today” (DeGruy 109). DeGruy established the concept in her book *Post Traumatic Slaves Syndromes: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (2005). PTSS is a condition that is caused by multigenerational oppression of enslaved Africans and their descendants as a product of centuries of chattel slavery (DeGruy).
- **Intergenerational Trauma** is an aspect of historical trauma. Feliciano Villar states: “[t]he term “Intergenerational” implies the involvement of members of two or more generations in activities that potentially can make them aware of different perspectives. It implies increasing interaction, cooperation to achieve common goals, a mutual influence” (115). One of the most apparent manifestations of intergenerational trauma might be observed in families suffering major forms of traumas such as murder, sexual assault, and other types of abuse. As a result, many issues such as oppression and other negative tendencies are

passed along to the following generation.

- **Cultural Trauma** takes place when people who share a collective identity are exposed to a dreadful experience which leaves permanent scars on their collective psyche and damages their identity development. According to Alexander Jeffrey, culture trauma “occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their collective consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (4). A similar interpretation belongs to Ron Eyerman who writes, “Cultural trauma is a process of mediation involving alternative strategies and alternative voices. It is a process that aims to reconstitute or reconfigure a collective identity through collective representation, as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric” (4).

3.1.3. Impact

The collective aspects of the traumatic impact include the collapse of social order centered on trust and generosity, as well as its substitution by aggression, impotence and fear. Daya Somasundaram stresses collective trauma’s “negative impact at the collective level, that is on the social processes, networks, relationships, institutions, functions, dynamics, practices, capital and resources; to the wounding and injury to the social fabric” (Weisner 6).

Collective trauma’s impact can be physical including deteriorated public spaces and the unavailability of healthy products. Sociocultural including damaged social relations, elevation of destructive social norms, a low sense of collective political and social efficacy, and widespread sense of fear and shame. Economic and educational including intergenerational poverty, long-term unemployment, business relocation, limited employment opportunities, and overall community disinvestment (6).

3.1.4. Psychoanalysis and the African American Case

Psychoanalysis is responsible for contributing to America's tormented racial history and culture in a way that has left persisting effect even in modern community as the apparent lack of multiplicity and social dichotomous of white and African Americans within psychoanalysis became deeply rooted in the American collective consciousness. This lack of variety has pervaded many areas and fields, including literature. As a result, Black novels have predominantly been viewed as political or social documents. Claudia Tate's most recent research of African American literature provides an interesting example of how psychoanalysis may influence our interpretations of Black novels as she states, “psychoanalysis can tell us much about the complicated social workings of race in the United States and the representations of these workings in the literature of African Americans” (05).

Tate's book, *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race*, employs psychoanalysis to read African American literature, focusing on five pieces of writings that have been disregarded by critics. She maintains that racial protocol for African American canon development has neglected works that reflect individual desire and ignore the issues of gender or race. Tate's Psychoanalysis of these novels discloses the unconscious impulses that fuel various Black novels, while also urging innovative interpretations of more explicitly political pieces for both the desire they either seek or deny. However, using psychoanalysis to explain Black novels would no longer surprise critics of postmodern Black authors like Toni Morrison, particularly because the novelist herself intentionally utilizes psychoanalytic concepts in her works.

Several African Americans, like W.E.B. Du Bois and bell hooks, and of other Black origins like Frantz Fanon published books and essays attempting to explain psychoanalytically the conscious and unconscious thoughts and desires of African Americans—and Blacks in

general—whether as individuals or collectively.

W.E.B. De Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) describes double consciousness as “a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others . . . One ever feels his two-ness, –an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts” (2). He explains that in American society, Black people have a divided self-perception which is not based on their nature, but has been organized and learned. It is the result of the deeply rooted social norms formed by internalizing white supremacy. This means that this racial fear goes beyond rejection of color to an anxiety about black personality and black identity, which black skin symbolizes.

In regards of skin color, in the fifth chapter of the book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), titled "The Fact of Blackness," Frantz Fanon states that color prejudice

is nothing more than the unreasoning hatred of one race for another, the contempt of the stronger and richer peoples for those whom they consider inferior to themselves, and the bitter resentment of those who are kept in subjection and are so frequently insulted. As colour is the most obvious outward manifestation of race it has been made the criterion by which men are judged, irrespective of their social or educational attainments. The light-skinned races have come to despise all those of a darker colour, and the dark-skinned peoples will no longer accept without protest the inferior position to which they have been relegated. (qtd. In Fanon 89)

Fanon maintains that color prejudice refers to a multileveled structure in which individuals with light skin color have more advantages than those with dark skin color within society. Consequently, Fanon states that African Americans decided to adapt denegrification,

for several years certain laboratories have been trying to produce a serum for “denegrification”; with all the earnestness in the world, laboratories have sterilized their test tubes, checked their scales, and embarked on researches that might make it possible for the miserable Negro to whiten himself and thus to throw off the burden of that corporeal malediction. (83-84)

Numerous young African Americans started to embrace white people's lifestyles and fashion trends, whether by dressing in clothing similar to those frequently worn by whites or by wearing straight hair wigs and colored lenses.

While most works address the white people's perspective about Blacks, bell hooks maintains that addressing Black opinions on whiteness is crucial in the eleventh chapter “Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination” of her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992). Many African Americans have assimilated white people's ideas about hating Blacks, despite the fact that they have progressed from seeing whites as a race of threatening people. They are however still afraid of others regarding them as a reverse racist for addressing their personal encounters with whiteness, even though they cannot express it. “Black people still feel the terror, still associate it with whiteness, but are rarely able to articulate the varied ways we are terrorized because it is easy to silence by accusations of reverse racism or by suggesting that black folks who talk about the ways we are terrorized by whites are merely evoking victimization to demand special treatment” (hooks 176).

However, African Americans analyzing whiteness had also generated prejudices so when they share these very same generalizations to white people, they become furious that they are being portrayed that way, yet they are unable to make connection between that and their own treatment towards Blacks. Whiteness, in hooks' opinion, works as a foundation of power and a position of superiority for as long as white communities continue to preserve their

race's image as the better counterpart and that others must respect that as the framework for intercultural exchanges.

3.2. Individual Trauma

3.2.1. Definition

Trauma does not simply impact groups of people or collectivities; it may also directly effects certain individuals. “Trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or enduring conditions in which the individual’s ability to integrate his/her emotional experience is overwhelmed and the individual experiences (either objectively or subjectively) a threat to his/her life, bodily integrity, or that of a caregiver or family” (Saakvitne, et al.). The child as an individual and a member of a group or community falls within this category.

Children are traumatized whenever they fear for their lives or for the lives of their beloved ones. A traumatic experience has a significant influence on the individuals, either in the way they conceive, recall information, view themselves or perceive the world (Bloom 2).

3.2.2. Types

The Childhood Trauma Interview by Fink, et al. focused on six areas of child trauma:

- **The separations and losses** focuses on interruptions in attachment, separation from or death of caregivers, time spent living with other relatives or strangers, placement in institutions or foster care.
- **The physical neglect** inquires about lack of supervision at and away from home and about deprivation of food, clothing and medical care.
- **The emotional abuse or assault** asks about experiences of being screamed at, criticized, humiliated and threatened with abandonment and injury, controlled, ignored, or scapegoated.
- **The physical abuse or assault** includes questions about experiences of being hit,

kicked, thrown against walls, locked in closets, burned, choked, cut or shot.

- **The violence witnessing** asks about both domestic violence as in siblings enduring physical abuse, parents being battered and other forms of violence as in stabbings or shootings on the street, the abuse of fellow students at school.
- **The sexual abuse or assault** inquires about noncontact experiences such as perpetrators making sexual threats or making the subject watch others engage in sexual behavior and contact experiences that ranged from perpetrators rubbing against the subject in a sexual way to fondling, oral sex, and rape (1330-31).

3.2.3. Impact

Trauma exposure throughout childhood has been shown in studies to disrupt the developmental ageing process, leaves the individual or child with life-long medical and psychological deficiencies, and can lead to exaggerated emotional distress. Early childhood traumas, such as emotionally harmful events, have a negative effect on early attachment bonds, particularly if the abuser is the caregiver. When children face interactions that are negative and frightening, these situations may impact a child's sense of identity, faith in others, and worldview (Dye 3).

Child trauma's impact can be emotional involving difficulties regulating emotions and detaching them from memories, thoughts and behaviors. Physical involving bodily symptoms or somatization. Cognitive including feelings of alienation, stimuli that triggers a traumatic memory, and dissociation. Behavioral involving reenactment, self-harm and self-destructive behavior. Interpersonal involving difficulty trusting others or forming supportive relationships (Weisner 2-3).

3.3. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

3.3.1. Definition

In 1980, the APA came up with a new name to the illness that was resulted from soldiers' experiences during war. It was labeled as shell shock after WWI, and combat fatigue after WWII, which later on it became PTSD. At first PTSD and its diagnosis were only attributable to those directly involved in the traumatic experiences such as war veterans, battered women, rape victims, and abused children, but secondary victims might also develop PTSD. Secondary victims include witnesses, bystanders, rescue workers, relatives, and now extended to include receiving news of death or injuries of relatives (Luckhurst 1).

PTSD is a syndrome of intrusive re-experiencing, avoidance, emotional numbing, and hyper arousal symptoms that occurs in some individuals in the aftermath of a traumatic event (DeJonghe, et al. 294).

In 1992, Judith Herman, a pioneering clinician whose work is still considered essential in the field of traumatology, argued in her book *Trauma and Recovery* that psychological trauma is often influenced by the society in which such trauma occurred. Her findings had an important effect in shifting blame away from survivors, who were previously viewed as weak and defective for their suffering. Herman also proposed the term "Complex PTSD" to indicate a different type of PTSD that occurs as a result of uncontrollable social or interpersonal traumatic events, under oppression and in situations of imprisonment (Zaleski, et al. 377).

3.3.2. Causes

PTSD is thought to be caused by experiences such as being the victim of child abuse, watching one's home burn, living through a natural disaster, learning that a family member suddenly died, perpetrating rape, and being involved in a major vehicle accident (Snyder 12).

3.3.3. Symptoms

Judith Herman posits that there are three main symptoms of PTSD: the first symptom is hyperarousal which is a persistent expectation of danger. Herman writes that traumatized

people have “an extreme startle response to unexpected stimuli, as well as an intense reaction to specific stimuli associated with the traumatic event” (36). The second is intrusion which is an inescapable memory of the traumatic situation. According to Herman, “the traumatic moment becomes encoded into an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep” (36). While the last one is constriction which is a numbing of the senses or slowing down of time, Herman describes this as a freezing or a “state of detached calm, in which terror, rage, and pain dissolve” (42).

3.4. Trauma in Postmodern Literature

3.4.1. Definition

Postmodern literature is often utilized to portray specific aspects of literary work after WWII, which depends on fragmentation, paradox and unreliable narrative. It is a skepticism of traditional conceptions of modern literature which stretches to the writer as well as his own consciousness. Thus, postmodern writers commonly apply metafiction to deny the existence of a single narrative within a work. The distinction between high-context cultures (those in which individuals establish long term up close ties. Due to those strong relations, numerous facets of societal conduct are not stated explicitly) and low-context cultures (those in which individuals have numerous relationships however for a limited period or just for a particular aim. Cultural conduct has to be explicitly stated in such societies in order that individuals entering the society learn how to interact properly) is also challenged with the utilization of pastiche, intertextuality and genres initially assumed unacceptable in literature (Sharma and Chaudhary 189).

3.4.2. Child Trauma in American Postmodern Literature

Postmodern literature emphasizes fictional narratives, as it believes that literature is

essentially narrative as postmodern narratives stress the significance of the audience or readers in shaping the overall meaning of the literary texts which allows the multiplicity of meanings and voices. By employing it, the author informs the reader that the story is not yet over but rather they could take part and discuss it. Meanwhile the modern narratives focus mainly on the author and his background thus the literary texts usually have one fixed meaning. In addition, postmodernist narrative focuses on the voice seeking to make it difficult to be encoded. However, the formation of a chronological postmodernism needed much more than the primacy of narratives; it also needed a new perspective regarding narrative philosophy. The emergence of structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s gave birth to the new discipline of narratology which aimed to arrange the repetitive aspects of culture out of which narrative was generated. Similarly, the fundamental features of narratology developed from the examination of diverse folktales and ancient myths, with the aim of reducing the arbitrary play of diversity to a few recurring structures or patterns. Nevertheless, to say that literary postmodernism was centered on narrative is not to claim that narrative is the only symbol of postmodernism (Connor 62-65).

The term postmodern was originally applied to a rising group of American authors who were assumed to be defying conventional literary norms. This group included John Barth, John Hawkes, William Gass and more. Postmodernism has evolved to refer to a broader attitude toward conventional intellectual assumptions including the ones found in philosophy, sociology and arts in general (Green 729).

Postmodern trauma fiction stemmed from postmodernist literature with which it shares its eagerness to push traditional narration to its breaking point. This urge to test the boundaries and limitations of narrative is one important point where postmodern fiction intersects with trauma fiction, another point is the emphasis of both on the complex and conflicted

relationship with the past. Postmodernity has made notions such as trauma culture and wound culture prominent. In postmodern fiction, childhood and the family emerge as prominent themes exploring sexual abuse, incest and domestic violence. Add to that the examination of childhood trauma from the child's perspective and from the perspective of the grown-up survivor as individuals are crucially shaped by their familial environment. These texts are profoundly concerned with the complex psychology of their protagonists and the process of narrating the traumatic past for instance Autodiegetic narration puts special emphasis not only on the individual's life-story, but also on the individual's psychology. In postmodernism, the concern with childhood and the family can also be understood as part of a general cultural interest in subjectivity, self-narration and life writing. Trauma writing also tends to be profoundly political, often giving a voice to the oppressed and calling attention to wounds that have been hidden under the grand narratives of history and to pain and suffering that has been ignored (Schönfelder).

3.4.3. Narratives of Trauma and Recovery

3.4.3.1. Trauma Narrative

In novels where the social and political concerns of the collective dominates the narrative, individual experience may be lost. In the individual narrative, trauma alters the natural processing of memory, resulting in psychological pain and a breakdown in thought known as dissociation, commonly known as fracturing of self-identity. This disruption and fracturing interrupts the victim's sense of subjectivity and agency. An individual who is denied subjectivity and agency is unable to express their experiences because their capacity for narrative along with a narrative framework is lacking. However, in the collective narrative, the focus of traditional literary analysis of trauma novels has been on the collective experience like African slavery in America is evident in such novels as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*; or the

Holocaust in narratives such as the collection of short stories of Tadeusz Borowski. The trauma passed down through generations through the act of storytelling, thus, affects the listener either as an individual, or collectively through shared ancestry and ethnic origin. Arguably, when we read a text with our focus on the collective experience of trauma, we risk denying subjectivity to the individual character; thereby, reducing the individual to nothing. Yet, that same text may be read or analyzed with an individual focus such as Morrison's novels which depict how a text can be read as a narrative account of simultaneously individual and collective trauma (Gumb 239-44).

3.4.3.2. Recovery Narrative

As to Judith Herman, one of the main aims of trauma recovery is to assist victims restore their self-control. In her book *Trauma and Recovery: The psychophysiology of violence—From domestic abuse to political terror* (1997), she proposed three stages toward recovery including creating a safe environment, going through a process of remembrance, mourning, and reconnecting with ordinary life. She stresses that individuals may not go through these stages in a chronological order. Herman and other trauma specialists agree that victims must embrace the traumatic experiences, mourn their losses, and move on with their lives (López 303).

For individual victims of trauma, new possibilities are to unearth varied responses such as recovery narratives that demonstrate recovery from trauma in a hostile environment in the aftermath of traumatic experience. Narratives in fiction can be imaginatively represented and interpreted through resilience, reconciliation and resistance. Resilience which is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of threat. Reconciliation which allows an individual sufferer to accept the traumatic experience, to re-frame the traumatic experience and remove self-blame. Add to that, it encourages healing

within collective trauma victims. Reconciliation can be achieved in fiction through representations of and meditations on characters' feelings of and responses to vulnerability. Resistance which is viewed in terms of the trauma sufferer's defenses to change, a resistance to treatment and to the talking cure. It is achieved through reclaiming agency and control over self. Recovery narratives develop from a multi-disciplinary framework and cross-cultural community backgrounds, embracing both individual and collective perspectives. For example, Toni Morrison's novels are recovery narratives that offer a subjective view of trauma and recovery. Additionally, fiction can provide a space not only for witnessing and testimony, but also for mourning and memorializing through which individual agency may be reclaimed (Gumb).

Postmodern trauma novels in particular tend to stage individual quests of trauma survivors for recovery in much detail. They also tend to investigate thoroughly the profound impact that trauma may have on an individual's physique and psyche. Additionally, postmodern traumatic fiction often stresses the difficulties of recovery processes, yet maintains a positive attitude toward recovery within postmodern literature. This demonstrates how late postmodernism's wound culture has created a demand for expressions of optimism amidst the sense of trauma's pervasive presence and impact. Postmodern trauma literature from the 1990s and early 2000s usually points to novel, yet complicated, beginnings to demonstrate to their audience that there is in fact a life beyond trauma (Schönfelder).

Conclusion

This chapter put forth a set of definitions to clarify the meaning of trauma. It provided as well a concise history of the concept. It also clarified the meaning of collective and individual traumas including their types and symptoms. Additionally, it demonstrated briefly what PTSD is. Moreover, it clarified the emergence of literary trauma theory, the basic

theories of Cathy Caruth and Kali Tal. It also discussed the role of psychoanalysis in internalizing the racial prejudice in the American society, as well as Claudia Tate's views on the importance of employing psychoanalytic theories such as Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's to interpret precisely African American literary works, focusing primarily on the writer's individual desires rather than viewing the literary work as a political piece. In addition to Du Bois, Fanon, and hooks' significant contributions to the psychoanalytic analysis of African American society and literature. Furthermore, this chapter explained the meaning of trauma narrative (collective and individual), Judith Herman's Fundamental Stages of Recovery from Trauma and the recovery narrative in fiction mean. Besides, the chapter elucidated childhood trauma and how it was presented in the American postmodern literature. Fundamentally, this chapter provided a brief explanation about the different facets of trauma and childhood trauma which will form the basis of the analysis in chapter three of the dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE

Child Trauma in American Postmodern Literature. The Case of Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*: A Psychoanalytic Approach

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Introduction

Toni Morrison (1931-2019), the winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature, has been widely recognized as one of the most incredible writers in portraying the African American perspective at various historical stations. She has explored complicated and sensitive topics in eleven novels and many other works written over five decades. In her latest novel, *God Help the Child* (2015), the writer revisits some of her earlier concepts focusing on child neglect, internalized colorism and more importantly childhood trauma. Through bold storytelling, Morrison exposes readers to the realistic social problems in contemporary America. She introduces a number of childhood traumas experienced by the different characters, whether black or white. They, as children, were killed by molesters, physically and emotionally abused, forced into prostitution at an early age, molested by their relatives, and abused for their natural skin color.

This chapter, therefore, is divided into two parts. The major purpose of the first part is to provide a psychoanalytic background of the writer, Toni Morrison and a brief introduction to the novel *God Help the Child*. The second part; however, traces the lasting psychological and physical scars left by the crimes done against children. Focusing by that on the impact their childhood traumas had in shaping their identity as adults and explore the healing process they had to go through to fully recover.

The analysis of this chapter is under the guidance of trauma theories, mainly the principles of Judith Herman and the psychoanalytic approach using the fundamental concepts of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Alfred Adler and Julia Kristeva.

Part One: Description of the Novel *God Help the Child*

1. Toni Morrison Through Psychoanalytic Lens

One of the main methods of psychoanalytic criticism is to interpret any literary work by analyzing the authors of the novel and connecting their literary work with their personal life to facilitate understanding its meaning. Following Sigmund Freud, the literary work is like a dream and its interpretation can be a representation of authors' unconscious desires and innate conflicts. Psychoanalysis gives clues about the personality and mannerism of the writer. Therefore, a psychoanalytical examination of the writer Toni Morrison is essential to seize the main ideas and conflicts unconsciously freed in the literary creation of *God Help the Child*.

Morrison once told her son to hide her papers so no one can write a biography about her. She constantly rejects others' attempts to write a biography saying she was not interested in herself. Morrison also prefers to not refill any gaps or correct mistakes biographers make in writing her personal information, showing her devotion to make the readers and critics focus solely on her works and her wish to remain somehow an enigma.

In Lorain, Ohio, Toni was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford. She was the second child out of four siblings. Based on Adler's Birth Order theory, the second child is most likely competitive, independent and a peacemaker. Such traits are evident in her bold storytelling and her examination of complex themes including child abuse, trauma, sexual molestation, neglect, colorism, legacy of slavery, traumatic history of African Americans, intraracial discrimination and restorative processes. A number of these themes are present in *God Help the Child*.

Morrison's childhood influenced her writing as well. She recalls a story about how her father physically attacked a white male thinking he was after his daughters, he was never a violent man, and he only reacted that way to protect his daughters (Ramírez, "Childhood Cuts" 146). Morrison believed that her father is traumatized as he witnessed white people hang two

black males when he was young. This experience highlights why it is critical to secure children to Morrison, and it explains that African Americans indeed suffer from a collective trauma born out of their horrific past.

Morrison switched her birth name from Chloe to Toni after attending Howard University because others mispronounced “Chloe” all the time. However, she later revealed her regret in changing her name insisting that she is Chloe Anthony Wofford and she regrets publishing *The Bluest Eye*, her first novel under the name Toni Morrison (Innes). In addition, she claimed that Chloe is the one who writes the books while Toni Morrison is the one responsible for tours, interviews and the entire legacy. Many events happened in Morrison's life that led to her identity crisis. At Howard University, she was subjected to interracial and intraracial racism for the first time; she was even dissuaded from writing about black characters in Shakespeare. Her marriage with Harold Morrison ended up failing as well and she had to bear the responsibility of her two sons alone.

Few months after she won the Nobel Prize, her house burned down, although her son Slade escaped, everything else was burned. Therefore, Morrison cannot get over fire which is evident through her characters such as the red-haired witch in *Song of Solomon* and Queen Oliver in *God Help the Child*. Moreover, her youngest son, Slade died when she was half-done with her novel *Home*. He was a co-writer in her children's books. Morrison dwelled for months in sadness and the regret of not being able to save her son. She stopped writing for a period, which was the closest she has ever come to writer's block. However, her next book was a special comfort as writing has always been the only thing she does for herself.

Morrison unconsciously freed all these painful events in her works; she talked about racial hierarchy within black community, failed marriages, mourning and more. In *God Help the Child*, a number of events are similar to her life. Sweetness is a single mother whose

marriage failed and had to raise her daughter alone. Booker's pain of losing a family member and the mourning process, Bride's identity crisis and her two names. Morrison also demonstrated her faith in the restoration of humanity and her hope for a better future for children through the words "God Help the Child" at the end of the novel.

Morrison is considered as a prophetic writer due to her awareness and interest in social and human issues. She asserts the writer's significance and language in decoding the deep messages hidden in history and to allow the silenced voices to be heard. It is apparent in a number of her novels such as *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Beloved* (1987) and *A Mercy* (2008). Therefore, Morrison's characters are considered as big as life as she realistically displayed the suffering of African Americans through them.

Her prophetic writing appears in *God Help the Child* for example in the frequent use of the number six: Lula Ann was six years old when she witnesses some little boy's molestation; Adam is one of six victims of the child molester; Rain was six years old when the hippie couple found her. The number six is associated with "sixty million and more" alluding to the enslaved Africans who perished resulting from the Atlantic slave trade (Ramírez 161).

With the death of Chloe Wofford in 2019, the name Toni Morrison is all that is left behind. However, the honorable legacy left by Morrison is, in its depth, Chloe's legacy as well.

2. Brief Summary of the Novel

Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child* was her eleventh and last novel which was released on April 30, 2015. While the original title was *The Wrath of Children*, the current title is the third attempt to name the novel (Chen). This work differs from Morrison's previous novels as it is set in contemporary America, it deals with multiple themes and it is told from different characters' perspectives. The main themes are, but not limited to, colorism, child

abuse, childhood trauma and their impacts on the identity of the characters. Morrison was capable of covering the main aspects of these complicated themes in a relatively short novel such as *God Help the Child*.

There is no definite location and time in this work; however, clues indicate that it is distinct from Morrison's earlier literary works. Whereas the previous books are founded in a past period, this one is set mostly in twenty-first century, in the United States.

The story follows mainly Lula Ann Bridewell, who is born with the darkest black skin while her parents are light skinned. Both her parents were ashamed of her. Louis, her father accused her mother of infidelity, he broke the three years marriage up and left. The mother, Sweetness, felt that Lula Ann was a burden, she even tried to kill her with a blanket when she was born. She then attempted to leave her by the steps of a church but decided otherwise and kept her. Lula Ann was forced at a young age to call her mother by her name instead of words like “mother” or “mom”. She did not comprehend the reason behind the harsh treatment she receives from her mother who deprived her from any form of love or affection. Sweetness taught her to always keep her head down and never protest because their racist community will not hesitate to punish her for the slightest mistakes. Thus, she had to remain silent when her classmates threw insults at her for her skin color or when she witnessed Mr. Leigh, their white landlord sexually assault a young boy when she was six years old. Lula Ann had to carry the burden of her silence for many years. In an accident involving a number of teachers accused of child molesting, Lula Ann falsely testifies against Sofia Huxley and imprison her for fifteen years to receive her mother's approval and affection.

At the age of seventeen, she decides to leave her home and Sweetness; she left her Lula Ann identity behind as well and created a new identity as Bride. Her new identity turned her into a beautiful black woman who caught everyone's attention whenever she appears and

following the advice of Jerry, her personal designer, Bride wore white only to highlight her dark skin color. She was employed in a cosmetic company named Sylvia, Inc and became the manager of her own product line “YOU, GIRL”.

Bride met and fell in love with Booker, they both knew little about one another's past as they kept many secrets from each other. One day, Booker broke up with Bride without prior notice except for telling her that she was not the woman he wanted. She refuses to be abandoned again by people she loves and plans for a journey to search for her boyfriend after meeting Sofia Huxley who severely injured her while Bride attempted to apologize to Sofia for falsely accusing her of child molestation. Bride hides the truth about this incident and pursues her plan to follow Booker to his new location. She meets Rain, the six years old white girl in her way who narrates her painful trauma where she was forced into prostitution and her experience about living in the streets. Rain teaches Bride how to be strong and how to not allow her trauma to control her life. At the end of her journey, Bride meets Booker's aunt Queen who tells her about his prolonged pain for the murder of his older brother Adam by a sexual molester. Therefore, he tries always to stand for innocent children against molesters in which he violently reacts to any child molester.

Booker and Bride tend to Queen when she was injured during the burning of her house. After her unexpected death, Bride informs Booker about her pregnancy and they both agree to let go of their childhood traumas to raise their child together away from the harm, skin prejudice and the pain of trauma.

In the closing chapter, Sweetness clarifies her reasons for the harsh treatment towards her daughter as the only way to protect her from the harm of society. She also leaves one final message to Bride when she hears about her pregnancy; the message is about the hardships that mothers have to go through to protect their children from any form of damage. The novel ends

with words identical to the title “God Help the Child” as a hope and a prayer for the safety of all children.

Part Two: Analysis of the Novel *God Help the Child*

3. Trauma Narrative

3.1. Collective Trauma

Collective trauma, according to Kai Erikson, is a damage to the fundamental structures of social life which weakens the ties that bind individuals together and affects the common feeling of collectivism. It is a progressive awareness that the society is no longer a reliable provider of support and that an essential aspect of one's self has vanished. Individuals do not coexist as a linked union or as connected units within a broader collective body anymore (153-54).

PTSS is a type of collective trauma which demonstrates the etiology of multiple adapted survival patterns seen in African American communities across the United States and the Diaspora. It is based on the idea that African Americans were genetically and intrinsically inferior to whites. This was accompanied by institutionalized racism, which continues to perpetuate injury. DeGruy explains that African Americans use the strength they gained in the past to heal the present (DeGruy). Similarly, since her early works, Toni Morrison has been exploring the problem of identity of African Americans who have been subjects to the discriminatory history. Nevertheless, her focus later on shifted to the discrimination within the Black family and Black community.

From this point, Morrison advocates Black people who have always been the outcasts in the American society due to the forced inferiority complex inherited by multiple generations. She also focuses on the memories of oppression in American Black individuals, families and society who experience what Erik Erikson calls Identity Crisis—a developmental

experience in which an individual doubts their understanding of their identity or their position in the outside world—before they reaffirm their Black identity (Kendra). They also break away from the physical and mental wounds of childhood traumas. Morrison shows how this intrinsic Black concept of America transforms and reproduces the problems of racism and trauma in the 21st century commercial and capitalist society.

In the novel, Sweetness' family showed the effect of the etiology of internalized racism and trauma transmission which started from her grandmother. Sweetness internalized her grandmother's and her parental authoritative style of detachment and projected it on her daughter. Bride, or Lula Ann, was deprived of the opportunity to form her own identity. Her own light-skinned mother, Sweetness, denied Lula Ann from the moment she was born due to her black skin color, a part of Lula Ann's body itself. She called her a "pickaninny" (Morrison 6). The real reason behind Sweetness' black skin hatred suggests what De Bois refers to as a double consciousness of the deeply rooted skin color inferiority and white supremacy among Black people.

The family relationship, which should be based on love, is a double-sided consciousness on skin color. This leads to a disconnection between parents and their children who are rejected by the father and/or the mother for being born with dark skin color just like Lula Ann or Bride in this novel. The consciousness of Bride's father, Louis, who internalizes white people's racial prejudice, is a consciousness of Black people who came to accept the notions of Blackness equaling inferiority and began applying them even inside the Black community. Fanon maintains that color prejudice is a human construct created by a group of individuals in order to judge, frown upon, and place in an inferior position those who do not fit the criteria or ideals they have established. Color prejudice did not end at the individual level; it also became a criterion for collectively judging races. This criterion is centered on skin

color; the lighter the skin color is, the higher and stronger the individual is.

Louis, who abandoned the family and left after seeing his daughter's dark color, is the first person to reject Lula Ann. He walks out of her as well as her mother's life. Sweetness recalls: "We had three good years together but when she was born he blamed me and treated Lula Ann like she was a stranger—more than that, an enemy"; "He never touched her. I never did convince him that I ain't never, ever fooled around with another man. He was dead sure I was lying" (Morrison 6). This ideal of whiteness resulted from color prejudice causes even mistrust in Black marriages, for the birth of a tar-black baby to light-skinned parents raises the ugly specter of imagined infidelity and the ruination of marriage and family (Franklin, et al. 69).

Similarly, Sweetness' behavior regarding her daughter is the result of denying Black identity. She justifies the abuse of her daughter by wrapping it up as a strict education that makes it possible to survive in a racist society. The mother racially passes double consciousness through skin color to her daughter, the next generation. In order for Bride to survive in a racist society, she had to move in accordance with the oppressive thinking of her society. Lula Ann or Bride learns "how to keep her head down and not to make trouble" (Morrison 8). Sweetness' parenting style is nothing but the product of the double consciousness and racial prejudice which she witnessed in the American society as a whole and the Black community specifically. She has heard and experienced the stories of previous generations about the social meaning of Black in a capitalist society and its effects on Black identity.

Sweetness knows that people may think that "it's a bad thing to group ourselves according to skin color—the lighter, the better—in social clubs, neighborhoods, churches, sororities, even colored schools. But how else can we hold on to a little dignity?" (Morrison

4). She recalls when her friends and neighbors look at her child Lula Ann and jump back frightened or frown upon her because of her dark skin. Morrison, however, reveals through Sweetness' confession that her hatred for Black people is not personal but the product of the previous generations of Sweetness who lived following the rules of Jim Crow in the South where Black people were separated from white people. Numerous dark skinned people, having said that, could no longer tolerate inferiority and chose to fight against it. Nevertheless, Fanon claims that countless other African Americans decided to adapt denegrification as a consequence. Sweetness reveals in a confession directed to the readers, "You should've seen my grandmother; she passed for white and never said another word to any one of her children. Any letter she got from my mother or my aunts she sent right back, unopened" (Morrison 3). Sweetness' grandmother lived as a white person due to her light skin color and separated herself from the Black community. Her mother also enjoyed the privilege of light skin color by avoiding the inconveniences of these discriminating laws. Sweetness' mother rejected the black skin color to the point where she chose the Bible for white people instead of the one for Blacks in her wedding ceremony, "When she and my father went to the courthouse to get married there were two Bibles and they had to put their hands on the one reserved for Negroes. The other one was for white people's hands" (4).

Sweetness is a Black woman who recognizes that skin-colored prejudice is wrong, but has given Bride a self-defense education that teaches her to avoid the violence against dark skinned people in a society dominated by white supremacy. However, due to this strict education, Bride who was a child did not establish her identity as an African American. In this regard, Fanon states: "without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned" (106) which evokes not just a feeling of inferiority, but also a feeling of nonbeing. "A feeling of inferiority?

No, a feeling of nonexistence. Sin is Negro as virtue is white" (106).

Through all of this, Morrison suggests the importance of parents as mentors to rebuild the definition of what it means to be an African American, leading to a recognition of Black identity. Bride constantly uses Black identity in a different way than previous generations. She reproduces black skin, which is a symbol of inferiority, as a product and turns racial and beauty standards into a tool and a strategy for the sale of cosmetics. Although she has escaped the previous generation's consciousness to recognize Black people as ugly and inferior, Bride has relied on other people's judgments through her image as a "beautiful black woman" and has failed to develop a personal identity based on her own ideas and values. Thus, we maintain that double consciousness is still present in the new generation of Black people.

Many African Americans, as per bell hooks, are still fearful of being classified as a reverse racist for discussing their individual journey with whiteness, even if they are unable to verbalize it. Thus, in Morrison's last novel there were numerous events where Black characters choose to remain silent regarding white peoples' horrendous treatment; for instance, Sweetness is well aware of the difficulty to rent a house in a safe area where white people can live. It was illegal to rent a house that discriminates against skin color, but she knew that white owners did not obey the law and decided to rent according to their standards and the white owner Mr. Leigh asks for seven dollars more than advertised. hooks contends that whiteness operates as the ground of influence and the status of supremacy for as long as white people sustain their race's perception as the superior parallel and that others must concede accordingly.

3.2. Individual Traumas

3.2.1. Lula Ann's/ Bride's Trauma

3.2.1.1. Lula Ann, Sudanese Black

The protagonist Lula Ann Bridewell (Bride) is the most affected character by the black skin prejudice in the novel. Morrison portrays Lula Ann as an inferior girl who is not aware of the beauty of Black people and had no choice but to suffer from “abjection” by her mother and almost everyone in her community.

In Julia Kristeva's book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, she defines Abjection as “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). Kristeva sees that Abject is the human response, whether be it terror or other responses to a rupture in meaning produced by the collapse of the boundary between self and other, subject and object.

The following passages, will shed light on the main three characters—her mother, Sweetness; her personal designer, Jeri; and her current lover, Booker; who taught Lula Ann the meaning of her black skin and see their influence on the development of her Identity.

- **Sweetness**

Lula Ann was taught the social meaning of dark skin by her mother, Sweetness, whose skin is light enough to be passed as white. She learned from her mother that black skin creates a social disadvantage. Lula Ann learned how she could avoid the damage caused by her black skin, at least in the environment where she was raised. Her mother who claimed in chapter one of the novel

It's not my fault. So you can't blame me. I didn't do it and have no idea how it happened. It didn't take more than an hour after they pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong. Really wrong. She was so

black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black. I'm light-skinned, with good hair, what we call high yellow, and so is Lula Ann's father. Ain't nobody in my family anywhere near that color. Tar is the closest I can think of yet her hair don't go with the skin. It's different—straight but curly like those naked tribes in Australia. You might think she's a throwback, but throwback to what? (Morrison 3)

Lula Ann, as described by her mother, is born with a very dark skin tone. No one in their family was close to that color. Her colorist mother taught her that her skin color frames the person she is and that she should always bear in her mind that “her color is a cross she will always carry” (8) in their racist society. As Lula Ann grew up, she decides to leave the house that created her childhood traumas and her mother along with it. Bride throws her childhood name, Lula Ann Bridewell, and changes it permanently to “Bride” which indicates the abjection of herself.

Bride's self-abjection is the outcome of a dysfunctional mother-daughter connection. According to Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, the abject is closely linked to “primal repression”—one that occurs prior to the development of the subject's relationship to its object of desire, it is “our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity” (13). Kristeva adds that the person has to reject the maternal entity to become a separate self, a subject. Following this, Bride's rejection of her mother is impossible because she is already rejected by Sweetness since birth. Thus, she fails to become a subject.

- **Jerry**

It was Jerry who taught Bride a new social meaning of black skin. He is a man who called himself a total person designer and encouraged Bride to wear only white. He explained

that black is “the hottest commodity in the civilized world” (Morrison 41).

What should be noted here is that Bride's skin color which was a symbol of inferiority is restructured to satisfy the demands of the American market. With the help of Jerry's consultation, twenty three years old Bride, got a job at a cosmetics company called Sylvia, Inc and was soon promoted to regional manager with her own product line “YOU, GIRL”. She always wears white clothes and minimizes accessories as a way to emphasize her black skin. Jerry taught Bride that the meaning of black skin can change depending on the way it is shown or self-evaluated.

Bride's new self-perception can be explained through Kristeva “maternal anguish”—being unable to pass the primal repression, she is “unable to be satiated within the encompassing symbolic” (8). Bride is unable to become a unified subject because she is unable to proceed into the symbolic stage; as a response, she strives to detach her identity from the other which is in this case her mother. As Kristeva claims: “only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be her. An Other who precedes and possesses her and through such possession cause her to be” (10). Bride's new identity is recognized through a cosmetics brand and the new image she created through it.

Morrison shows Bride as the other side of colorism's obsession with dark skin: the fetish, Bride takes advantage of her body's unavoidable objectification. She seems to be successful on the surface, with most of the materialistic images she uses to promote the new narrative she constructs for herself. Still inside Bride, through all the blooming, lives the seed of Lula Ann. Lula Ann that is raised to use her “physical beauty” (Franklin, et al. 34).

- **Booker Starbern**

Bride's boyfriend is the person who taught Bride that it is meaningless to stick to skin color and race as an explanation for all situations. In a conversation with Bride, he states

“It’s just a color,” Booker had said. “A genetic trait—not a flaw, not a curse, not a blessing nor a sin.” “But,” she countered, “other people think racial—” Booker cut her off. “Scientifically there’s no such thing as race, Bride, so racism without race is a choice. Taught, of course, by those who need it, but still a choice. Folks who practice it would be nothing without it.” His words were rational and, at the time, soothing but had little to do with day-to-day experience. (Morrison 167-68)

Booker's statements show that the act of giving a great deal of meaning to a skin color, which is merely a body feature, is a meaningless act. It also indicates that white people, too, are tied to their skin color in order to maintain their superior status. Therefore, if Black people continue to stick to the ideas of skin color prejudice, they will end up encouraging the social and cultural structures to discriminate against them.

By the end of the novel, Bride realizes that the meaning of her black skin is nothing more than a socially and culturally formed concept and that she is the one who holds responsibility to construct her own identity not the others.

3.2.1.2. Mother Neglect

Morrison's tracing of the childhood trauma of the novel’s protagonist is based on the disconnection in the mother and daughter relationship. Although Bride overcomes tough conditions and succeeds in becoming a successful Black woman who drives expensive cars, she does not visit or talk to her mother who gave her a harsh childhood experience.

The author reveals in this novel the mother's rejection of her daughter's skin color through the first-person narrative of the mother, Sweetness. In the first chapter of the novel, Sweetness recalls the birth of her child Lula Ann in the 1990s, saying “She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black” (Morrison 3). Sweetness' confession highlights

her refusal to recognize Lula Ann. However, instead of physical violence such as the fleeting urge to kill her daughter “just for a few seconds—I held a blanket over her face and pressed” (5), she chooses mental violence that further breaks the mother-daughter relationship by having Lula Ann refer to her as Sweetness rather than mother.

Another reason for the mother’s refusal of Bride’s skin color is also because of personal pain. With Bride’s birth, Sweetness had to experience the abandonment of her husband, Louis. He accuses his wife with infidelity and leaves his family. In the last chapter of the novel, the sixty-three years old Sweetness is staying at the nursing home. She confesses: “When my husband ran out on us, Lula Ann was a burden. A heavy one but I bore it well” (210). Although she says she had held it well the pain that she had to endure was not easy for Sweetness. She stresses that she is a mother who did not cast aside her maternal conscience and responsibility, by saying that she did not want to be “one of those mothers who put their babies on church steps” (5).

According to Bride's perspective, Sweetness refused to even touch the young Bride's body when she was giving her a bath or punishing her, to the point where Bride “could tell. Distaste was all over her face when I was little and she had to bathe me. Rinse me, actually, after a halfhearted rub with a soapy washcloth. I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch” (36).

Add to that, the mother has never been to the school's parents’ gatherings. In this regard, Sweetness also talks about her harsh treatment towards Bride in the last chapter of the novel, along with a tone of regret and reveals all of her violence towards her young daughter. It was through the act of making a fuss when Lula Ann accidentally fell or dropped things and when she was roughing her rebellious daughter by the time she turned twelve. But her cruel rejections led the young Lula Ann to experience a psychological shock and gave her a trauma.

Moreover, because of Bride's undeveloped self-concept, she lacks peer-group socialization experiences. Her mother's inability to nurture her daughter results in her having a weakened self-concept which influences her ability to make healthy choices and choose friends (Franklin, et al. 22). Sweetness justifies of the harsh criticism of one's daughter as if it were an act to cultivate durability to endure it in a society dominated by racial discrimination and violence. After Sweetness witnesses a young Black girl being assaulted by white boys in the street, she reveals that she had raised her daughter harshly to protect her from such violence. Despite Sweetness' refusal, young Bride relies on her mother and wants to get her attention and establish a healthy bond with her.

To understand further Bride and Sweetness' mother-daughter bond, we need to analyze it using Jacques Lacan's the Name-of-the-Father-theory. The Father's Law comes between the mother and the child, disrupting the child's desire for primal unity. However, in Lula Ann's case, the father is absent and the mother rejects any kind of intimacy with her. Lacan proclaims that all children come into being as subjects when they recognize the mother's desire for something other than themselves, yet Bride has to realize that her mother does not desire her. In order to become a subject, interpellation must occur—Althusser's process through which an individual is “hailed” and subsequently responds, taking on the qualities associated with that name and hence entering the social stage. In Bride's situation, Sweetness avoids to hail her child as “daughter” making her depressed. Her childhood is characterized by constant racist language because of her skin color. Bride rejects the prior contestation and denies the Name of the Father, preventing her from accessing what Lacan considers to be the symbolic order. Infants aged six to eighteen months undergo what Lacanian psychology refers to as the mirror stage, wherein the child recognizes his reflection in the mirror and considers himself to be identical with that reflection. When a child learns a language and is interpellated,

he or she enters the symbolic order, where he or she becomes both a subject and an object. Bride remains fixed in the mirror stage, the stage of misrecognition, mistakenly perceiving herself as a unified whole, requiring no one else. However, for Lacan the gender of the child staring into the mirror influences the identification process. Bride bases her complete identity on her appearance, shaping herself into an object to be observed mostly with the assistance of Jerry (Stave 9-12).

3.2.1.3. Rape Witness Trauma and Silence

According to Judith Herman, “witnesses as well as victims are subject to the dialectic trauma” (1). This means, when children are sexually harassed or witnessed such violence, it evolves to a strong trauma that suffocates children's self-esteem and prevents them from finding role models and harms their adulthood. At the age of six, Lula Ann witnesses a white landlord, Mr. Leigh, sexually harassing a white young boy. This incident leaves an unforgettable scar in her memory. Adult Bride recalls the sexual molestation while talking about her fears and wounds to Booker. Even though she locked these memories away, they vividly come to her mind as if she has seen it for the first time. She confesses to Booker how painful and scary it was. Herman says that “long after the danger is passed, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present” (26). Hence, Bride's disturbing experience locks her in her traumatic memories and prevents her escape.

Lula Ann tried to tell her mother about it, but Sweetness turns a blind eye to the injustice made against an innocent soul and kept threatening Lula Ann to keep her mouth shut so that no one knows about the incident. Sweetness did not even listen or try to comfort her. All she cared for is that she might not be able to find a house to live in, or get another job if the news spread. Two years later, at the age of eight, still hunted by these memories which physically possessed her, Lula Ann falsely accuses Sofia Huxley of sexual molestation

because she wanted to take revenge for her silence and pain. “What if it was the landlord my forefinger was really pointing at in that courtroom? What that teacher was accused of was sort of like what Mr. Leigh did. Was I pointing at the idea of him?” (Morrison 65).

In addition, Morrison emphasizes that this pain and silence developed to a psychological trauma. “A human being in a situation that is difficult to respond to fear is in a state where the spirit of God is extremely violated, and there is no room to drive out the trauma, which is the source of this, by his own power alone” (16), Herman's comment tells us that Lula Ann's indescribable situation of shock and horror has given her a trauma. She emphasizes the important role of parents' response to their young children who witnessed sexual violence or had direct experience with it. That is to say, the type of parent's response either serves to prevent childhood trauma or aid to its formation.

3.2.1.4. False Testimony

In the early chapters of the novel, Bride has a plan she kept in the shadow for many years. She was determined to see Sofia Huxley, therefore she visited the home page of the prison to check the needs of Sofia. She prepared money and gifts for her and that was the most important project for her to carry out. When Bride was young, three male and female teachers in kindergarten including Sofia were accused of sexually molesting the children. Lula Ann was one of the children who testified in the court against the teachers. Her false testimony deceived everyone and convicted Sofia. After serving fifteen years in the prison, Sofia met Bride who visited to undo her mistake.

Undoing is Defense Mechanism coined by Sigmund Freud which is the process of undoing some type of unacceptable behavior by masking it with a positive behavior. However, an unexpected thing happens. Sofia suddenly beats down Bride until she was half dead, as Bride narrated: “I don’t feel anything. I don’t think anything. Not until I see my face in the

side-view mirror. My mouth looks as though it's stuffed with raw liver; the whole side of my face is scraped of skin; my right eye is a mushroom" (Morrison 25).

Herman points out that "the adult survivor is at great risk of repeated victimization at adult life" (81). Bride who could not defend herself felt like she returned to Lula Ann, who never counterattacked. She was severely hurt physically and mentally by the unexpected assault of Sofia, and she feels bad that she was not able to undo her testimony. It is not until the last chapter that Bride confesses to Booker that it was a false testimony.

"I lied! I lied! I lied! She was innocent. I helped convict her but she didn't do any of that. I wanted to make amends but she beat the crap out of me and I deserved it".

The room temperature had not risen, but Bride was sweating, her forehead, upper lip, even her armpits were soaking.

"You lied? What the hell for?"

"So my mother would hold my hand!" (Morrison 180-81)

This confession alone could not clear up the charges against Sofia, but revealed a young Bride who was hungry for her mother's love. She committed a crime of pointing at the innocent Sofia as a child offender because of her desire to get recognition from her mother. Even though her testimony was all a lie, Bride received a warm embrace from her neighbors and, more importantly, from her mother, "[A]fter the trial Sweetness was kind of motherlike" (Morrison 36). Bride recalled that Sweetness "held my hand, my hand. She never did that before and it surprised me as much as it pleased me because I always knew she didn't like touching me" (36). The "hand holding" is symbolically used in Morrison's various works and the main reason to why Bride gave false testimony in this novel is that she desperately wanted her mother's physical contact and attention.

It is also noteworthy to question the intentions of Bride. Why did not Lula Ann point at the male teacher who would have been a good substitute to Mr. Leigh, the landlord she saw molesting a child and choose Sofia instead? Through the lens of Freud's defense mechanism Projection—a psychological defense where a person 'projects' unwanted feelings, thoughts and memories onto another individual—we understand the real reason behind her decision. Bride targeted the most vulnerable person because to her, Lula Ann is like Sofia, who is "gentle, funny, even, and kind" (Morrison 55). Sofia was not loved by her religious parents, this lack of parental love Bride found in Sofia was very similar to her own. For Bride, Sofia is a mirroring image of herself that she wants to get rid of, that is why she choose to point at her in the court in a way she wanted to avoid dealing with her angry feelings towards her uncaring mother.

3.2.1.5. You Not the Woman I Want

From the very beginning of the novel, Bride faces what Alfred Adler calls Inferiority Complex. When she was the young Lula Ann, she was consistently rejected and neglected because of her dark skin color, be it from her mother or society. According to Adler, neglect can lead to the development of Inferiority Complex because "[i]f a child is really hated and neglected from the beginning of his life, he cannot live—such a child will perish" (67).

The opportunity to work in a big cosmetics company and looking beautiful in white clothes are Bride's compensation of the Inferiority Complex to reach her personal superiority, a way to feel good about herself. But, when Booker decides to leave her, she feels neglected again, she confesses: "I'm scared. It's terrible. I think. I can't explain, but I knew from the beginning. It started when he said, 'You not the woman I want' I'm scared. Something bad is happening to me. I feel like I'm melting away. I can't explain it to you but I do know when it started" (Morrison 9).

“I’m melting away” refers to the physical change in Bride's body. Booker's words “You not the woman I want” continue to hunt Bride's thoughts. Bride believes that her physical regression began “not simply after he left, but because he left” (108). The main instances where the reader was directly exposed to Bride's body change in the novel start with Bride’s sudden loss of her pubic hair followed by hints regarding her drastic decrease in weight and how months passed without her menstrual period.

However, no one seems to be aware of this change except Bride. This change can be a symbol of the regression of her mind back to the time when she was a victim constantly abused by her mother. Bride states: “she was changing back into a little black girl” (113), a little Black girl who constantly longs for someone's recognition. From this point of view, Bride tries to find Booker to fight for herself and get some answers about the past as “she felt she had been scorned and rejected by everybody all her life” (114). Meeting with Booker serves as an opportunity for Bride to look back on her childhood scars hidden in her unconscious.

Moreover, the constant rejection threatens Bride's identity as an adult woman. The physical changes are similar to what Sigmund Freud refers to as identity crisis which is caused by many events that Bride goes through. Almost in all of them, Bride hurts her whole body which shows the collapse of her adult identity. Her body that was built as a defense device against her weakness is now under constant deformity. For instance, when Bride encounters Sofia, she gets injured. The narrative focuses on Bride's physical damage or when she injured her leg after her car crashed into a tree, she gets stuck and feels helpless.

Additionally, in the recovery process Bride becomes weak and needs the protection of others around her. Bride is first guarded by Brooklyn, then guarded by Steve and Evelyn, and finally by Booker. The narrative then stresses how her body slowly recovers to its normal form

where she no longer needs other people's assistance. The physical injury experienced by Bride leads to a restoration of her adult identity. Not to forget that while staying with Steve and Evelyn, Bride meets Rain, a young white girl. Bride is surprised to find that her body looks the same as Rain. The transformation of her body into one similar to the young girl indicate that the two share a similar painful childhood traumas.

3.2.1.6. PTSD

Bride is suffering from PTSD. She displays herself in a new image, a new persona and abandons her old self, her past as Lula Ann. This can be read as self-hatred, her words “Neither am I” as a reply to Booker’s “You not the woman I want” (Morrison 9) to when he left her shows that she is not satisfied with her new image. Bride, similarly to other postmodern literary heroines, expresses herself and proudly confronts the world about whatever is going on in her head.

3.2.2. Booker's Trauma

3.2.2.1. Mourning

Booker’s family, the Starbern, is a much-evolved family that empowers children with critical thinking skills and self-reliance, the latter of which fosters self-confidence and independence. Since the Starbern always keep television out of their house and sought to instill reading habits in their family, Booker is a reader and therefore does not fall for the capitalist fallacy which says wealth equals happiness; neither does he fall for the achievement and patriarchal stereotypes which equate superiority with masculinity. He refuses these shackles on purpose because he has seen firsthand how power makes people greedy and inhuman and how it is obtained by unethical means, as the likes of his maternal grandfather, who made his millions as a slumlord and of whom Booker's mother is frightened of even as an adult. Booker grows up in a stable family, with a mother, a father, many siblings, and

discipline (Franklin, et al. 72). Booker Starbern is knowledgeable, kind, and respectful towards women, but most importantly, he is inclined to acknowledge his own flaws and thinks rationally in order to improve and develop into a mature individual.

Booker is another character who lives under the burden of his traumatizing childhood memories which are inevitably linked to the kidnapping and subsequent murder of his older brother, Adam. Booker learnt when he was young that his beloved brother was kidnapped, sexually molested by a pedophile and murdered. He witnessed the decomposed state Adam's body was in, "The maggots, overfed and bursting with glee, had gone home leaving fastidiously clean bones under the strips of his mud-caked yellow T-shirt. The corpse wore no pants or shoes" (Morrison 133). A few years after the incident, the man was revealed to be a pedophile, a white male in a car repair shop who used a puppy to lure six boys from different backgrounds, tied up the kidnapped ones, forced them to death, molested them sexually, cut off their genitals and kept them in a glass bottle. He had the names of Adam and other victims tattooed on his shoulder and was known through media outlets as the "nicest man in the world" (130). The unfair death of his beloved older brother was reduced into another victim's name; he was just a line in a newspaper's list of six victims. Booker was badly disturbed by this murder that left him without his dear older brother.

Adam was more than just the older brother, he was the one who filled the void of the twin brother who did not make it to birth. Through the years of Booker's childhood his twin became an "inner companion", an internalized object.

Booker was three when they let him know he was a twin to the one who did not survive birth, but somehow he'd always known it—felt the warm void walking by his side, or waiting on the porch steps while he played in the yard. As he grew older the shape of the void faded, transferred itself into a

kind of inner companion, one whose reactions and instincts he trusted. (134)

Adam was the “flawless replacement” of the lost twin Booker knew about at the age of three. To Booker “When he started first grade and walked to school every day with Adam the replacement was complete. Therefore, following Adam’s murder, Booker had no companion. Both were dead” (134) and similarly to his mourning process with his stillborn twin, he internalized his older brother Adam. Sigmund Freud confirms that the melancholic person instead of finding a substitute to the lost object, in this case his brother Adam, he internalizes that object. Freud claims that it is a necessary procedure for an ordinary and successful mourning. It is also noteworthy to focus on the point that the Starbern family named their children alphabetically. Therefore, Adam, the eldest child in his family and the ‘A’ was an exceptionally special brother to Booker, a “brother he worshipped” (Morrison 134). This sudden loss of Starbern’s ‘A’ forced him, the ‘B’ of the family, to fall into a state of confusion and helplessness. This indicates that Adam’s death ruined Booker’s life order just like the alphabet as it is not usual to start the order from the middle or by skipping some letters. Similarly, Booker refuses to ‘skip’ his older brother. Adam’s murder left a huge impact on him and left him with a sense of shallowness that forced him into deep sorrow and unspeakable pain.

But two events were added to this unbearable situation for the shocked Booker. The first one, which really infuriates Booker, is the reaction both the authorities and the community have after the disappearance of his dear brother

When the police responded to their plea for help in searching for Adam, they immediately searched the Starberns’ house—as though the anxious parents might be at fault. They checked to see if the father had a police record. He didn’t. “We’ll get back to you,” they said. Then they dropped it. Another little

black boy gone. So? (132)

Through this reaction Toni Morrison depicts the failed role of authorities to save young innocent children, and the racial discrimination African Americans face in such situations. Add to that, the public rage over the conviction of the “nicest man in the world” (130) which blocked his process of private mourning. Resentment is what Booker felt towards everyone, he struggled in order to discover an alternative to freeze and individualize his feelings.

The second one, which ends up getting on his nerves even more is the pretense of normalcy that his own family showcased a few days after Adam's funeral. It did not fit in his head that both his parents and siblings strive to return to their normal business and family routines while he lived through a real nightmare alone. But, Booker fails to notice that his parents have other children to tend to and look after. They know that they must keep the rest of them safe and away from harm and prevent the family's essence from dissipation. Booker is unaware, for instance, that his father's sorrow is more intense than his because following Adam's death, his father stopped listening to jazz music which used to bring him great joy.

Booker's trauma has had a serious impact on his life enough to turn him into a cynic and cut him off from his family. Booker requests to learn how to play the trumpet and works to pay for one-half the cost of his lessons. He chooses to learn trumpet lessons every Saturday morning to avoid his family's Saturday gatherings. He prefers to dwell in the past and abandons his family, although he maintains contact with the Starbarn family via his aunt Queen Olive, who serves as a parent and companion to Booker.

As he grows older, he becomes more interested in obscene magazines than studying after going to college and falls into cynicism and skepticism about materialism and politics. Morrison demonstrates the constraints of academic life for anyone struggling with trauma in

her portrayal of Booker's psychological status. One day on a visit to the Starbarn, his family's home, Booker was beyond shocked:

When he visited his and Adam's old bedroom, the thread of disapproval he'd felt during his proposal of a memorial [to his murdered brother] became a rope, as he saw the savage absence not only of Adam but *of himself*. So when he shut the door on his family and stepped out into the rain it was an already belated act. (Morrison 146-47, Italics added)

It is obvious in the passage above that Booker indeed sees Adam as a replacement to his twin, his inner companion, thus he felt Adam's absence in the family as if it was his own absence. This clarifies the nature of Booker's mourning and shows how it is extremely difficult for him to easily move on from the death of his brother.

Adam's death left a huge impact on Booker as Queen reveals later in the novel and that in the process of his mourning, he chooses to eternally remember the last moments of Adam. His grief is never ending because he is unable to let go of his deceased brother. As a result, Booker suffers from pathological symptoms, wherein the missing object is concealed within his memory.

The last time Booker saw Adam he was skateboarding down the sidewalk in twilight, his yellow T-shirt fluorescent under the Northern Ash trees. It was early September and nothing anywhere had begun to die. Maple leaves behaved as though their green was immortal. Ash trees were still climbing toward a cloudless sky. The sun began turning aggressively alive in the process of setting. Down the sidewalk between hedges and towering trees Adam floated, a spot of gold moving down a shadowy tunnel toward the

mouth of a living sun. (134-35)

According to Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, when people lose a love object, most likely through the death of a beloved, they go through a painful psychological journey to withdraw the libido that had been originally attached to the love-object and to displace it onto a substitute. It is a journey during which the individual loses interest in the world and the ability to love any other object. It is the same case for Booker, as Queen reveals in the later parts of the novel that “he’s a leaver, all right. Left his own family. All except me” (Morrison 172), he decides to abandon his family because the Starbarn tried to move on from his brother's death. To him “Adam's death became his own life” (172), so he rejects anyone who tries to stop his process to mourn his brother in the way he deems appropriate.

In his melancholic state, Booker is incapable of processing the loss of the love-object, his older brother Adam, through ordinary mourning. The real reason that prohibits Booker from successful mourning lies in his inability to find a substitute in reality which can compensate for his loss. He is unwilling to replace Adam which is evident in his actions after his brother’s death as with his refusal to have friends. This indeed confirms that Booker failed to properly mourn Adam, considering his significant place in Booker's life.

3.2.2.2. Violence

After Adam's unfair death, Booker lets his childhood trauma dominate his present. He suffers from depression and showcases a special uncontrollable aggression towards adults who leave children unattended and towards perpetrators of child abuse. An anger that is in fact directed at the pedophile who murdered Adam which is an evidence of a defense mechanism known as Displacement.

Displacement is a process of adopting a behavior in response to something that cannot be achieved and displaying it on a less dangerous target. Freud introduced the concept of

displacement which occurs when an individual passes a traumatic demand or thought to others. He described it “as the most powerful instrument of the dream-censorship”, this means that certain elements replace other elements in a chain of associations within the mind (Freud 20).

Therefore, when Booker sees a sexual predator, a white man with his lower body uncovered as he was ogling young children in the playground near his college campus, he felt as if he was witnessing the assault of his own brother which resulted in him beating the man until he lost consciousness and “left the beaten man’s jeans open and his penis exposed just the way it was when he first saw him at the edge of the campus playground” (Morrison 127). Booker got arrested, but avoided being sentenced. Another incident of his uncontrollable rage is when

He had passed a couple, parked near an empty lot, taking turns sucking on a crack pipe. The sight was of no interest to him until he noticed a child, maybe two years old, screaming and crying while standing in the backseat of the crackheads’ Toyota. He walked over to the car, yanked open the door, dragged the man out, smashed his face and kicked away the pipe that had fallen to the ground. (150-51)

One more instance of his anger fits is at a family dinner after getting a Master's degree. Booker offered his father to make a scholarship fund as a project to remember his brother Adam, but he was extremely disappointed by his father's negative reaction. After a short visit to his old room, the one he shared with Adam, he found out that Carol, his younger sister, changed it to her room and removed Adam's skateboard and all the traces of their old belongings. Booker lost control over his emotions and a huge fight occurred with her. The fight got out of hands to the point where Booker's father asked him to leave the house, and he did.

3.2.2.3. PTSD

In the majority of the novel, Booker Starbern remains a mystery. His relationship with Bride seems perfect, partly because of “her lack of interest in his personal life” (Morrison 156) and their shared freedom from family ties. However; when they share more about their lives, Booker perceives that Bride forgives Sofia Huxley, a child molester for the crimes she purportedly committed. Still bearing the weight of his emotional pain from his childhood trauma, he suddenly rejects Bride saying she was not the woman he wants, not acknowledging the regret she carries from her false testimony. His case can be classified as a PTSD.

Judith Herman writes in her book *Trauma and Recovery* that the inner clash of the human willpower, which is absurd to discuss anything that slips into an unpleasant condition, has a really strong inclination to demonstrate psychological trauma. This explains that the confused interpretations of the shocking events in the memories of the trauma victims result in an internal collision in the form of unconscious and conscious. Booker's misunderstanding shows that his trauma hinders his understanding and judgement. He cannot accept the fact that she is helping a molester who abuses children without knowing the background of Bride's decision.

Booker displays the great degree of pain he feels from Adam's victimization and passing. Later, Queen scolds him for using Adam as a reason for leaving Bride behind: “I guess good isn't good enough for you, so you called Adam back and made his murder turn your brain into a cadaver and your heart's blood formaldehyde” (Morrison 185).

Despite his fogged judgment, he denies Brooklyn when she intends to seduce him in a cool and collected manner, revealing both his highly sophisticated sexual morality and intelligent humor. By coldly rejecting Brooklyn's sexual advances, Booker undercuts the popular stereotypical image of the philandering Black man, adding yet another facet to the

complex and sophisticated image of Black manhood (Franklin, et al. 75).

Queen's accidental death in the later chapters of the novel helps Booker sort things out. Her tragic death teaches him the fragility of life and reminds him of his obligation towards his own life. Morrison's narration specifically shows the contrast between Booker's mourning over Adam and Queen's deaths, despite both tragedies being a death of beloved one.

The reason lies in Booker's age and maturity. When Adam died, Booker was a child, but when Queen died, he is older and mature enough to process grief and reach Freud's successful mourning which he was not able to achieve in the case of Adam's death (78).

Morrison gives an insight into Booker in this novel by going in depth into moments from Booker's childhood and early adulthood which together express Booker's immense desire for self-expression as a way of dealing with hypersensitive and often aggressive emotions in reaction to his brother's death (90).

4. Recovery Narrative

Morrison warns that not only children—particularly African Americans—were highly exposed to violence in the past, but children nowadays are likely to suffer the same fate. Judith Herman writes:

The consequences of child maltreatment can be long lasting and broader. The child's psychological and social development is negatively impacted as survivors often suffer difficulties in forming intimate relationships with others and a complete representation of self. Still, studies on early childhood development show that a child grown in an oppressive family or which has been subjected to a past traumatic experience becomes so sensitive that he feels always alarmed even in a safe condition. Moreover, disposing of no means of defense against his/her perpetrator, the victim responds to the

cruelties inflicted upon him by dissociation, self-abuse, depression and rage.

(88-90)

Characters in the novel, namely Bride (Lula Ann) and Booker, suffer from traumatic childhoods which render them hopeless and helpless in many situations and lead them to make wrong decisions against themselves and others. But these characters are in need to recover from their traumas and restore their connections with each other and their community, thus restoring their identity.

Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* maintains that the stages of recovery are “establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story and restoring the connection between survivors and their community” (3). Following this point, she confirms that the most suitable way to overcome trauma is to face it and points out that “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (1).

In a similar vein, Kristeva encourages in *Tales of Love* individuals to be open to others in order to love (15). Morrison, in her novel, advocates that the only method to be capable to love someone is to see and comprehend his or her mutual sorrow hidden trauma of others.

4.1. Booker

In his 1917 book *Mourning and Melancholia*, Sigmund Freud analyzes how people respond to the death of their loved ones and to the erosion of their morals. He explains that while mourning, the person experiences severe depression for a certain period, but it heals over time. To add; depression is a pathological state of mourning, accompanied by a serious despair, an absence of interest in the outside world and a loss of loving ability. When the mourning work is completed, the individual becomes free. Moreover, the loss of the subject of attachment evokes guilt about its death by the person because both processes are tightly

linked. When a person fails to accept losing their love object or when there is no process to make a meaning of loss, the person cannot mourn properly and falls into self-blame and despair in reality (584-89), which is depicted in Booker's process to mourn the death of his brother and aunt Queen.

Julia Kristeva cheers in *Tales of Love* “the patient to use language to explain—to symbolize—the loss by offering language as a compensation for the loss, seeks to engage the person in a process of self-renewal through interaction with others” (14-15).

For Booker, reading and writing helped him cope with his traumatic memories. He writes letters which hold the essence of his emotions about Bride and his brother. Jazz was, too, his personal way of expression. However, music eventually stood in his way to properly mourn the death of his beloved people, Adam and Queen.

The real healing process of trauma begins when Booker faces the truth, “Each time he imagined her eyes glittering toward him or her lips open in an inviting, reckless smile, he felt not just a swell of desire but also the disintegration of the haunt and gloom in which for years Adam's death had clouded him” (Morrison 154). Queen demanded that Booker tells the truth, saying, “You lash Adam to your shoulders so he can work day and night to fill your brain. Don’t you think he’s tired? He must be worn out having to die and get no rest because he has to run somebody else’s life” (184) and advised Booker stop his obsession with Adam. Following Queen's advice, Booker writes a letter saying goodbye to the deceased Adam who was his biggest trauma and is freed from the guilt that has captivated him.

Booker sends his sincere condolences to his brother and decides to live his life from now on. All his letters get burned in Queen's fire accident meaning his past was deleted and a new life awaits for both of them. His long-term mourning comes to an end and he overcomes the complex feelings about his brother Adam who influenced his life and designs a new future

with Bride and their unborn child.

Booker represents Morrison's inner thoughts on race in this piece, as she expresses her own views on race via Booker's sophisticated thoughts and conversations with Bride. He is a cultivated and witty character who recovers from his childhood trauma by writing his own complex feelings.

4.2. Bride

Herman states, “Those who have experienced trauma will not only have to mourn for the lost self that the trauma has destroyed, but they can also find a new world by forming a new self and discovering sustainable faith” (196).

Bride is a woman with a traumatic past, she constructed a fake identity through changing her physical appearance and her childhood name to fit the beauty standards of American society. This leads to a separation, a gap between the young Lula Ann, the past, and the adult Bride, the present. Both of them construct her identity, they are the result of her failed attempts to move past her childhood trauma alone.

In many events in the novel, the reader witnesses Bride's lack of honesty. Lula Ann falsely frames Sofia for a crime she never committed and Bride tries to silence her inner child and enjoy her new life peacefully. But Lula Ann speaks up and corrects the situation by apologizing to Sofia who violently beats her as a compensation leaving serious physical injuries on her body.

Bride's physical recovery in the last chapters refers to her healing from her childhood trauma and her return to adulthood as person free from trauma and physical pain. When Bride confesses to Booker her painful past and the traumas she had to bear at a young age, she becomes free from the mistakes that hurt others and from the ghosts of her childhood trauma. Morrison reveals: “Having confessed Lula Ann's sins she felt newly born. No longer forced to

relive, no, outlive the disdain of her mother and the abandonment of her father” (Morrison 190). Moreover, when Booker “offered her the hand she had craved all her life, the hand that did not need a lie to deserve it, the hand of trust and caring for—a combination that some call natural love” (206). She is finally free to redefine her identity and become stronger for herself, her unborn child, and for Booker.

4.3. Bride and Booker

Morrison purposely shapes Queen as a guide who points out the problems of Bride and Booker and recommends corrective actions.

Finding Booker who, after abandoning her, is staying near Queen's house; Bride shouts at him: “You don’t have to love me but you damn well have to respect me” (Morrison 181) and there's a fierce physical fight with the argument. Bride physically attacks Booker refuting that his writing was about him not about her and he also responded to her with violence. Morrison embodies the reunion of Bride and Booker as a process of violence and reconciliation, through a third person narrator “Now having slept so many hours she felt more than rested and free of tension; she felt strong” (190). When Bride and Booker confess their childhood traumas they allow their inner children to speak and be free of trauma's cuffs.

When Queen's house was burned down by the fire, both Bride and Booker showed a shared strong sense of consciousness and commitment to jump into the flames to save Queen. In addition, when she laid in bed with burns, Bride and Booker take turns nursing her. Morrison portrays that both show a little freedom from their traumas by helping one another out of the excessively obsessive behavior of their trauma. When Queen regains consciousness, they plan for a future in which the three of them live together. However, Queen's sudden death leads to an unclear future for them. Booker blames himself for not caring more for his deceased aunt, which shows that he still cannot deviate from his attitude of being overly

obsessed with his mourning process. Bride, too, keeps Queen's death as a reminder that the last few days were comfortable because the two focused on the third person they loved. She thinks about what will happen now that it is only both of them.

Queen predicted earlier that “They will blow it, she thought. Each will cling to a sad little story of hurt and sorrow— some long-ago trouble and pain life dumped on their pure and innocent selves. And each one will rewrite that story forever, knowing the plot, guessing the theme, inventing its meaning and dismissing its origin” (Morrison 186). Because of their endless clinginess to their painful pasts and childhood traumas, Queen was afraid they will not be able to find their happiness. However, after leaving Queen's ashes in the river, Bride announces her pregnancy to Booker. He, who lost both his brother and his aunt, thinks that he cannot lose another person.

In Herman's words “Many survivors are terribly afraid that their children will suffer a fate similar to their own, and they go to great lengths to prevent this from happening” (83). Similarly, Booker and Bride hope for “A child. New life. Immune to evil or illness, protected from kidnap, beatings, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing, abandonment. Error-free. All goodness. Minus wrath” (Morrison 207).

4.4. Mother-Daughter Relationship

Sweetness confesses that when she saw her daughter for the last time, she was so cool that she forgot her skin color. She reflects on her role as a mother and defends everything as being essential for Lula Ann. She expresses remorse yet refuses to apologize. After all, the neglected Lula Ann turned to Bride, a successful and beautiful woman who is going to be a mother very soon. Sweetness sees herself as a part of this success story (Franklin, et al. 43).

She also reveals in the last chapter of the novel “I reckon the thrill is about the baby, not its father” (Morrison 208), when Bride informs her mother about her pregnancy but never

mentions anything about Booker, the father of her child. Indicating that she sees her child as a compensation to her painful childhood.

Morrison positively resolves the issue created by racial discrimination between the mother and her daughter—Sweetness and Bride. Sweetness hopes for Bride and her unborn child a safe future. Through Sweetness' concluding remark, Morrison stresses the necessity of familial and maternal love in a child's journey to maturity as well as the hardship of being a mother.

Lula Ann. If you think mothering is all cooing, boo-ties and diapers you're in for a big shock. Big. You and your nameless boyfriend, husband, pickup—whoever—imagine OOOH! A baby! Kitchee kitchee koo! Listen to me. You are about to find out what it takes, how the world is, how it works and how it changes when you are a parent. Good luck and God help the child. (Morrison 210-11)

Conclusion

This chapter provided in its first part a brief summary of *God Help the Child*, introduced the characters and gave a psychoanalytical insight to Toni Morrison. It has also raised in the following part the issue of collective trauma which internalized the skin color prejudice, double consciousness and white supremacy in the modern African American society like the case of Bride's parents. The analysis of the collective trauma was centered on the fundamental ideas of the prominent African Americans figures such as Du Bois, hooks and others like Fanon. The chapter also analyzed the individual childhood trauma of the main characters, Lula Ann Bridewell and Booker Starbern, based on the trauma theories of Judith Herman and the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Alfred Adler and

Julia Kristeva. These theories aid the elaboration of different kinds of trauma and traced their origin, indicating that they were the result of child physical and emotional abuse, neglect and sexual molestation. In addition, the previous mentioned theories allowed the access to the both unconscious and conscious psyche of the characters and explained the effects of the childhood trauma on the construction of the characters' identity. Moreover, this chapter depicted the characters' recovery process of and show how the interactions between the different characters helped in healing as well as the role of forgiving oneself for past mistakes. In essence, this chapter served to clarify the different aspects of childhood trauma, its impact on the individuals, the recovery process towards healing and the hopeful wish for a better future for children in *God Help the Child* novel.

General Conclusion

When Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* was first published, it garnered conflicting feedback where a variety of reviewers perceived it positively; whereas others regarded the novel negatively. On this account, the focus of this dissertation is to investigate psychoanalytically childhood trauma and recovery expressed in the novel.

The first chapter reflected the theoretical foundation of the field of psychoanalysis along with a brief introduction to psychoanalytic literary criticism; it also highlighted the key founders of psychoanalysis namely Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Alfred Adler and Julia Kristeva. Furthermore, the chapter mentioned some of their fundamental theories such as some of Freud's concepts essentially Dream Work, the Structural Model of the Human Psyche and the Defense Mechanisms. Lacan's Mirror Stage, the Three Orders and the Law of the Father. Adler and his Inferiority Complex and Birth Order Theory in addition to Kristeva's Abjection which all were central in analyzing characters' inner thoughts and understanding their emotional turmoil in the third chapter.

The second chapter introduced a theoretical context of trauma and literary trauma theory by going through their definitions and history. It offered insight into collective and individual trauma types and their impact, PTSD's main causes and symptoms, trauma in postmodern literature along with the trauma and recovery narratives. Moreover, the chapter focused on the role of psychoanalysis in assimilating racial discrimination within the American community and psyche, along with Claudia Tate's perspective on the significance of using psychoanalysis to analyze Black literature. Add to that W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and bell hooks' valuable contributions to the psychoanalytic interpretation of Black Community and works of literature and finally it identified childhood trauma in the American postmodern fiction.

The third and last chapter highlighted the main events in Morrison's life related to the novel from a psychoanalytical perspective and included a synopsis of *God Help the Child*. In addition, it gave insight into the collective trauma of African American society in the novel, mainly the protagonist's family and the surrounding community using ideas of Du Bois, Fanon and hooks. The chapter also provided an examination of the theme of childhood trauma alongside the main characters' recovery by applying trauma and psychoanalysis fundamental principles mentioned in chapters One and Two. Moreover, the chapter drew attention to the way Morrison unconsciously liberated most of her traumatic experiences in her writings as numerous incidents in *God Help the Child* parallel the author's life. Those incidents can be apparent in events such as Bride's identity struggle in a racist society, Sweetness' broken marriage and her struggles of being a single mother and Booker's grief at the loss of a beloved someone. Furthermore, Morrison displayed a great control on narrative by giving her characters their distinct voices. Through their different points of view, they depict their inner emotions as well as childhood traumas such as Bride's trauma which resulted from a patriarchal mother and a racist society as well as their process towards recovery.

Pursuing a comprehensive analysis of *God Help the Child* resulted in confirming that the novel's characters indeed reflect Toni Morrison's real life including her repressed desires and conflicts via their own distinct first-person narrative as well as the occasional third person omniscient narrator. Many events experienced by characters are similar to the ones lived by Morrison such as Bride's change of names. In addition, the research has proven that psychoanalysis played an important role in deciphering the characters' conscious and unconscious psyche through applying its theories mainly to explain the impact of childhood trauma on the characters self-perception and their interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the research has evinced that Morrison was indeed capable of clearly portraying the majority of

the characters' childhood traumas and recoveries by giving them the chance to express their own voices and conflicted feelings. The writer provided the readers with enough traces to track down the characters' disunited traumatic experiences through trauma and recovery narratives.

Although some questions in this study were answered, others remained unanswered because the findings could not address all proposed questions about Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child*. Hence, extra research would be highly beneficial, as a number of other topics need further investigation, such as the study of the novel from a feminist perspective, stylistically examining the writer's style, and many more.

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الملخص

تدرس الأطروحة الحالية رواية الكاتبة الأمريكية توني موريسون "ليكن الرب في عون الطفلة" لتصوير الصدمة النفسية للطفل التي تعاني منها معظم شخصيات الرواية في المجتمع الأمريكي الذي أفسده التحيز العنصري من خلال سرد فريد من نوعه. إن الغرض الأساسي هو اقتفاء أثر تلك الصدمات النفسية وفترة التعافي من خلال تحليل مختلف الأحداث التي عُرضت عبر القصة الكاملة للرواية. كما يستخدم هذا البحث الأسلوب الوصفي والتحليلي الذي يستند أساساً على نظرية الصدمة النفسية ومنهج التحليل النفسي لتقييم الرغبات الفطرية والتجارب الصادمة لكل من الكاتبة موريسون وشخصياتها من الناحية التحليلية النفسية. تنقسم هذه الأطروحة إلى ثلاثة فصول حيث يتضمن الفصل الأول لمحة عامة عن علم النفس التحليلي والنقد الأدبي النفسي. ويتناول الفصل الثاني النقاط الرئيسية حول نظرية الصدمة النفسية ونظرية الصدمة الأدبية. أما الفصل الثالث والأخير فيصف النقاط المحورية للكاتبة موريسون وآخر أعمالها، كما يكشف عن الصدمات النفسية في مرحلة الطفولة وعملية تعافي كل من لولا آن/برايد وبوكر. ومنه توضح نتائج التحليل النفسي للروائية توني موريسون وكتابها "ليكن الرب في عون الطفلة" أن شخصيات الرواية هي إنعكاس لحياة الكاتب ومرآة للمجتمع الأمريكي. كما أنها تبين الدور القيم لعلم النفس التحليلي في فهم سيكولوجية موريسون وشخصيات الرواية في الأدب الأمريكي ما بعد الحداثة عموماً، وفي الرواية بشكل خاص. وعلاوة على ذلك، أكد التحليل على قدرة توني موريسون على تصوير صدمات الطفل النفسية للشخصيات ومسارهم نحو مرحلة التعافي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: توني موريسون، ليكن الرب في عون الطفلة، الصدمة النفسية للطفل، الأدب الأمريكي ما بعد الحداثة، منهج التحليل النفسي.