

Color Metaphor and Children's Psychological Trauma in Morrison's Novels

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ABSTRACT

"Trauma" is one of the important themes in Morrison's novels. In recent years, some critics use trauma theory to interpret Morrison's works, and combine her identity as a black female writer with feminist critical theory to analyze the black women's trauma in her works. This paper breaks through the limitation of interpreting Morrison's works from the perspective of feminism and racism, and it analyzes the color metaphor in the text based on the trauma theory. In addition, Morrison's novels describing the traumatic experience of black children are selected as the research objects in an attempt to show the unspeakable traumatic experience of black children in different historical periods.

Keywords: color metaphor, psychological trauma, Toni Morrison

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, the works of this African American female writer have been the focus of academic research in China and foreign countries. Morrison has so far published 11 novels, including her latest novel *God Help the Child*, which she wrote in 2015 at the age of 84. In those works, such as *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and *God Help the Child*, Morrison fully arouses the sensory impression of color to describe images, which brings the readers a deep impression. In these sensory descriptions, the use of color metaphor is one of the main artistic techniques used by the author. The color in literary works is not only the pure restoration and description of natural colors, but also a way and means of expression of thoughts generated after the processing and refinement of the writer's subjective consciousness. Metaphor is a cognitive way of thinking, acting and expressing thoughts. It is based on physical perception to describe and recognize abstract and incomprehensible things. That is to say, every object and every color in the novel is the product of the author's personal intention, and the author's choice of them reflects his real writing purpose. In Morrison's works, she gives black people cultural confidence and breaks the plight of black aphasia. And by using the color metaphor, Morrison manages to reveal the psychological trauma of the characters as well as the black aesthetic point of view to the outside world, so that the black aesthetics will not be marginalized. In addition, after reading the text of Morrison, we can find that the use of color metaphor does not only reveal the trauma of the characters in the novel, but also enriches the author's writing techniques.

Therefore, it is necessary to study the relationship between the use of color metaphor and the psychological trauma of black children in her works. Morrison brings color to life and depicts black life under the pressure of white culture in her novels. By the effective using of color metaphor, Morrison makes the theme of psychological trauma more prominent. This paper analyzes and discusses Morrison's narrative technique of using different color metaphors to show the traumatic symptoms of black children, and reveals her methods of healing those trauma in her novels from her earlier and latter period of creation. Finally, the author explains her political consciousness and cultural standpoint reflected in her creative practice. For a long time, the majority of Morrison studies have interpreted and compared the content from the perspective of literature criticism, such as narrative techniques and artistic features, while few have explored the cognition of color metaphor in a specific work from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Therefore, in this paper, several representative colors are selected as the research objects to study the connection between the use of color metaphor in the text and the psychological trauma of black children.

II. CONSTRUCTION OF COLOR METAPHOR

Since people are accustomed to using familiar, perceptible experiences to understand imperceptible abstract concepts, and cognitive linguistics calls familiar concrete objects "source domain", and unfamiliar abstract objects "target domain". Metaphor is the projection process from the "source domain" to the "target domain" on the basis of similarity between the two objects. Lakoff and Johnson pointed out in *Metaphors We Live By* that metaphorical models are

"mainly used to conceptualize, understand and reason abstract things, and are therefore the basic characteristics of thinking". According to his own cognition of different colors, the author uses different color words to form metaphorical meanings in many places in a work, placing his own emotions in it, creating different atmosphere, and adding a strong sense of color to the work. Metaphor has been regarded as a rhetorical device in traditional studies. With the development of cognitive linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson have completely subverted the concept of metaphor, and the study of metaphor has risen to the level of thinking. They found that metaphor plays a very important role in people's conceptual system and plays a role in shaping people's thinking mode and cognitive mode. Metaphor is the projection of an image schema from one thinking field to another based on people's experience. It is an important way for people to conceptualize and understand abstract things. Therefore, the process of constructing metaphor is also a process of thinking, and the use of conceptual metaphor is determined by human's own experience and way of thinking.

Similarly, what kind of color words writers use in their works depends on their own life experience and different perceptions of color. Color impinges on people's visual nerves and stimulates their cognitive reasoning mechanisms. As a form of metaphor, color words often reflect the meaning content generated by the characteristics of color and constitute the connotative meaning of color. The use of color metaphors can explain and elaborate abstract conceptual objects, through the interrelation to achieve the cognition and understanding of the object, so that the constitution of the color metaphor is achieved. In literary works, color word has become a very important rhetorical device and writing method. Color is a kind of visual perception, which stimulates our brain's cognitive reasoning on color characteristics and obtains the deep connotation behind color. As a perceptual system, color exists in people's cognitive structure. It is a perceptual representation of the interaction between human beings and the external world and a form of symbol. In Morrison's novels, color runs through all her novels. Color words are the bridge between the content of the work and the author's real intention, and the author's thoughts and emotions are vividly displayed in those color words. The interpretation of color metaphor from the perspective of cognitive linguistics is based on people's subjective cognition of the objective world and the commonness of color cognition in life experience. Taking the color words as the source domain, the color words are mapped to the non-color domain objects, so that the objects or concepts of other experience domains are understood and expressed through the original experience accumulation and perception of the color domain, then the color metaphor comes into being.

The names given to different colors in human language are called color words. In human culture, people use color to express concepts, states or emotions. Color metaphor is a mapping from the color domain to other cognitive domains. According to Shu Dingfang, "If the concept expressed in language is metaphorical, the same concept expressed through visual means is metaphorical." In addition, music and painting are also metaphorical. Therefore, color metaphor can be described as a way of thinking that builds mapping between various forms of color representation and other things in the conceptual domain through some similarity between them. The color domain is one of the most basic cognitive domains. Human cognition of color is an important part of cognition of the external world and experience.

III. COLOR METAPHOR AND BLACK CHILDREN'S TRAUMA

In recent years, African-American literature has gained increasing worldwide attention and a lot of new works have been produced. Because of the special historical and cultural background of African Americans, the tone of their literary tradition is antagonistic. They strive to find themselves and find their cultural roots, and they want to get rid of the influence of white racial and cultural values, which is clearly reflected in the language and rhetoric device of African American literature.

Henry Lewis Gates, a contemporary African American literary theorist, believes that the most prominent feature of African American literature is figurality. In his book *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, he points out that the beginning stage of African American tradition is metaphorical. In the white-dominated society, if they do not do so, they cannot survive. Blacks are masters of metaphor. They say one thing and they mean something completely different. It was a way for them to survive the repression of white culture. So the reading of African American is not a game, and this kind of metaphor is the most characteristic aspect of the African American tradition. It can be seen that the study of metaphor in African American texts plays an important role in interpreting the appropriate meaning of their texts. By explaining the unspeakable things behind the color metaphor in Morrison's novels, we can find the author's concern for the psychological trauma of African American children hidden behind the words. Metaphor is a way of life itself, in Morrison's masterpiece *Beloved*, Morrison tries to explore the African American children's inner world, particularly Denver and Beloved's life experiences. The implicit meaning carried by color here has specific meaning, so to explore the role of the prominent use of color in

Morrison's works can help readers to interpret her works better.

A. *Conflict between white and black in The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is Morrison's first and representative novel and plays an important role in her writing career. In this novel, the target domain of the metaphor of black and white is the antagonistic conflict between the African American and white worlds, and this conflict is the important cause of the psychological trauma of black children in the novel. Black color has long been defined as ugly and chaotic color by white society, while white color represents beauty and cleanliness. The definition of these two colors reflects the suppression of white hegemony culture over black culture. In *The Bluest Eyes*, Morrison confronted the real situation of black image and white image. White skin character is the mainstream and positive image, while black skin image symbolizes poverty and chaos. On the other hand, through the revelation of the pain caused by the white skin character, she denied the cultural identity tendency of "blending in" which was widely spread in the society at that time. The history of the definition of African Americans is just like a history reflecting the political, economic and cultural status of black people. Although there has been a short period of black radical resistance, but from the overall background, the white people have been in the dominant and hegemonic position. The white doll, white milk and white house mentioned in the novel are in sharp contrast to the black earth, black coal and black potion. These conflicts correspond to Pecola's childhood of not being loved by her mother and her childhood of being sexually abused. These psychological and physical traumas are reflected by the antagonism between black and white.

B. *Beloved's green brings hope of rebirth*

The opposition between black and white mentioned above is somewhat dispelled in Morrison's mid-period works. In *Beloved*, the black woman Sethe, is helped on the run by a white girl who delivers her daughter Denver when Sethe is dying. In Morrison's description, the white girl seems to be the "savior" of the world. There is no denying that the tragedy of Sethe is caused by white people, but not all white people are demons. In Morrison's other works, there are positive white images like this white girl, and there are some negative black images. In *The Song of Solomon*, the hero Milkman is the son of a black man, but he is greedy, cruel. Therefore, even the same color shows different target domains in Morrison's works in different periods. Green is the color of nature, symbolizing life, vitality and hope. Green is also a recurring color in *Beloved*. Many of the plots involve green, such as the beautiful trees in Sweet Home, the place where Baby Suggs leads his fellow blacks to pray, the green forest Sethe passes

through when she escapes from Sweet Home, and Denver's secret base, the emerald chamber. Green gave them hope and symbolized the black community's vision of a better life in the future. In the end, Beloved finally disappears into the forest. In African cultures, the bridge is traditionally the intermediary between the underworld and this world. The forest is the metaphor of the source of life. Beloved's return to the forest signaled the beginning of her new life.

C. *Bride's white and reconciliation*

Morrison's latest book *God Help the Child* takes the "childhood trauma" of the protagonists Bride and Booker as the starting point, showing the contemporary African American children suffering from psychological trauma caused by various people in the society. Therefore, the traumatic narrative of black children is another focus of the author besides black women, and it has important research value. Black color and white color appear repeatedly in this novel, while other colors are not used much by the author, but the meaning of black and white has changed from Morrison's first novel. The black girl Bride, says her favorite color is white. She always wears white clothes or skirts because they give her confidence. The reason for Bride's love of white is that she was despised by her parents at birth because of her dark skin. "She was so black, she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black." "Tar is the closest I can think of yet her hair don't go with the skin." And the name she gave herself also reflects the yearning for white skin, because the white is the color of western wedding dress of the bride. The love of white and the avoidance of black skin correspond to Bride's avoidance of her own painful childhood experiences. "At the beginning, Bride believed that memory is the worst thing about healing." But when Bride decides to find Booker, her life changes radically. The first time Bride realized her name was childish was that a white couple rescued her after a car accident and she learned their names and told them hers. These experiences enabled her to find that retrieving her childhood association memories could bring her back to a state of peace and stability, so she gradually corrected her prejudice against memory and began to face her childhood memories. Morrison made use of the traumas suffered by the most vulnerable and marginalized children in the black community to attack the racial relations, violent culture, interpersonal estrangement and other problems existing in the contemporary American society. What Morrison has been insisting on all these years is to tell the harsh truth of this wounded and traumatized country in a serious tone, in order to tear apart the falsehood and harmony under its disguise, and to expose the dark and brutal truth to people.

IV. CONCLUSION

Metaphor exists not only in language, but also in human's thinking and behavior. It has been regarded as one of the main contents of human cognition and communication. The color domain is one of the most basic cognitive domains. Human cognition of color is an important part of cognition of the external world and experience. The names given to different colors in human language are called color words. In human culture, people use color to express concepts, states or emotions. Color metaphor is a mapping from the source color domain to other cognitive domains. In recent years, many fields such as philosophy, poetics and linguistics have begun to make extensive use of metaphor to explore this field and even cross-field. The concept of metaphor has also begun to break the fixed pattern of linguistics and become a more and more recognized way of thinking. "Minority" and black "children" are the focus of trauma theory, and the growth of African American children is related to the future of the whole African American nation. The combination of color metaphor and trauma theory helps to interpret the trauma of black children in Morrison's works, and it can integrate with the results of previous studies on the trauma of black women in Morrison's works, which is conducive to a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of Morrison's narrative of trauma, and broaden the research horizon in analyzing Morrison's works by applying this theory. On the other hand, taking black children as research objects is helpful for us to understand the characteristics of children's trauma and enrich the trauma theory.

At the same time, with the evolution of the target domain of color metaphor in Morrison's novels, we can study the recovery of black children from trauma, which is helpful for black children to get rid of from the source of slavery, interrupt the intergenerational transmission of this trauma, and get out of the shadow of it. In addition, trauma theory is a relatively new field of study in recent years, which not only provides writers with creative inspiration, but also becomes a popular tool for literary criticism. It provides a new field of vision for the interpretation of the text and can better reveal the theme and connotation of the work. By using trauma theory to analyze the trauma of black children in Morrison's works, we can trace the origin and characteristics of the trauma of black children more deeply, and explore the methods and approaches to treat the trauma of black children. Healing the trauma of African American children will help them to rebuild a new sense of history, eradicate the psychological disease that has plagued black people for a long time, rebuild their own racial subjectivity, and build a multi-culture society in the United States with other cultures in a more confident attitude. Finally, the analysis of the trauma of African American children is also helpful for us to analyze the trauma symptoms of other children,

such as the "left-behind children" problem that has attracted much attention in China in recent years, so as to provide certain medical enlightenment for the trauma treatment of children.

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