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NARRATIVE STRATEGIES AND LITERARY DEVICES EXPRESSING TRAUMA IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVEL "BELOVED"

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This article explores the representation of trauma in Toni Morrison's "Beloved" (1987), highlighting how narrative structure and stylistic devices serve as the structural equivalents of traumatic experience within the literary work. While previous scholarship has extensively explored trauma as a thematic element in the novel, there remains a gap in the analysis of how particular literary techniques formally represent trauma and shape the reader's engagement with it. Addressing this gap, the study integrates insights from trauma theory, particularly the works of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, with narratological and stylistic analysis. Methodologically, the research utilises a postcolonial approach, close reading, poetic, and interpretive textual analysis, drawing on fragmentation, analepsis, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and elements of magical realism, alongside theoretical frameworks of individual, collective, and intergenerational trauma, including Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory. The findings demonstrate that T. Morrison's narrative strategies do not merely depict trauma but actively reproduce its cognitive and affective structures. It is proven that the novel's fragmented chronology mirrors the intrusive and repetitive nature of traumatic memory, while shifts in narrative voice and form reflect diverse psychological responses such as repression, dissociation, and emotional disintegration. The postcolonial analysis reveals that "Beloved" expands the scope of trauma beyond the individual, situating it within the historical and cultural legacy of slavery and its transmission across generations. It has been shown that T. Morrison's novel resists linear models of recovery and challenges conventional narrative coherence, instead offering a complex representation of trauma as an enduring, multidimensional phenomenon. This study contributes to trauma and literary studies by highlighting the inseparability of form, memory, and historical experience in the articulation of trauma.

Key words: *narrative strategies, literary devices, individual/collective/ intergenerational trauma, Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved".*

Introduction. The problem of depicting trauma in literature has become a key focus in contemporary literary studies, especially in narratives that explore histories of violence, displacement, and oppression. Trauma, recognised not only as a psychological state but also as a cultural and historical phenomenon, resists simple representation because of its fragmentary, repetitive, and often unspeakable nature. As scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman have shown, traumatic experiences disrupt linear temporality and challenge traditional ways of storytelling, requiring different aesthetic and structural approaches. In this context, literary texts become key spaces for exploring how trauma can be expressed through narrative techniques and stylistic devices rather than just through thematic content.

One of the most profound literary explorations of trauma is Toni Morrison's "Beloved" (1987), a novel that explores the enduring legacy of slavery in the United States. While current scholarship has thoroughly examined trauma in "Belov-

ed" as a thematic concern, focusing on memory, suffering, and historical violence, less attention has been given to the formal mechanisms through which trauma is constructed and experienced within the text. Specifically, there remains a notable research gap in analysing how particular narrative strategies and stylistic devices serve as structural equivalents of traumatic experience and actively influence the reader's cognitive and emotional engagement.

The aim of this article is to investigate how narrative structure and stylistic devices in "Beloved" formally represent trauma and reproduce its psychological, affective, and temporal dimensions. To achieve this aim, the study integrates insights from trauma theory, narratology, and postcolonial criticism, thereby offering a multidimensional approach to analysing literary trauma. In accordance with this aim, the following research tasks are pursued: to examine the theoretical foundations of trauma; to analyse the role of narrative strategies in structuring the representation of traumatic experience

in *Beloved*; to identify and interpret key stylistic devices, including stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and elements of magical realism, as formal means of articulating trauma; to apply a postcolonial perspective in order to situate trauma within the broader historical and cultural context of slavery and its transgenerational legacy.

By addressing these tasks, the article seeks to demonstrate that in “*Beloved*”, trauma is not merely represented but embedded in the very fabric of the narrative, thereby highlighting the inseparability of literary techniques, memory, and historical experience. The particular focus of this article is on the ways the author employs fragmented storytelling, stream of consciousness, and symbolism as strategies for rendering traumatic experience. The article argues that these literary devices do not merely express the narrative but also structure the expression of trauma itself, making the novel’s form and content inseparable. Moreover, the article explores not only individual trauma but also the intergenerational and collective dimensions of it, which are deeply connected with the history of American slavery. Thus, the article argues that “*Beloved*” (1987) is not just a novel that describes trauma. This is a landmark work in the literature of witness, which also makes the reader experience trauma.

T. Morrison opens her novel “*Beloved*” with an abrupt, unexplained declaration, “*124 was spiteful.*” (p.). This phrase brings the reader to the novel’s central problem of unresolved grief and heavy trauma. In our view, T. Morrison deliberately places this phrase at the very beginning; conversely, she aims to ensure that reading “*Beloved*” replicates the experience of living with trauma. Published in 1987 and awarded the Pulitzer Prize the following year, “*Beloved*” is inspired by the historical case of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who in 1856 killed her infant daughter rather than allow her to be returned to slavery. The novel follows Sethe, an escaped enslaved woman living in Cincinnati in 1873, and the ghost of her murdered daughter, who returns initially as a poltergeist and later as a young woman in the flesh.

The author treats this story not as an example of individual suffering but as one of the deepest scars left by slavery; the wound that is both personal and collective, historical and yet relevant. This article argues that Toni Morrison employs narrative fragmentation, magical realism, and other literary devices to create structural equivalents of traumatic experience. The devices that are examined in the following sections have the purpose of bringing the reader to the experience of trauma that cannot be fully expressed in words.

Theoretical Framework. Any literary analysis of trauma must start with a clear conceptualisation of the phenomenon as both a psychological and representational break. The American Psychological Association describes trauma as “any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative impact on a person’s attitudes, behaviour, and other aspects of functioning.” (Definition 1). This definition emphasises trauma not merely as an intense emotional reaction but as a structural disturbance that modifies cognition, affect, and identity development.

Contemporary trauma theory further emphasises its delayed and fragmented nature: trauma is not fully absorbed at the moment it occurs but reemerges through intrusive memories, repetitions, and narrative gaps. As Cathy Caruth argues, trauma constitutes “*a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind*” (Caruth, 1996, p. 3), highlighting its paradoxical status as both an overwhelming experience and one that resists direct representation.

Within this framework, literary texts serve as privileged sites for expressing trauma because of their ability to depict fragmentation, silence, and temporal disruption. Judith Herman’s work *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) provides a complementary framework of recovery stages, which is closely linked to experiencing trauma. “Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life” (Herman, 1992, p. 87).

Most importantly, the stages mentioned above are neither linear nor guaranteed. Survivors follow their own recovery paths, often cycling through the stages multiple times, becoming stuck in one stage, or experiencing them in a different order. T. Morrison’s “*Beloved*” reflects this process accurately. Its plot consists of three main parts: Part One depicts the present, which is fragile and haunted; Part Two shifts towards mourning with Beloe’s return; Part Three aims for reconnection, though it remains incomplete. Moreover, trauma manifests as a persistent disruption of temporality and subjectivity: Sethe’s inability to envision a future, Paul D’s emotional dissociation, and Denver’s social withdrawal all exemplify the enduring impact of unresolved trauma. However, in her novel, T. Morrison depicts trauma not as a personal failing of an individual character but as the inevitable consequence of what slavery inflicted on previous generations of human beings.

Marianne Hirsch, in her work *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), describes the intergenerational aspect of trauma as an experience that is passed down to the next generation. They suffer from it to such an extent that they begin to experience personal memory and shape their identity without directly encountering the trauma. "Post-memory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." (Hirsch, 2012, p. 103) In T. Morrison's novel, the characters grow up carrying the weight of slavery they never lived through. Their isolation, emotional dysfunction, and helplessness are the result of the *intergenerational trauma*.

Moreover, the novel complicates individual models of trauma by situating suffering within the historical violence of slavery, thereby aligning with Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, in which the second generation inherits traumatic experiences so deeply that they function as lived memory. Thus, trauma in *Beloved* operates simultaneously *on individual, collective, and intergenerational levels*, challenging the boundaries between personal experience and historical legacy.

In conclusion, Morrison's *Beloved* shows that trauma cannot be limited to a single event or individual mind but must be understood as a complex, ongoing process shaped by historical violence and collective memory. By blending psychological theories of trauma with narrative techniques that highlight fragmentation, repetition, and silence, the novel exposes the deep challenge of expressing and resolving traumatic experiences in a literary text. Furthermore, through its focus on intergenerational transmission, the novel "Beloved" extends trauma beyond direct experience, illustrating how the legacy of slavery continues to influence identity and emotional life across generations. Ultimately, this literary work challenges any simple idea of recovery, instead portraying healing as partial, unstable, and highly dependent on context, thus emphasising trauma's lasting presence within both personal and cultural memory.

Fragmatic Memory as a form of trauma is illustrated through the structural feature of the novel "Beloved", which is its *non-linear plot development*. T. Morrison's narrative does not follow a straightforward chronological order. Instead, it circles, loops, and delays in *a rhizomatic way*. The key event of the novel, which is Sethe's infanticide, is revealed slowly and indirectly. The reader knows that a traumatic event happened long before discovering the details. This isn't the suspense of a

thriller but something akin to repression. In other words, the literary text doesn't directly confront the trauma until the main character does.

Linda Krumholz indicated that in her article, claiming that "to make the novel work as a ritual, Morrison adapts techniques from Modernist novels, such as the fragmentation of the plot and a shifting narrative voice, to compel the reader to actively construct an interpretive framework. In *Beloved*, the reader's process of reconstructing the fragmented story parallels Sethe's psychological recovery" (Krumholz, 1992, p. 396). The structure of the novel involves constant *analepsis*, a movement back in the narration.

In the novel, T. Morrison returns to scenes of slavery, escape, and the early years in Cincinnati. These scenes are the so-called *textual intrusions*, which are not signalled by chapters or typographical markers. They intrude into the present of Sethe's consciousness rather suddenly, which creates the effect of disorientation on the reader. This technique makes the reader feel immersed in the concept of trauma and recurring traumatic thoughts. One of the earliest examples of analepsis occurs in Chapter I: Sethe is in the moment of running to the pump when suddenly the past erupts. She thinks of the "boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her – remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys" (*Beloved*, 1987, p. 24). The stylistic effect leaves the reader completely disoriented. It accurately mimics what a trauma survivor experiences during recurring traumatic thoughts. *Stream of Consciousness* and *Interior Monologue* are other important literary devices used to convey traumatic experiences in the novel under analysis, particularly in the second chapter.

In the extended monologue, which spans several pages, the reader observes a sudden shift in the portrayal of the intrusive thoughts. There are no punctuation marks, paragraph breaks, or conventional syntax. T. Morrison deliberately removes all these graphic elements to depict how thoughts appear in the mind of a traumatised person. Moreover, this part not only narrates trauma, but also performs it. The reader can experience the mix of emotions that the murdered child undergoes, along with the collective experience of trauma. "I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing" (*Beloved*, 1987, Part II).

Another example of such a compelling inner monologue and stream of consciousness appears in Part II of the novel. However, the depiction differs significantly from the monologue of "Beloved". This time, T. Morrison rejects the conventions of organised prose and allows consciousness to speak in raw and unmediated form. Sethe's monologue in Chapter 20 begins with a declaration of almost shocking simplicity. "*Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See.*" Here, the author employs short, unextended, elliptical sentences to depict trauma following the loss of a child, alongside the exhaustion faced by the main character.

Then the monologue shifts to the fragmented recollection of the night of escape. It is full of rhetorical questions and exclamations, and repetitions: "*Maybe I would have seen somebody or something. Maybe. Anyhow I took my babies to the corn, Halle or no. Jesus. When I heard that woman's rattle. She said, Any more? I told her I didn't know. She said, I been here all night. Can't wait. I tried to make her. She said, Can't do it. Come on. Hoo!*" (Beloved, 1987, Part II).

This passage exemplifies traumatic memory that repeatedly surfaces, illustrating Cathy Caruth's assertion that traumatic memory does not reappear as a coherent story but as an intrusive, fragmentary reliving of the past. The difference between Sethe's and Beloved's inner monologues is quite obvious and clear. Sethe's monologue is fragmented yet structured, reflecting the chaos in her thoughts caused by trauma. In contrast, Beloved's monologue lacks structure, with no clear sentence boundaries or distinction between past and present, life and death. It embodies the voice of a consciousness so fractured by trauma that coherent narration can no longer exist.

The third type of inner monologue, distinct from the two mentioned above, is Paul D's. It exemplifies a third type of inner voice based on suppression, meaning the monologue is absent for a prolonged period in the narration. "*Saying more might push them both to a place they couldn't get back from. He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut*" (Beloved, 1987, Part I). Paul D's survival strategy has been to lock away his memories and feelings in what he calls a tobacco tin in his chest, and his narrative voice shows an unwillingness to delve into his own thoughts.

Regarding *intergenerational trauma and collective memory*, the novel "Beloved" (1987) does not focus solely on its characters' individual trauma. T. Morrison is an American novelist renowned for her portrayals of the African American experi-

ence. The novel "Beloved" is no exception as it explores the trauma of slavery, which is not merely an individual wound but a collective and intergenerational one. This means that *the trauma of slavery* does not end with the liberation of the enslaved but is passed down to subsequent generations. Although its form may change, the harm persists.

The author presents this experience through two main narratives. The first is Denver's experience of postmemory, and the second concerns the role of the Black community in Cincinnati.

Denver is a character who inherits the trauma of the previous generation. According to Marianne Hirsch's term, she is the post-generation. A child born into trauma she did not experience, delivered on a river during the escape, growing up in a haunted house and cut off from her community, experiences the trauma of the previous generation, as if the story she inhabits does not belong to her. Her entire sense of identity centres on her mother's history and the community's collective memory. Yet, in the novel under analysis, there is a subtle hint that intergenerational trauma can be overcome. The narrative offers a message of hope: "*Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another.*" (Beloved, 1987).

While Denver represents the intergenerational dimension of trauma, the Black community of Cincinnati represents the collective dimension. The American Psychological Association defines collective trauma as "an event or series of events that impacts not only one person but also a group of identified or targeted people. Collective trauma usually refers to traumas rooted in oppression or discrimination toward a minority group by a dominant group, in contrast to interpersonal trauma" (Definition 2).

In the novel, this aspect is depicted through the damage slavery causes to the community. Furthermore, the community is portrayed not as a passive backdrop but as an active force capable of both intensifying the traumatic experience and, conversely, facilitating healing. The example of collective trauma is Sethe's withdrawal from her community as a response to her actions. Sethe kills her daughter to prevent her return to slavery. Although the neighbourhood itself suffered the trauma of enslavement, it still turns away from Sethe because of the resentment towards what seems like an excessive action to attain that desired freedom. This withdrawal is a collective trauma response. The community turns away from what it cannot process, just as a traumatised individual turns away from what they cannot face.

Another example of collective trauma is entirely different from the one above, as it depicts the moment of collectively overcoming the trauma. In the

novel under analysis, especially in the third part, the neighbourhood women gather outside 124 and raise their voices together, an act of collective witness that finally breaks Beloved's hold on the house. At the same moment, Sethe mistakes an arriving white man for the schoolteacher and lunges at him, only to be restrained by the women around her. It is the community, not Sethe alone, that pulls her back from the edge. This scene illustrates the structural parallel: the community that once turned its back on Sethe now intervenes.

Conclusion and further perspectives. In conclusion, Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" demonstrates that trauma is not only a thematic concern but also a plot structuring principle that shapes the novel's narrative form, stylistic devices, and readers' experience. Through the intentional use of nonlinear narration, analepsis, and fragmented plot structure, T. Morrison captures the disorienting nature of traumatic memory, in which the past constantly intrudes on the present. The deployment of stream of consciousness and interior monologue, ranging from Sethe's fractured yet partially coherent reflections to Beloved's radically disintegrated voice and Paul D's suppressed and silenced interiority, further reveals different psychic responses to trauma, including repetition, fragmentation, and repression. Additionally, elements of magical realism,

particularly the embodiment of Beloved as both ghost and flesh, function as narrative strategies that materialise the inexpressible, giving form to what resists linguistic articulation.

These literary devices collectively allow T. Morrison not only to depict trauma but also to perform it, immersing the reader in its emotional and cognitive dimensions. Simultaneously, the novel explores various forms of trauma: personal trauma, evident in the psychological division of Sethe, Paul D, and Denver; collective trauma, rooted in the shared history of slavery and reflected in the responses of the Black community; and intergenerational trauma, most clearly embodied in Denver, whose identity is shaped by inherited memories she never directly experienced.

Ultimately, the novel "Beloved" defies closure and questions any simplistic idea of healing as straightforward or final. While moments of reconnection, especially through communal intervention, indicate the potential for partial recovery, the novel emphasises that trauma persistently remains within both personal and cultural memory. In this regard, T. Morrison's work, viewed through a postcolonial perspective, stands as a compelling testament to the complexity of depicting historical violence, showing that the legacy of slavery endures not only in history but also in narrative, consciousness, and collective identity.

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НАРАТИВНІ СТРАТЕГІЇ ТА ЛІТЕРАТУРНІ ЗАСОБИ, ЩО ВИРАЖАЮТЬ ТРАВМУ В РОМАНІ ТОНІ МОРРИСОН «КОХАНА»

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У цій статті розглядається репрезентація травми в романі Тоні Моррісон «Кохана» (1987) та досліджується, як наративна структура та стилістичні прийоми слугують структурними еквівалентами травматичного досвіду в художній літературі. Хоча попередні наукові дослідження широко розглядали травму як тематичний елемент роману, аналіз того, як конкретні літературні прийоми формально відтворюють травму та впливають на сприйняття читача, залишається недостатньо розробленим. Заповнюючи цю прогалину, дослідження поєднує досягнення теорії травми, зокрема роботи Кеті Карут та Джудіт Герман, з наратологічним та стилістичним аналізом. Методологічно робота спирається на постколоніальний підхід, уважне читання, поетичний та інтерпретаційний текстовий аналіз, що включає концепції фрагментації, темпоральності та наративного голосу. Досліджено ключові літературні прийоми: нелінійний розвиток сюжету, аналепсис, потік свідомості, внутрішній монолог та елементи магичного реалізму, а також теоретичні основи індивідуальної, колективної та міжпоколінної травми, включаючи концепцію постпам'яті Маріанни Гіри. Результати дослідження демонструють, що наративні стратегії Т. Моррісон не лише зображують травму, але й активно відтворюють її когнітивні та афективні структури. Фрагментована хронологія роману відображає нав'язливий та повторюваний характер травматичної пам'яті, тоді як зміни в оповідному тоні та формі відображають різноманітні психологічні реакції – репресію, дисоціацію та емоційну дезінтеграцію. Постколоніальний аналіз показує, що «Кохана» розширює межі травми за межі індивідуального досвіду, вписуючи її в історичну та культурну спадщину рабства та його передачу через покоління. Показано, що роман Т. Моррісон чинить опір лінійним моделям одужання та кидає виклик традиційній наративній когерентності, натомість пропонуючи комплексне представлення травми як довгострокового, багатовимірного явища. Дослідження робить внесок у травматологічні та літературні дослідження, підкреслюючи нерозривний зв'язок форми, пам'яті та історичного досвіду в артикуляції травми.

Ключові слова: наративні стратегії, літературні прийоми, індивідуальна / колективна / міжпоколіннева травма, роман Тоні Моррісон «Кохана».



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